

Chapter 18

Mobile Media and Social Interaction: Mobile Services and Content as Drivers of Social Interaction

Manuel José Damásio
Lusófona University, Portugal

Inês Teixeira-Botelho
Lusófona University, Portugal

Sara Henriques
Lusófona University, Portugal

Patrícia Dias
Lusófona University, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the new social configurations society is undergoing on the basis of media emergence. Media are embedded in the arousal of communication and information transmission becoming the form, the infrastructure and the institution for the social and culture. This chapter focuses on mobile communication, having as central goal to debate on the processes of mediatization and mediation of society, as well as on the processes of belonging and social cohesion. Data from mobile internet adoption and use will be discussed in the light of the above mentioned theoretical approaches. An empirical case study will also be approached and results will provide contributions for the understanding of this type of technology adoption processes and the increasing importance of mobility in cultural and social practices, promoting an exciting discussion on the centrality of media nowadays and the current transformation processes society is undergoing.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the different ways contemporary mobile content, services and applications mold specific individual and collective experiences that have consequences for different aspects and forms of social cohesion, involvement and belonging. These consequences mainly result from contemporary social practices related with mobility and mobile communication (mobile internet services) use in community life. Departing from the awareness that, nowadays, media influence is spread to all spheres of modern life,

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our goal is to examine these processes of transformation on the field of mobile communication, services and trends. Thereby, this chapter intends to approach and discuss how social transformations may be supported by a mediatized environment grounded on the power and added-value of mobile features, namely services offered via the use of mobile internet (m-internet), the so-called mobile applications (apps).

Our main assumption envisions that media come to be a central element, both for social relationships to take place, as well as for instrumental tasks and daily chores. Our intention will be to focus on mobile communication and on the value of mobility for current social arrangements, exploring the impact of this type of access, and practices performed through it, on the levels of social cohesion and sense of belonging to a group or community. Mobility and mobile communication here will be approached as a new and original social shared system that allows for original individual and social patterns of orientation and interaction and that are being adopted worldwide, compelling individuals and institutions to conform and adopt this new mobile trend and mobile media logic. Our main problem questions 1) whether the emergence of network technologies, namely the adoption and use of mobile features and services (apps) that allow for social interaction, have any impact on associated social configurations such as social cohesion, sense of belonging and integration in social groups; 2) whether contemporary social arrangements are in some way an outcome of technological processes, in this case regarding mobile technologies; 3) whether there are other intervenient forces beyond media-related aspects and what are they; and finally, 4) what is the value of mobility for current social practices of interaction and participation.

In order to further explore these questions, an empirical research project on the study of mobile internet use and adoption will be presented and discussed. This project includes a three-year investigation which explored the 1) relevance of mobility as a driving force for social involvement; 2) the role of a mobile application (app) in community life and its value for the promotion of social engagement, social cohesion, and subjective expression; and lastly, 3) the emergence of new consumption rituals and cross-media behaviors after the dissemination and adoption of a mobile app for communication and content sharing and distribution.

PART I: LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and Technology: The Mediatization of Society

Media technologies, and more particularly, digital media, are spread and embedded in all spheres and institutions of our society in a way that it seems almost impossible to think of a world without media: how would we talk to other people, how would we get the news, how would we search for information, etc. Changes in social practices, social interactions and institutional procedures are only examples of the social influence of digital media and their use. Newly emerging patterns of social and technical interaction are synonymous with social change and lead to specific dynamics and outcomes (Damásio, Henriques & Costa, 2011). The on-going interaction between digital media and their users in contemporary society results in a dynamic process of social change that leaves no social sphere or dimension untouched.

Social changes resulting from the spread of communication technology in society (Rogers, 1985) have been studied not only from the standpoint of people's adoption and uses of new communication technologies (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis, 2003; Ling, 2007; Wang & Wang, 2010), but also from the more general perspective of how the media affect society and culture (Deuze, 2006; Latour, 2011). Communication studies have relied on two influential wide-ranging concepts for understanding the broader

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