

Sobre la evolución de los medios: Emergencia, adaptación y supervivencia

Carlos A. Scolari
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 **ÀLEX VALVERDE-VALENCIA** *Universitat Pompeu Fabra & BAU (Spain),*
alex.valverde@upf.edu



The challenging future of media evolution

Some books are capable of condensing and assembling the contributions of an entire academic discipline to offer a precise synthesis of what has been done in the past. Others are capable of ushering in a new field by proposing new concepts to offer points of departure for what remains to be done. Very few books are capable of doing both. *Sobre la evolución de los medios* [On Media Evolution] is one of those few books that concentrates and yet expands, that proposes through integration and connects the dots of what has already been developed to outline what has yet to be constructed.

The author of this book, Carlos A. Scolari, a professor in the Communication Department at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, offers a map of the *evolution of the media* as a discipline capable of responding to the uniqueness of the media change and a meeting point of theories and models that address this widely variable phenomenon. The book, which is organised into three parts, offers a very constructive theoretical and practical overview to shed light on the context, concepts and methods that make this new discipline meaningful.

The current paradigm of technological acceleration and the incessant appearance of new communication situations presents a context that has never been seen in history before, which requires a revision of the scholarly approach used to study this scenario (Scolari, 2022). In the first part of the book, the author connects contributions by different authors and fields that study the media to shape a new theoretical framework that encompasses these contributions and puts them in dialogue with each other. Examples of this are the connections with Verón

(1997) and the articulation between technologies and social practices, with Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 1999; Law, 1999) and its relations between human and nonhuman actors, or with Meyrowitz, McLuhan and Postman and their multiple different and complementary contributions to our understanding of the media, its interactions and technological change, among many others. These conversations establish a map of the *media ecology*, which the author started in this same journal (Scolari, 2010) and is used to weave a network of contributions that serve as a theoretical foundation for the emergence of *media evolution* as a discipline. All this confirms the transition from the ecological gaze to the evolutionary gaze, from space to time, from what De Saussure (1945) called the *synchronic* and the *diachronic*, which the author once again revisits here.

Having set the context for the *media evolution* as an academic discipline, the author presents it as an area under construction and development, which should extend its gaze into the long term, revisiting intermediality and embracing a systemic and complex approach, in that it views the media as interrelated elements that co-evolve and are framed in intertwined systems. To address the foundations of this new discipline, the second part introduces a tentative dictionary of concepts that applies biological metaphors to explain media change processes, thus avoiding reductions or linear gazes. Each concept is followed by a case study that enables the reader to understand how these metaphors materialise and what mechanisms are put into motion when studying the evolution of media like faxes, vinyl records or comics; or media practices like news consumption; or evolutionary relations among media, like painting, photography and cinema.

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Metaphors like the life cycle draw from previously proposed models, like the one set forth by Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor (2004), and update them in accordance with the changes in the contemporary world. This first cyclical metaphor may be the source of the most suggestive categories for understanding the current paradigm mentioned above. Concepts like *emergence*, *domination* and *adaptation* offer opportunities to interpret the rising, collision and resignification of media and social practices fostered by the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) as a catalyst of media change. Therefore, the metaphors in the second part of the book help to compile experiences and lessons from many disciplines that have a particular potential to contribute to understanding media change, and unite them under the same theoretical framework. The concepts and the respective case studies which complete this tentative dictionary fulfil their mission: they lay the groundwork for what might become a discipline that studies media evolution broadly, incisively and attentively.

To apply these concepts and make them meaningful, the third part of the book offers an initial set of methods that could be used to research this evolution. The methodological approach, once again applied with an integrative aim, contains some of the most important qualitative and quantitative methods for this new scholarly field. Particular methodologies are included in this third part, like quantitative *cultural analytics* (Manovich, 2020) or qualitative ethnography, as well as entire disciplines like semiotics and media archaeology studies. Once again, the author brings into dialogue disciplines, methods and techniques that present a significant potential to offer responses and open new perspectives within the framework of a new discipline.

In conclusion, this book is a bridge to what may be this new discipline, which studies transformations in the media ecosystem. It is also an extensive, profound bibliographic source that concentrates decades of scientific knowledge and maps the relationships among works. The book is unquestionably a meeting point of theories and practices, authors and methods, which aims to make something as complex as technological and social change meaningful. *Sobre la evolución de los medios* is many things, but it is most importantly a starting point. It is an invitation to transdisciplinary investigation into the phenomenon of media evolution, revisiting concepts and methods but applying them with a new, deep and always critical gaze. This book is a call to action for anyone who wants to make sense of the media transformation and get ready for, as the author says, the challenging future lying ahead of us.

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