

LSE Research Online

[Ellen J. Helsper](#)

Book review: the social dynamics of information and communication technology

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Helsper, Ellen (2011) *Book review: the social dynamics of information and communication technology*. *Information Communication and Society*, 14 (2). pp. 295-297. ISSN 1369-118X

DOI: [10.1080/1369118X.2010.539245](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2010.539245)

© 2011 The Author

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/36072/>

Available in LSE Research Online: September 2014

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Eugene Loos, Leslie Haddon and Enid Mante-Meijer (2008). *The Social Dynamics Of Information and Communication Technology*. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Price Hardcover £55.

ISBN: 978-0754670827

This book is a collection of papers based on presentations at the conference ‘ The Good, the Bad and the Irrelevant: The user and the Future of information and Communication Technologies’ organised by the European COST 269 network of researchers. The editors frame this incredibly diverse set of papers as the study of the integration and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in everyday life. Domestication is consequently a key organising term especially in the introduction and the conclusion but also in the organisation of the chapters. Silverstone and Haddon’s influence is clearly present in the book’s framing of how ICTs are appropriated in different contexts (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996).

After reading the book the question lingers what the boundaries are of the field of domestication research? In bringing together a collection of papers related to education, family life, business, legal matters and ICT design, the answer, based on this book, seems to be that domestication is everything.. Domestication as practiced by the different authors in this book feels like a descriptive rather than an explanatory theoretical approach. In addition, the relation between this approach as a framing device for the book and the individual chapters is sometimes tenuous. Key themes in domestication and social dynamics of ICTs theories such as commodification and appropriation are not addressed in many of the contributions to this book. Which is a loss because a more thorough knowledge of this framework by individual authors could have furthered an understanding of the way in which ICTs were used in that particular project. The book as a whole does not succeed, if this was the aim to begin with, to dispel any of the reservations one might have about the value of the domestication framework as an explanatory theory in the way that the editors would probably have liked.

As a result, the contribution of this book towards the study of domestication and study of everyday life is less clear to me. The feeling I was left with after reading it from cover to cover was that there is a lot of research that looks at ICTs in a variety of contexts but there is no coherent theoretical framework that can help us come to informed conclusions about the processes taking place. It suggests that trying to construct a general theory of ICTs and everyday life is a equivalent to finding the theory that explains life in general.

A review of the book as a unified whole is an almost impossible task. It is a patchwork of studies with glimpse of interesting projects but underdeveloped theoretically and without a clear indication of what these mean for future research. Some of the chapters are presented as one off, decontextualised, stand alone projects others are more clearly integrated into the overarching social dynamics and domestication framework. The variety of approaches and topics makes the potential reader base for this book very broad. Some contributions deal with very practical issues and would thus be informative for practitioners and policy makers, others are clearly academically focussed. Nevertheless, a background in related (social or informational) sciences would benefit the reader in drawing the links between the chapters as proposed by the editors and to spot some of the weaknesses in individual contributions..

One of my reservations is that there are methodological flaws in the ways some of the studies have been carried out. For example, correlational statistics were used for an experimental research design which did not do the data justice . Other chapters suffer from a lack of theory; for example, considering the importance of culture in many of the contributions, there is an apparent lack of theoretisation and subsequent operationalisation of culture in everyday life. The spelling and grammatical errors did not really contribute to a seamless reading either. The flipside of this is that

the book should be commended for combining the contributions of so many different authors and containing studies the reader would not have otherwise heard of, from countries that are usually off the map in terms of publications. Interestingly given the framing in domestication and social dynamics, the sections on business and work were the most theoretically and empirically grounded.

As a result of this being such an all encompassing book the nature, writing style and focus of each chapter is very different. It does not read as a coherent narrative from start to finish, for this the authors backgrounds and approaches differ too much, but it does create an overall impression of the importance of ICTs in all aspects of people's lives. As a whole the book does succeed in stressing the importance of an informed perspective of ICTs in whichever field of social science and praxis one is involved in. It certainly makes the reader aware that 'it is important to be aware of their [ICTs] mixed potentiality' (p.220).

The diversity in subject matter is also one of the strengths of the book. It cannot do anything but introduce the reader to areas of research and theoretical development that they are not familiar with. Most of the chapters are written in such a way that they are accessible for even those completely unfamiliar with the subject area. The best reading strategy is perhaps to read individual chapters of interest and seeing the framing of the whole project as a underlying thought but not an organising principle.

Reviewer:

Dr Ellen J. Helsper,

Lecturer in Media and Communications

London School of Economics and Political Science

Current Research: Ellen Helsper's current research interests include the links between digital and social exclusion; interpersonal mediated communication; and quantitative and qualitative methodological developments in media research. She is also an Academic Advisor to the Media and Communications Department of the Universidad Catolica in Chile and a Research Associate at the Oxford Internet Institute (University of Oxford).