

mass media and the newer interactive media, constitute the dominant site of modern public spheres, and thus via their form, content and specific media logics, contribute directly and routinely to the character of civic cultures.

(Dahlgren, 2003, p. 3)

While Dahlgren does not ignore the empirical dimension of civic cultures, his conceptual dimension of civic cultures holds an innovative promise in seeking to define key elements in contemporary audience-public constellations. This conceptual take allows us to begin to ask how publics and audiences are resourced. What are the socio-cultural conditions by which social agency is achieved, practiced and opposed? In which ways do media (old and new) operate in relation to those processes? Answers do not focus upon the location of civic cultures as spatial categories - for example, in relation to the familiar distinction of Habermas between private and public spheres. Rather the answers focus on locating civic cultures as communicative practices that people shape across different settings and textual repertoires.

From such a perspective, it seems obvious that mobile communication may enhance a sense of affinity to public settings, of being entitled to speak and be heard, even if it is still too early to conclude what this mundane empowerment implies for social engagement and action in the longer term. It is also evident that, from the point of view of a civic cultures perspective, the practices of nomadic intimacy that mobile communication advances into public space are ways in which, not least, young people widen the scope of what may be defined as 'worthy' of public discourse and thereby add a new dimension to the 1970s feminist slogan that, 'the personal is political'.

On a grander scale, mobile phones, in addition to dynamically updated websites, have already had an immediate political impact. These new media have eased the rapid mobilisation of large-scale protests such as the anti-globalisation demonstrations at the WTO conference in Seattle in 1999, the World Bank meeting in Prague in 2000 and the successful overthrow of Philippine president Estrada in 2001. Their assumed political implications have caught the public and professional interest to a greater degree than is the case with the everyday uses (Geser, 2001; Rheingold, 2002; Pertierra et al. 2002). How may we understand such protests in relation to concepts of media audiences and publics?

Clearly, the mobilisations are different from audiences (and from audiencing) in their collective, physical manifestations and in their shared aims and actions. In some sense, they are more like crowds or mobs in that they seem amorphous from the outside and are adaptable to changing circumstances.⁸ Still, unlike crowds in the traditional sense, rapid, mediated communication is instrumental to the formation of these protests, a factor that opens communicative spaces within the

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For example, Pertierra et al. (2002) demonstrate that during the uprising in the Philippines, a host of text messages were initiated by organised, political activists and acted as catalysts to - rather than instigators of - political opposition which had already formed, not least through radio and television (a six-hour daily TV coverage of impeachment preceded the massive demonstrations in Manila). And so, while Rheingold's radical conclusions about spontaneous, political activism brought about by mobile media resonate better with the positive, commercial discourse on mobiles than with mundane empirical facts, research does validate the central importance played by mobiles and the Internet in the media ensemble:

These technologies allowed their users to momentarily suspend their class, educational and ideological differences, and establish virtual communities - of texters, web-surfers, etc. - that were united by their antipathy to the then acting President. These technologies thus facilitated communication and cooperation between groups normally located at opposing ends of the ideological divide.

(Pertierra et al., 2002, p. 120)

As the Philippine example demonstrates, mobile communication may buy into other forms of systematic deliberation, and the immediate activating force of the mobiles lies in their 'capacity to expedite the arrangement of rallies' (Pertierra et al., 2002, p. 121). Operating collectively through mediated communication and sharing a common aim of action, such protests do, indeed, resemble the traditional Habermasian notion of a public. Moreover, the existence of and contestation between several publics may arguably nurture members' reflexive communicative competencies and add to the effectiveness of their actions. Still, mobile protests also differ from received notions of a public in that the communicative spaces opened by these groups oscillate between individual and collective forms of communication; they enable brevity of information, not nuanced argumentation; issue-based action not systematic deliberation - be it in the idealist form of reaching consensus or in the positivist form of reducing complexity through the voicing of difference and disagreement. Hence, sustained political arguments in the familiar sense cannot be voiced or heard by the mobile publics, nor is communicative permanence secured, making it hard for institutional insights of mediation to be systematised and explored as learning processes for the future.

Mobile, civic cultures, as well as networked demonstrations, challenge our received notions of what constitutes audiences and publics, perhaps also what publicness is. As such, mobile and interactive media highlight the need for conceptual transformations in view of these trends. First, and most important, they enforce and allow us to frame our analytical questions differently. With Dahlgren, we may ask how publics are formed, not just who they are or where and when they are

visible. That is an increased professional interest in the socio-cultural conditions of communicative agency. Second, we need to contextualise the mobile and interactive media uses within the entire media ensemble. From such a perspective, it seems evident that mobile media do not undermine or abandon the formation of audiences and publics as we know them; but they do serve to make these processes more complex. We can no longer assume that audiences are based on spatially segregated communities, nor that all publics are temporally stable fora of systematic and sustained argumentation. In tandem with the increasing importance played by mediated communication for social regulation, the formation of 'grand' publics diminish, or are accompanied by the formation of what we call 'portable' publics, whose composition is more flexible than traditional publics since they may change from issue to issue. Third, we need to study the relations between audiences and publics. The transient nature of the portable publics also makes them more permeable with 'nomadic' audiences. Since most people in networked societies variously occupy both positions, the important division is perhaps not so much between audiences and publics, but between online and offline groups. This development, in turn, adds to the social pressure put on traditional public spheres, since their existence cannot be taken for granted but has to be legitimated in action.

