Networked Wisdom of the Digital Crowd: From Individualization to Socialization through Algorithms-the Paradigm Shift
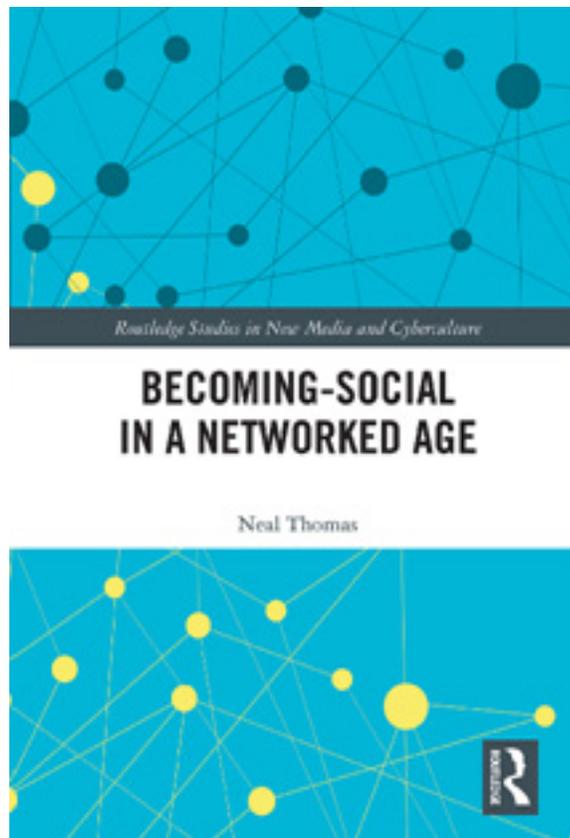
Becoming Social in a Networked Age; by Neal Thomas. Routledge, London, 2018, 192 pages, hardbound, ISBN: 9781138719026 (hardback).

Social networking today has radically changed our way of life form, communication style, daily working, our relationships with other people, etc. This paradigm shift has not landed overnight but over the last one and half decades gradually. Even if we stare back at the boundary of the present Millennium, just 20 years back, one will certainly be overwhelmed after doing a simple comparative study between pre–2K and post–2K lives. Now, whether social networking transformed our life for better or worse, that is a debatable issue. Still, quite a substantial number of people think that social networking has sound effects in our society, though many think social networking has only bad effects. It is thus logical to accept that, like almost everything in life, social networking has its own pros and cons.

This book describes the semiotic effects of active protocols and algorithms in popular social media systems. The basic notion of this book is to point out links between Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and information systems (IS) design in the context of contemporary work in critical media and software studies. It is a commonly observed trend that the majority of social media–related researches are sociologically contextualized. The author, Neal Thomas, shows how the fundamental semiotic operations of social media decisively define the true meaning and context of being social in a networked age. This book says that considering social media platforms as computational processes of collective individuation results in diverse forms of subjectivity and sociality. The author puts forth a very pertinent question: *how do philosophical theories of the subject structure informational processes at both the level of interface and system design to produce the collectivizing and individualizing functions that we come to call 'social'?* The individualization is the process of attaining

one›s self-actualization that is a quasi-statically continuous phenomenon carried out not only by the individual himself but also by society. The concept of socialization is intrinsically embedded in the concept of individualization. Actually, individualization may be reckoned as the starting point of socialization — the transformation of the socialization process from the pre-social media era to the present social media era signals a paradigm shift. The networking system may be considered as a tool for individualization to socialization transformation. As this tool worked slowly in pre-social media, rather the pre-2K era, this transformation took more time. Today, that time lag is drastically slashed down and the individualization to socialization transformation occurs very fast. The paradigm shift essentially lies in the rapidity or speed of the transformation process. As lingual diversity is a form of hindrance to fast communication, the sign as a communication object surpasses it. Here lies the significance of semiology or semiotic studies. Semiotics investigates how meaning is created and how meaning is communicated through signs and symbols.This book consists of six chapters with a bibliographic reference and index. The first chapter entitled *"On the notion of a formatted subject"*, starts with the introduction of the concept of Giant Global Graph (GGG) coined in 2007 by Tim Berners-Lee to distinguish between the significance of the content and nature of the existing World Wide Web (WWW). The significance of the content indicates the functional linkages provided between the information objects and human beings or the hyperlinks. The main function of a graph is to find out the variational pattern or relationship between two variables. Similarly, Lee's global graphs describe the relation between Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Information System (IS). In the next section, the concept of a formatted subject, the term coined by the author, is explained. The *formatted subject* actually implies a set of ideas systematically structured for stipulated functioning. The connotation of the word *subject* has been dilated here from the enclosure of documentary multitude to the ideological or conceptual space of thought process. The relationship between semiosis and socialization is described next, followed by public knowledge representation through a networked approach. The author narrates the importance of this project.

