

Chapter 9

Driving Media Transformations: Mobile Content and Personal Information

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ABSTRACT

The consolidation of the mobile ecosystem is deeply influencing the adaptation of traditional media industries to the digital transformations of business, consumption and audiences. Legacy media digitization comes along with a perfect storm where different kinds of crisis converge. This is also the ground where an eventual response to uncertainties about future may appear in the form of new opportunities and possibilities. Simultaneously, mobile content evolution brings forth a new habitus of consumption, an increasingly complex set of social rituals, content format syntax and technical requirements that constitute new consumption scenarios. This chapter aims at discussing a conceptual framework on how the techno-economic drift of the mobile ecosystem matches the evolution of content industries dynamics and content consumption scenarios in terms of dysfunctions and challenges. The theoretical ground is built upon the works from a three-year research project on the evolution of mobile content and the economic and sociocultural relevance of personal information management.

INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of mobile communication technologies has given rise to an entire new ecosystem within digital media landscape. Mobile ecosystem involves a complex and changing net of players (including telecomm operators, handset suppliers, software developers, content aggregators, content producers, new advertising players and users) that are becoming increasingly influential in the sphere of media and content industries (Feijóo, Pasu, Misuraca & Lusoli, 2009).

Legacy media digitization comes along with a perfect storm where different kinds of crisis (of financial resources, of business and management models, of audiences, of distribution systems...) converge. The dramatic drop of advertising expenditure (Perry, 2012) and of pay-per-access income (Pew Research

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8838-4.ch009

Center, 2013), however, appears not to be exclusively due to global financial crisis, to the increasing fragmentation of audiences or to the fragmentation of users' time and attention in a growing number of devices and media practices (Purcell et al. 2010). It is also rooted in deeper transformations that concern the whole of the cultural content value chain and which involve a reorganisation of players and influences among them (De Prato, Sanz & Simon, 2014). The impact of the mobile ecosystem in digital content industries is transferred to traditional media industries in the form of innovation vectors or trends that may give answer to some of the pending questions on the future of media: content formats, distribution systems, the role of personal information and new value networks in cultural industries.

The transformations triggered by the process of digitization are as well the ground where an eventual response to uncertainties about future may appear in the form of new opportunities and possibilities. On addition, media digitization is not only a matter of economic or technological challenges. These are intrinsically linked to social transformations. The social and cultural consequences of the mobile revolution have been –and still are– extensively dealt with by many scholars and researchers. But these changes also concern the social and symbolic side of mobile content. In this context, mobile content evolution brings forth a new habitus of consumption, an increasingly complex set of social rituals, content format syntax and technical requirements that constitute what we identify –following Goffman (1959)– as consumption scenarios.

In this chapter we intend to outline a conceptual framework for the study of the interrelations between mobile ecosystem players and media in order to understand how the techno-economic drift mobile technologies are driving matches the evolution of content industries in terms of dysfunctions and challenges. Our interest, however, is not solely focused on the economic landscape, but as well in the socio-cultural transformations that accompany the mobile side of the digital revolution.

In broad terms, the resulting picture strengthens the traditional media industry's perception of a collision with software and digital industries, to which cultural content has become a central issue. The conflict points delimited in this chapter (that is, the critical innovation vectors where traditional media show to be more dependent) are basically three: the influence of new distribution channels, the characterisation of content consumption in terms of social interactions and the increasing relevance of personal information in the redefinition of cultural content business models. These aspects constitute as well a relevant argument for consolidating mobile content environment as a specific field in the current development of media studies.

MOBILE PLATFORMS AND THE RE-INTERMEDIATION OF CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Mobile ecosystem has evolved in the last six years from a network centred structure, in which telecomm operators had a privileged position, to a platform centred structure, in which software developers (especially OS suppliers) influence the relations amongst the different mobile players. In this process of platformisation (Ballon, 2009) the main players tend to group together, in a loose or tight scheme, all of the required roles for a common set of hardware, software and other techno-economic specifications (Feijóo, Gómez-Barroso, Aguado & Barrero, 2012). Mobile platforms enact complex multi-sided markets with multiple interdependencies amongst involved players (DePrato, Sanz & Simon, 2014). Apple's iOS and Google's Android are examples of dominant mobile platforms that tend to create a more or less closed environment in which content becomes a relevant asset and a distinctive product at the same time.

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