Chapter 14
The Role of the Profile and the Digital Identity on the Mobile Content

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ABSTRACT

The (re)construction of the user profile and the digital identity resulting from both conscious and unconscious activity on the Internet is directly linked to the process of creation and diffusion of content. Many times, neither the users-prosumers are aware of this process nor are the authors cognizant of the original content, as new authors – humans as well as machines - cover the relations established between the users, their content, their activity online and the combination of these. Big data and information economy are not just consequences of the possibility of collecting as much information as possible about users. Instead, they provide a quasi unlimited means of mapping and shaping every movement of our behavior and lives through devices and technologies. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to understand how users handle this liquid ecosystem and its relationship with the evolution of mobile content, considering the different rhythms and dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

The brain directs us but it also fools us when perceiving the world, explained neuroscientist Susana Martínez Conde (2013). Between sensory and attentional limitations, what we perceive represents 0.01% of the information that surrounds us. Thus, the brain makes up a simulation of reality. This is similar to what happens in the movie *Matrix*, where people live in a virtual reality and have no means of distinguishing it from the real world. But this is of no consequence, provided we are still capable of finding food and interacting with the environment. As a matter of fact, it goes back a long way, not only to Pre-Darwinian days but as far back as to Plato's cave. These discrepancies are used in everyday life as more or less evil motives in advertising, marketing, politics, magic, etc. (Martínez Conde, 2013).

Similarly to the *Matrix* comparison, Mark Deuze (2012) mentioned *The Truman Show* when explaining how we are increasingly living 'in' the media, like a fish in water, rather than 'with' the media, as we did before. We consider that similarity is a suitable parameter to describe the process of technological appropriation that McLuhan labels as 'ecological'. In this respect, we refer to Vilém Flusser's *Homo Ludens* and his thoughts on how "for the first time, technologies are simulating the nervous system" (1988). Bauman's liquidity (2005) flows into technology as well, which is specifically studied in connection with mobile devices and media (Aguado, Feijóo, and Martínez, 2013; Serrano Tellería and Oliveira, 2015). Thus, a challenging ecosystem surrounds users, who already exhibit some alerting behaviors like the 'fear of missing out' (Turkle, 2011; Rosen, 2013), continuous partial attention (Stone, 2002-2014), lack of rationality in some attitudes and performances, limitations in the extension between knowledge and action, and strong circumstantial pattern behavior. The ambiguity and volatility of most 'terms and conditions' of apps, developers, platforms and software environments should be further considered (Serrano Tellería, Oliveira, 2015).

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to delve into how users deal and understand their online profiles and digital identities management through mobile devices. In relation to content evolution, the objective is to describe both their attitudes and consciousness about the level of interaction between big data, the media ecology, the social media and their role as users-prosumers. In the frame of the European FEDER project 'Public and Private in Mobile Communications' (LabCom, Beira Interior University), different methodologies have been implemented: online surveys, content analysis, focus groups and interviews.

Background

Previous approaches can be divided into four main groups. Firstly, national and international surveys focused on users' actions and preferences concerning mobile adoption and content access. Secondly, content analysis about users' performances on apps and platforms, establishing relationships, in many cases, with the users' awareness about the logic of the devices and the media involved. The third approach relies on focus groups and interviews to better understand the perception of users' attitudes and motivations. The fourth and last is dedicated to analyzing the 'terms and conditions' of apps, developers, platforms and software environments both from a legal and technological standpoint.

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The first surveys about general uses and habits showed the rapid implementation of mobile devices as well as the adoption of a multitasking performance of media consumption that places smartphones in the center of users' lives, reflecting the previous boom of the mobile phone and the incorporation of the tablet into our daily routines (Meeker, 2014; Nielsen, Pew Research, WAN-IFRA, GEN, etc.). Economic resources and technical availability may differ from country to country, depending on their level of development and market implementation. For that reason, fewer studies have been found concerning the concrete issues of this study. Our project is dedicated primarily to the Portuguese population, drawing on the experience of entities that have conducted this type of survey in Europe and America.

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