

## Critical Book Reviews

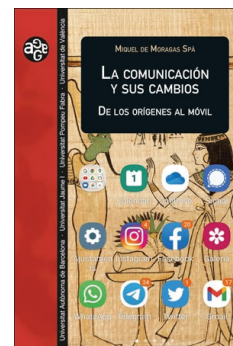
MORAGAS SPÀ, M DE. *La comunicación y sus cambios. De los orígenes al móvil*.  
Barcelona: UAB, JI, UPF and UV, 2022. (Aldea Global; 44)  
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The latest book from Miquel de Moragas, Emeritus Professor of Communication at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, constitutes a good historical outline of communication. Its importance, current focus, and characteristics will soon see it become a reference work, as have others from the same Aldea Global collection, co-published by the UAB, UJI, UPF, and UV. This collection boasts the academic publishing quality label, promoted by the Union of Spanish University Publishers and backed by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) and the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT).

The two hundred pages of this book are a sound synthesis of the evolution of different changes in human communication, similar to other summary texts from renowned specialists in science. This is a scientifically mature work, the product of a lengthy career as a university teacher and researcher (at mostly Catalan and Ibero-American universities). The traits that reveal Miquel de Moragas' understanding and style are on full display: great subject knowledge, solid intellectual grounding, good research experience, capable judgment of an astute observer and conscious user, passion for social communication, and, lastly, an extraordinary ability to communicate.

Whilst not strictly a book on the history of communication, the theoretical focus is grounded in a historical perspective, not merely because it covers the whole period from the origins to the present day, but also because the thrust of the text is the type of changes that have taken place over the centuries and the respective social dynamics. Namely, Moragas interprets the rationale of the changes and their social, economic, cultural, and political changes. Both aspects are important enough because, as the author states, we must move away from the idea that all these changes are an exclusively modern phenomenon and reject technological determinism.

This approach makes for a diligent historical perspective (not universal, but Western). In other words, it has that feature that communication historians always note: the need to think of communication in historical terms, whilst remembering that

humans have created and maintained social networks ever since we started living in communities. In the 21st century, we must talk about “digital social networks”, to duly differentiate them from social networks prior to the internet. We must be careful with expressions such as today’s “social media” because predigital means of communication were also “social”. Only by doing so can one understand and be clear on the qualities of each part of the “communication ecosystem”, which, all too often, is mistaken for the organisation of communication or the communication system, which are not the same thing.

The book is divided into ten chapters. After the introduction which explains the types of changes (disruptive, evolutionary, replacement, supplementary or hybridising, or pragmatic) and the consequent phases in which these changes are established or accelerate, the author devotes three chapters to summarising centuries and centuries of history; from remote ancestors (from the earliest writing to the printing press), from hand-crafted prints to the mass media, all the way to the inventions of the 19th century (signals, light, and sound). The following three chapters cover the 20th century, whilst emphasising the new media of popular culture, telecommunications as a pre-internet stage (1980-1996), and the dawn of the internet (1969-1996). Moragas then, in perhaps the two most thought-provoking chapters, tackles the 21st century media and the new realm of the internet (platforms and social media). Lastly, the book concludes with an extremely interesting chapter on the early effects of the 2020-2021 pandemic on communication. I consider this section a success, as it encourages future research based on various specific pieces of research that have been conducted around the globe in recent years and which will likely enable Moragas to go further and deeper into this important topic from his original perspective.

The author warns us that “it is advisable to avoid simplifications and the trend for nostalgia, in the sense of assuming that changes in the forms of communication are worse than earlier oral and written cultures (the rule of logos) without considering the contribution that that diversity [the convergence

of semiotic systems] has made to the advancement of human knowledge” (p. 173). Significant changes which have often had their roots the military domain (such as the telegraph, radio, telecommunications, and the internet) but which, since the 1950s, have been introduced and used publicly often coinciding with some “*mega event*”, such as the Olympic Games. In this area, Miquel de Moragas, who is also a specialist in Olympic communication and founder of the UAB Centre for Olympic Studies in 1998, offers us some eloquent examples.

Whilst recognising the socially, culturally, and technologically beneficial aspects of communication changes, both pre-internet and in the digital age, the author does not hide the various problems in their use (instability, addiction, inequality) or abuse (control, biopolitics, privacy). His observations on platforms and algorithms are timely and worrying, especially on two critical issues in our advanced societies: the quality of journalism and democracy. What type of world and life are artificial intelligence and big data fashioning? Are we heading towards ultra-personalised information that shuts us off in bubbles, in the twilight of a shared world we all inhabit, as predicted by Éric Sadin (2022)? Or is our democracy, under a regime of digitalised information, already degenerating into an infocracy as Byung-Chul Ha (2022) states? Precisely for these reasons, Moragas advocates the enforcement of updated communication policies suited to the new communication ecosystem, which would include defending net neutrality, redefining the concept of freedom of expression, regulating the handling of personal data, transparency in algorithms, redefining public information services, and technological and media literacy.

Before I finish this review, I would like to draw attention to some important aspects of the narrative of the book: this is an open, light, and academic-style discourse (friendly but still critical), which barely use the royal “we” as it is mainly written in the first person. Occasionally, Miquel de Moragas even demands the cooperation of the readers, whilst inviting them to reconsider their own experience of communication.

*Communication and changes in it. From its origins to the mobile phone* appeals constantly to the memories of the reader, be they elderly, middle-aged, or young, and engages them in their own memories and how they have experienced or experience their own history of communication. In that regard, this practical experience of active reading, as Umberto Eco would say, enriches the content of the book and makes it a captivating read. As does the writing in Moragas’ book, in his characteristic short sentences and very short paragraphs. The author has found a writing style that can blend into the textuality of the unique languages of the information society and knowledge today. The narration sometimes seems to surge forward, with brief pauses for feedback that help the reader to refind their place. It seems to go back and forth with a certain degree of repetition, a style that is a distinctive feature of spoken communication. Spoken communication is the greatest and oldest form of human communication, and something we also find nowadays in that form of oral writing that is Twitter,

WhatsApp, and Telegram, and in the interactions of virtual assistants such as Alexa, Siri, Cortana, and so on.

For that reason, Miquel de Moragas has written a book that is not merely timely, but also useful for the public to understand the historical aspect of communication that we enjoy and suffer in our lives.

### References

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