

Critical Book Reviews

AGUADO, JUAN MIGUEL. *Mediaciones ubicuas. Ecosistema móvil, gestión de identidad y nuevo espacio público*
 Barcelona: Gedisa, 2020. Colección Comunicación. 270 pages
 ISBN: 978-8418193583.

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Ubiquitous mediations: how the new media ecosystem works

The implications of technology in citizens' lives are astonishing, and the successive waves of technological developments are transforming our culture. One of these transformations affects individuals' behaviour in society and is occurring with increasing frequency in the digital world via mobile technology. In *Mediaciones ubicuas*, Juan Miguel Aguado, a professor of Journalism and coordinator of the Mobile Media Research Lab at the University of Murcia, proposes a communication theory that defines the new forms of communication produced by 'technological mediation' in 'all the spheres and moments of everyday life' (p. 13). Aguado outlines the features of the transformation of the media ecosystem, whose main attribute is ubiquity and the most important instrument is the smartphone. This book is yet another step forward in the research that Aguado conducts on the social impact of mobile communication, whose results can be found in books like *La comunicación móvil. Hacia un nuevo ecosistema digital* (Gedisa 2003) and *Emerging Perspectives on the Mobile Content Evolution* (IGI Global 2015).

The book analyses the mechanics of mobile communication and the new role played by humans in this environment. It also presents a critical analysis of the functioning of the media and platforms in the digital age, and it lists the social and economic relationships that emerge in a new capitalism in which monetisation is achieved via the users' data. Here the reader will find 'a clear genealogy between the smartphone and Big Data, artificial intelligence (AI), social algorithms, hyper-surveillance, the platform economy and the new virtual public sphere' (p. 12).

Ubiquitous mediations encompass a set of transformations that are giving rise to a new technological ecosystem. In that scenario, content is also transformed, although it takes on features of the formats in other media formats, like television or CDs, to adapt to the very nature of mobility. The content is dematerialised and socialised through the interaction and

transformation possibilities afforded by the different platforms. According to Aguado, 'the uniqueness of the mobile context lies in its ability to ubiquitously and continuously superimpose the symbolic digital context and the sphere of real interaction with one's environment'; that is, 'mobile technology absorbs the world and reconstructs it in a thousand prisms' (p. 26).

In the new media ecosystem, actors interact to generate networks of value, which oftentimes have an economic component. Thus, new business models emerge which are adapted to a ubiquitous demand for dematerialised content designed to be accessed from different devices. Furthermore, this business model is created adapting to the new consumption rituals that mobile technology makes possible. In these new consumption scenarios, identity management becomes a determining factor because 'mobile social interactions and cultural content [...] are involved' in communicative exchanges (p. 102). Aguado uses the concept of 'egospheres' to explain those dynamics of representation that are associated 'with the rights of self-(re)presentation' (p. 103). With this idea, he 'tries to designate a structure of symbolic resources commonly used to present oneself to others in social interaction rituals mediated by mobile phones' (p. 104)

The author describes the companies that emerged within the context of mobile technology, primarily digital platforms, which use these identity management rites to draw the attention of the consuming public. They do not use persuasion, as traditional industries did, but instead aspire to 'a soft, fluid, frictionless can-do, like a second skin' (p. 53). In the new business models, 'personal information' is an 'increasingly important' asset (p. 57), and cross-media platforms are based on this premise.

All these changes channelled in ubiquitous mediations occur in a technological world that uses big data as a tool, without which this transformation would not have been possible and which, as the author asserts, has ethical connotations. Aguado stresses that the use of data is not a neutral, innocuous practice but is related to the knowledge of the person who chooses and organises them. It is a new form of power in which algorithms

will become a social actor. 'Through their services and applications, platforms shape structures of data collection' and 'constitute veritable datafication structures with a performative value', thus shaping 'reality in that it measures or analyses it' (p. 132), Aguado explains in the book.

On the other hand, the use of big data has given rise to a Copernican turn in economics, generating new forms of monetisation, this time via data. At this point, another ethical question emerges: privacy. Aguado believes that in today's capitalism, the value is not in the data themselves but in the way they are used and the profiles and patterns created. On the one hand, the structures of the new virtual sphere 'limit', 'conceal' or 'transform' privacy 'into a web of micro-decisions which are lost in the infinite settings options [...] or in interminable conditions', so he claims that 'privacy becomes a question of privileges' (164) associated with the subscription to a service or the purchase of a device. On the other hand, another ethical question that emerges in ubiquitous mediations is the surveillance of individuals' social interaction by institutions and companies. This practice was originally used by states as a defence strategy; however, Aguado believes that we are now faced with the duality of political surveillance, or Big Brother, and corporate surveillance, or Big Business. In the former, individuals give up their personal data as a mechanism of protection, and in the latter, they do so to access content and services freely and effectively.

Aguado finishes his theorisation of a new media system with one of the main dilemmas in today's society: the dissemination of content involving hatred and disinformation. As stated above, ubiquitous mediations entail a transformation of both the format and content of communicative messages associated with personal identity. However, just as an emotional component is used in communication and social relations, there is an 'emotionalisation of the public discourse' (p. 186) in the news messages conveyed with mobile technology. According to the author, that is the ideal environment to develop communication pathologies, namely the dissemination of messages of hatred and fake news.

In conclusion, the value of this book is twofold. First, it offers an academic concept, ubiquitous mediations, to describe the new communicative universe fostered by mobile technology and conceptualises it within the field of communication theory. Secondly, it provides an extensive bibliography which is extraordinarily useful for any reader who wants to learn more about the new information and communication paradigm.