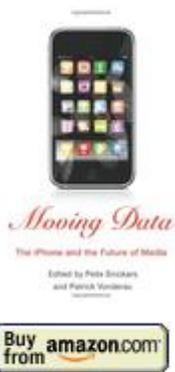


## Living Connected Lives in the Media Sphere

A review of



### **Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media**

by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Eds.)

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Early in the evening of March 13, 2013, a huge crowd gathered in the square in front of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Word had come that a new pope had been elected, and they wanted to share in the blessing of the new Bishop of Rome from the basilica's famous balcony. Just a few hours after Pope Francis made his appearance, news media across the world ran a pair of pictures purporting to show how the world had changed since April 15, 2005, when Francis's predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, had been elected.

A 2005 photo by Luca Bruno of the Associated Press (AP) was filled with the bare heads and backs of a throng facing St. Peter's. This relatively bland image was juxtaposed with a 2013 photo by Michael Sohn of the AP showing a scintillating ocean of lit cellphone and camera screens hoisted above the heads of the parallel crowd. The next morning, NBC's *Today Show* (2013) was among the many news organizations featuring this striking comparison. In reality, the 2005 photo didn't actually show the post-Benedict XVI election

crowd but a more somber scene as Pope John Paul II's body was being carried into St. Peter's Basilica 11 days earlier (Kolawole, 2013). Nonetheless, the point was made: In the eight-year interval between 2005 and 2013, an important technological innovation had swept the world. That change came with the June 29, 2007, release of the first Apple iPhone.

Edited by Pelle Snickars of the National Library of Sweden and Patrick Vonderau at Stockholm University, *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media* offers a set of diverse and often-penetrating reflections across 22 essays on precisely what has changed in our world since the introduction of the Apple iPhone six years ago. The authors come from European and American academic settings (plus Gerard Goggin, a noted media theorist at the University of Sydney, Australia). They respond to mobile media's impact from an almost exclusively Western frame of reference and adopt analytic approaches to the iPhone shaped by their primary disciplinary allegiances, mostly in departments of media, film, and communication studies. These authors tend not to discuss psychological research findings in their chapters, that is, conclusions arising from quantitative and experimental methods that explore hypotheses arising from explicit theories in domains such as cognitive, sensory-perceptual, or social psychology.

So why would a psychologist, and particularly a media psychologist, want to delve into the offerings of this volume? Each of the four major sections of the book offers insights and revelations worth consideration by psychologists and students drawn to understand the lively and burgeoning interdisciplinary field of inquiry into media, communications, and their effects upon human lives.

Among the five essays forming Part I, Data Archaeologies, I was particularly taken by the authors' attempts to define the rapidly evolving nature of digital media and their relationship to human sensory-perceptual, motor, and cognitive processes. Again and again we are reminded that the use of the iPhone necessarily engages not only auditory and visual processes, but a wide range of tactile gestures as well. Indeed, Alexandra Schneider argues that these movements may eventually mimic that world imagined by the futuristic thriller *Minority Report* (Spielberg, Bont, Curtis, Molen, & Parkes, 2002). In that film, Tom Cruise's police character, Capt. John Anderton, interacts inside a three-dimensional screenlike territory before him, assembling digitized data and patterned representations drawn from the real world.

Further, Nanna Verhoeff, a well-known media theorist at Utrecht University, offers a synopsis of her recent volume's argument that the iPhone has reformatted our experience of the world visually (Verhoeff, 2012). Melding its global positioning system, compass, motion sensor, and mapping technologies, the iPhone offers its users a "screen space" that frames surrounding realities with augmented cartographic information and allows users to interact with that world as a kind of navigational performance.

The iPhone was introduced as a new hybridized technological object in 2007. As such, it was built upon a broad range of previous technologies and multiple innovations in computing, hardware and software design, and fiercely competitive corporate interests.

Many of these forces are explored in Part II, Politics of Redistribution. The five essays in this section are, perhaps, of less direct interest to psychologists, but they provide a sophisticated historical record of where the iPhone came from and, quite intriguingly, how unprepared and even unimaginative its maker, Apple, was at the time of its release. The legendary Steve Jobs did not seem at first to have understood that the iPhone could serve as the platform for a vast interactive technological network of applications (apps) and developers. It was only in mid-2008, when Apple first made its iOS Software Development Kit available for download, that the stage was set for the explosive and innovative world of apps that have captured so much attention for Apple and filled its financial coffers so handsomely.

How innovative those applications have turned out to be serves as the focus for the six chapters in Part III, The App Revolution. In Chapter 11, Barbara Flueckiger appeals to the insights of the Czech philosopher and theorist Vilém Flusser (1988/2007) to argue that the iPhone has fundamentally upset the linear media culture of the Western world into something new, what she terms “a digital culture of interactivity” (p. 171). The coding of data in binary rather than analog mode allows such data to be accessed in random rather than sequential fashion. And, as a result, the foundation has been laid for devices such as the iPhone to begin building a collaborative and creative “psychic field” (p. 180) of human persons as predicted, she notes, by the psychologist L. C. R. Licklider more than 40 years ago (Licklider & Taylor, 1968).

The overall impact of iPhone apps and other digital technologies is explored among the five contributions to Part IV, Mobile Lives. Perhaps the most penetrating of these analyses is offered in Chapter 21 by Mark Deuze and the Janissary Collective. Those students who sit before so many of us in class or the clients who come to us for counseling now live in a world of “polymedia” (p. 300) and have been fundamentally and irrevocably altered by the “mobility turn in life” (p. 304). They increasingly inhabit a world of mediated connectivity, a “mediasphere” (p. 304) in which they find themselves always available for interactive communication.

For some groups such as the diasporic communities of Asians and others in Europe and North America, this technology preserves enough of the home community that a hybrid, “glocalized” life is possible. For others, the future may not be as hopeful and affirming. In such a world, the loss of an iPhone is tantamount to the severing of community. Further, Dalton Conley’s powerful ending coda, “The End of Solitude,” offers a haunting meditation on the ways that life in an all-pervasive world of connectivity denies each of us the kind of privacy and reflective withdrawal that ultimately we need to understand ourselves as individuals. I intend to use Conley’s essay in my own classes on psychology and media for the discussion that I am sure it will evoke.

As I read through these essays, I could not help but think about what an impossible task it is for academics to offer timely and enduring comments on the emerging digital world. It is changing so rapidly that one can only guess as to what—as the book’s subtitle

claims—“the future of media” might be. I’d imagine that the editors had to hold a certain line in late 2010 and early 2011 when these essays were being completed: The 2010 introduction of the iPad has already challenged the iPhone’s remarkable influence. Nonetheless, readers interested in the impact of digital media will find in this collection a rich source of new ideas and perspectives.

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