Individualisation in modernity both enhances and enforces continuous monitoring of social roles in all spheres of life. From that perspective, mobile audiences arguably ease the processes of monitoring by adding an extra interpretive dimension, highlighting, and often negotiating, the duality of social and virtual interactions. The monitoring going on in the portable publics, on a daily basis, between individual and collective interactions may afford public engagements and affinities that can spur public communication at large, while in itself seeming less geared towards sustained public deliberation and debate.

Interactive expressiveness

So far, our analysis of mobiles has focused on their spatial, temporal and social aspects, what may be termed a user-centred perspective on mediated communication. But what do people talk about? Which types of print, visual and mixed messages circulate? These questions concern the meaning-making substance and form of mobile communication, and they focus on the media perspective on communication. Naturally, this perspective is crucial to a socio-cultural understanding of media - if mediated meaning-making was irrelevant to people why would they use media in the first place? So, a joint user and media perspective, social and textual, facilitates more nuanced studies (Drotner, 2000).

While this joint perspective is a demanding task in any media study, it is even more daunting in analyses of interactive media such as the web, email, gameboys and mobile phones. With these technologies, the text, always an elusive and contested entity, is apparent only at the moments of interaction, and in many cases it may be

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Let us therefore start with a functional typology of mobile communication following Roman Jakobson's classic scheme (Jakobson, 1960/1985). At one extreme is the short message conveying the caller's wish for the recipient to perform some sort of action. Such messages serve a conative function. At the other extreme, there are messages whose substance is relatively unimportant but which operate as signs of connectivity. These messages serve a phatic function and are very common in mobile communication, particularly with young people and women (Drotner, 2001, Geser, 2002). Many mobile owners leave their phones on not so much for being available for calls but to have the satisfaction of hearing little beep tones when receiving a text message, often without bothering to read it. A similar phatic function is seen with another popular texting format, namely, the goodnight messages sent to partners and close friends.

The phatic function of connectivity demonstrates perhaps the greatest discrepancy between the evaluations made by users and non-users, and by adults and kids. Adults and non-users tend to judge mobile communication in terms of its effectiveness, economy and substance - all of which call for brevity and immediate relevance. Conversely, users evaluate mobile communication in terms of its affect, performativity and form. For example, in a qualitative study on children's media uses, a parent expressed near incomprehension of his daughter, aged nine, who would sms her best friend next door every morning, ten minutes before meeting her to go to school (Drotner, 2001). In a similar vein, repeated calls and text messages are deemed pointless by non-users on grounds of triviality, while users find satisfaction in these messages as affective tokens of social bonding. Thus, the phatic function serves to push the communicative focus of mobile interaction from substance to process, from *what* is being communicated to *that* communication takes place at all. The dispersion of audiences and publics across a variety of sites and sources of expression may add to this shift of focus in that commonality has to be continuously articulated and affirmed.

Mobile interaction not only serves different communicative functions. As we have already seen, it equally takes several forms. *Sms*, *mms* and calls on to email and web chats in the 3G systems. While all of these forms are interactive in nature, they nevertheless display increasing degrees of communicative complexity - and responsibility on the part of users. For example, the asynchronous, inexpensive and conventional character of sending an icon or a text message makes it less demanding as a communicative act for the sender as well as for the recipient.

Due to the limitation of characters, the sender may resort to standard formulations in texting and feel less pressure on individualised impression management than when placing a regular call. Especially for boys and young men the communicative standardisation, and hence emotional distance, implied in short text messages ease

contact with the opposite sex - even to the point of candidness: 'ice can be broken, intentions declared and invitations offered, all without the risk of embarrassment' (Plant, 2000, p. 19). Thus, boys and young men will send text messages and icons with sexualised content to girls they fancy - as emotional test balloons let out from a distance: 'Hi, sweetie! So wonderfl to b with u 2day. So GOOD we talked yesterday!!! Just want to say ILU. Happy training! xxx T' (Rasmussen, 2002, p. 19).