The development of knowledge graphs is described in the subsequent chapters, including the functional areas known as knowledge engineering. Chapter 2 entitled "The epistemically formatted subject", presents the concepts of Frege, Peirce, Russel *et al*. The term *epistemically* here indicates the theoretical foundation of the knowledge engineering. The truth-theoretic approach to the language of Frege is explained. The American philosopher C. S. Peirce is known as the Father of pragmatism. The author argues that except the relationship between symbolic logic, quantification and language, Peirce's thought has a basis in pictorial, phenomenological and diagrammatic ways of thinking. The www may be viewed as one massively interlinked database, as suggested here, is interpreted in the light of Codd's traditional relational theory. The concept of linked data is explained thereafter, along with critical appraisal. Chapter 3 entitled, "The per formatively formatted subject", explains the social graphs. The term *performatively* indicates the practical role of knowledge use and communication that co-exist with our reliance on logic and truth. The importance of social computing in Information System (IS) design is presented here. The author discussed Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores' Language-Action perspective as an important topic as well as Lucy Suchman's challenges to their view. The author highlights the importance of social computing in the context of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, which emphasizes local practice and context. The social graph technologies incorporate these ideas at both the interface and the level of protocol. The social networking dais like Facebook and Twitter, *embed a mixture of illocutionary force* (introduced by J.L. Austin as a communicative effect), *lived practice and other deontic* (relating duty and obligation as ethical concepts) *dimensions of social life into the heart of their systems.* In this way, sociometry and social network analysis theory quantify human relation, sentiment, emotion etc., the background support from the functionalities of algorithm and protocol. This feature is examined here in the context of a mixed semiotic perspective.

Chapter 4, entitled "The signaletically formatted subject", presents predictive-analytic graphs and their conceptual development from a mixture of neuroscience, computing, psychology and complex systems theory. As the author says, *this chapter strives to show how predictive-analytic graphs represent a more thoroughgoing 'machinic' approach to social computing…. The predictive-analytic graph has a probabilistic basis and so do not observe the usual, intentionally-styled boundaries between subject and object. The result is….partly empirical, partly behaviouristic, participating in mixtures of what Hansen calls a superjective agency.* Chapter 5 entitled "The all amatically formatted subject" presents different knowledge graphs. The Greek term *allagmatic* means change and also objects that are exchangeable. This chapter describes the relationship between the mixed semiotic perspective and our dominant, individualistic views of the social context. The last chapter concludes and summarizes all five chapters.

Social media has a huge impact on individuals and their lives. While some impacts can be positive, social media has been shown to affect things like our moods and stress levels negatively. Addiction is caused by social media too. There are many areas where social media addiction can have a negative impact. The discussions on social networking so long carried out mostly centralise sociological perspectives in the context

of collective analysis and psychological perspective in the context of individual analysis. The linguistic perspective of such a study is rare to date. The semiotics may be considered an independent facet in linguistics, though, in linguistics, it is closer to semantics than other sub–facets. However, semiotics implies general studies of all kinds of signs and symbols that enable the communication process, whether linguistic or non–linguistic, that is, dependent or independent on any language. Still, the signs and symbols definitely convey some sort of meaning. The semiotic studies thus are a dependent function of semantic studies. The book is highly technically describing the semiotic features of knowledge graphs without any general introductory linguistic or semantic interpretations. The narrations are excellent and impressive. The viewpoints of traditional philosophers, along with their projective judgement on the present situation, bear clarity. There is no diagrammatic interpretation or tabular presentation of any idea or concept. Also, no practical example of any social graph is provided here. However, this book highlights the utility and contextuality of semiotic studies in social networking platforms, a hitherto seldom discussed topic. From that viewpoint, it unveils a new research area about social networking studies.

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