

## BOOK REVIEW

Lupton, D., Mewburn, I. & Thomson, P. (Eds.) (2018). *The Digital Academic - Critical Perspectives on Digital Technologies in Higher Education*. New York: Routledge.

Reviewed by *Balázs Zsigmond Horváth*<sup>5</sup>

Received: May 12, 2021 • Accepted: May 13, 2021

Published online: June 28, 2021

© 2021 The Author(s)



How bumpy are the online lives of university lecturers?

Scientific work, like many other intellectual occupations, is becoming increasingly digital. This book summarises essays by leading scholars examining the implications, opportunities, social and political circumstances and notions of working in a contemporary university setting in light of the emergence of digital technologies.

Contributors of the chapters form a critical perspective focusing on the impact of digitalisation on the future of higher education, how technology affects scientific publication protocols and university employment conditions, the day-to-day work of researchers, and ways of communicating with students and colleagues. Innovations in scientific practice have an impact on education, research administration and trigger the formulation of new perspectives. The writings present the views of professionals with expertise in education, research administration, sociology, digital humanities, media and communication.

We first get a summary of a controversy sparked in August 2016 concerning an article on The Guardian's online site criticising the internet habits of university lecturers. The writing undermined the *raison d'être* of community profiles of educators for being an unworthy form of communication relative to university goals. This is controversial because the development of electronic mail also stems from university research, and since the introduction of mobile computing, WiFi and cloud computing, the university sector now provides opportunities for scholars from different geographic regions to communicate instantly with each other, with university staff and students and with other out-of-campus connections as well. Although modern computer technologies have gradually emerged and become widespread in academia over the past thirty years or so, relatively little research has been done on how educators use digital advances in their work. The main question is, what are the broader social, cultural and political implications and contexts of technology use?

In the following chapter, it is discussed that students must become experts in research practice during PhD applications. They must produce a well-founded thesis that demonstrates that they contribute to scientific knowledge. However, doctoral students do not only produce a

---

BKSZC Pogány Frigyes Technikum, Hungary. E-mail: [zsmondi@gmail.com](mailto:zsmondi@gmail.com)

large and intellectual portfolio: they also have to present themselves as “scientists”. Much of the construction of the scientific self-image takes place in writing and during writing. It has been shown that the writing of scientific papers is governed by institutional and disciplinary rules, but during the stages of the doctoral degree, candidates still have the opportunity to choose the types of text and identity of what they produce, which is also part of their development. To date, little attention has been paid to how a text is shaped through online publication. Blogging provides a frontier through which doctoral students can discover their emerging identities, the academic community, and what it means to be an academic.

In the third chapter, we can read about how the isolation felt as a doctoral student and then the early challenges of the labour market encourage some to get involved in the scientific community life in the online space. We get a description of an independent project called PhD2Published, created to prepare researchers for the early stages of their careers. This inspires researchers to publish on their own on hybrid, online and public platforms and create similar interfaces in the future, outside the legitimate printed format.

As the next topic, the author of the book points out that contemporary researchers are under threat that will change their relative autonomy and build their reputation. Universities are increasingly seeing their renewal in international competition as a focus on ranking permeates the industry. A new concern is emerging that surrounds higher education institutions in a changed world. One reason for this anxiety is the development of online culture in recent years and the availability of information and education through various means. The chapter describes the cases of sixteen university lecturers who have worked to present their activities more widely online. The study explores the opportunities that online media can bring along with the pressures and constraints on individuals.

In the fifth chapter, we read about the changes in the policies behind the operation of Twitter, as well as how they affect science-related announcements. The development of algorithms for filtering content has led to significant changes since 2014, and Twitter is also significantly shaping the way scientists organise and disseminate information.

In the sixth chapter, the book discusses some of the findings of a research project called “Academics Who Tweet” through qualitative interviews with participants. The interviews are about how researchers use Twitter as a scientific tool for developing and maintaining research networks and professional development. Findings that critically articulate the concept of digital interaction are introduced. Using the concept of networking, which can also be applied to Twitter, we can imagine the online practices, movement, growth and spatiality of scientific life.

The next topic is about the recent debates around digital activism and its acceptance within higher education. Scientists are increasingly becoming members of social and political movements. The case described in this chapter demonstrates some severe consequences that politically outspoken scientists can get. The question is legitimate: what are the institutional consequences of political participation? Ongoing societal tensions are now emerging on digital platforms, making it particularly difficult for scholars in these environments as their institutions increasingly invest in creating digital profiles that depend on exploiting their reputations and making political commenting risky.

Continuing this thread, educators need to be socially, culturally, and pedagogically savvy to ensure that the diversity of classroom technologies can be used effectively. It is clear that there is a dialogue between the two impulses, technological development and socio-cultural change. In



the digital classroom, educators are shapers of social change. The online university courses advertised are also interesting because of software innovation, and the virtual environment calls into question some long-standing views about more effective ways of delivering educational content to the general public.

Thus, the main purpose of chapter eight is to connect the experiences taught in contemporary universities with the reality we all face in neoliberal modernity. It is important to look at how well the modern classroom fits the individualising requirements of the ‘now’; not only because of the market demands it allows but as a means of focusing on the pedagogical benefits of the late modern conception. The emphasis should be on a student-centred, more personalised curriculum that can translate priorities from teaching to learning. In keeping with the commitment to practice the theory to understand everyday action as a cultured, structured organisation, this study provides insight into the cultural and institutional processes of emerging pedagogical practice.

Further dissecting the topic of the previous article, the book reveals that in recent years, “Massive Open Online Courses” (MOOCs) have made university-level courses at prestigious universities available to anyone with an Internet connection. The chapter examines the complexity of the background work essential for the preparation of MOOCs and focuses on current trends in higher education studies on workforce dynamics, with particular attention on university-institutional factors.

In the final chapter of the book, the writer looks at the proliferation of digital technologies and data analysis in recent years. They seem to call into question the legitimacy of the social sciences in interpreting and commenting on social practices. Several aspects of social research are currently divided into areas such as commercial research and development laboratories or social media companies perform analyses and support their results with software, algorithms, and data analysis technologies. The chapter explores the challenges facing social researchers in a specific area of methodological knowledge redistribution, education and research in general at higher education institutions.

In conclusion, two Inger Newburn interviews follow, focusing on the use of digital media and editorial thoughts about writing the book, the answers to some questions overlap and are worth comparing.

The book is a well-worded, continuous and enjoyable read compared to the topic at hand. It provides a worthwhile point of reference for researchers to make between today’s changing conditions and times before the Coronavirus pandemic, making it function as an exciting pathology of a bygone era.

---

**Open Access.** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes, provided the original author and source are credited, a link to the CC License is provided, and changes - if any - are indicated.