Receiving and responding to standard icons, text messages and calls demands knowledge of communicative variations in order to correctly decode the various forms and act appropriately. As we saw, mobile communication foregrounds self-regulation of social roles to a greater degree than mass-mediated forms, and hence it involves more personalised fine-tuning of communicative competencies and textual repertoires. One must know when to decline a response, answer an sms with an sms, or upgrade the intensity of communication and make a call. Thus, mobile phones not only demand extensive monitoring of social roles, as already noted, but since these social roles are largely constituted and played out through communicative processes, the social monitorings are simultaneously textual monitorings.

If radio and particularly television have rightly been seen as windows to the world opened from within the living room (Meyrowitz, 1985), and if the recent trends of reality formats on television and the Internet may be seen as mediations between social and virtual intimacies (Mehl, 1996, Dovey, 2000), then the extensive take up of mobile phones in many ways signals an extension of the living room into the world. Or more precisely, they signal a range of intimate, mediated interactions across social and virtual spaces and they do so around the clock. This transformation of public space into a 'common living room' (Kopomaa, 2000) is routinely deplored as an intrusion of the trivial and mundane into the loftier, more abstract realms of publicness, both in its spatial and social sense. Alternatively, the transformation is hailed as a victory of innovation and individual activism undermining old-fashioned institutions and hierarchical structures. These dichotomous discourses tend to underestimate the complexities involved in practicing the social and textual 'mobilization' of mediated communication. These practices involve tentative transformations of our understandings of both audiences and publics, as we have seen.

Media and media studies on the move?

So far, the Internet has claimed much more intensive scholarly interest than mobile phones in exploring the possible transformations of audiences and publics, and few attempts have been made to relate the two sets of transformations. Scholars from audience studies primarily focus on everyday uses of the Internet including gaming, chatting and texting (for example, Sefton-Green, 1998; Svenningson, 2001; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002); ICT researchers study e-learning and computer users' acquisition of digital competencies - mostly within formal settings

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of teaching (O'Malley, 1995; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). In addition, scholars of political communication focus on the ways in which democracy and citizenship may, or may not, be resourced by net communication (Schiller, 1999; Granjon, 2001; Jenkins & Thornburn, 2003).

There are good reasons to argue for a transgression of these professional boundaries. First, most people occupy positions as both audiences and publics at various times and in various sites and settings, and researchers may easily overstate the importance played by one or the other by focusing on either and so miss the interlacing of both. Second, as Peter Dahlgren (2003) argues, we need to understand why people join, evade or are excluded from participating in public forms of communication, and the answers lie, not in the public sphere itself, but in civic cultures enabling or disabling social affinities, and in the fissures generated by media that transgress or challenge established boundaries between the two. Hence, we need to study the relations between audiences and publics from a more holistic perspective. Third, and perhaps most important, Internet and mobile technologies converge in the 3G handsets. The Internet operates on a global scale, and on both civic and commercial grounds, even if the latter seem to encroach upon the former. Thus, users may appropriate Internet communication both as citizens and consumers, and intricate mixtures of the two (as on political consumer sites). Mobile devices operate on strictly commercial grounds, and to most people they do not have global reach. Thus, users may appropriate mobile communication mostly as consumers, even if the portable nature of mobile phones, as we have seen, may facilitate an affinity to public space and to speaking in public (and as a public), not least for groups that have been marginal to these fora in the past.

The convergence of mobile and Internet communication is likely to throw into relief some well-known problematics as well as some new possibilities. The telecommunications industry is determined to reap the commercial gains in advancing mobile services, despite dot-com setbacks and real divisions between content providers and operators. The 3G technology is being introduced in Australia and Europe and it is already widely adopted in Japan. In the push for more commercial services - mms and web services offering gambling, games and girls - more big players are likely to use gatekeeping formats and forms of communication. Conversely, it is precisely these multi-functional formats that hold the greatest, creative potentials for users - they can become performers in multimedia interactions and advance their multimodal competencies.

Hence, we face a scenario, familiar to earlier media developments, in which some of the important stakes are the power over the rights to access and use; the universality of information and entertainment; and the legal status of intellectual property rights. While mobile technologies do not change the stakes in this scenario of the immediate future, at least they add yet another medium through which audiences and performers, publics and producers, may lay claim to these stakes. Perhaps their greatest potential lies in the ways in which they widen the

subjective conditions for democratic engagement. This is not so much in facilitating visible, political demonstrations as in the more taken-for-granted practicing of publicness, in extending our imagination of what it takes to perform audiencing, of which issues can be shared through mediation, to partake in shifting the boundaries between public and private domains, between the modes of talk and the means of action.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the following colleagues for stimulating discussions and timely critique: Peter Dahlgren, Daniel Dayan, Ditte Laursen, Sonia Livingstone, Mirca Madianou, Dominique Mehl, Ulrike Meinhof, and Roberta Pearson. A shortened version of this chapter has appeared in *Journal of Media Practice* Vol 6:1.
2. The camera and transistor radio are important mobile media, too, and share central aspects with contemporary mobile media: like many interactive media, the camera puts the user in a position as producer of visual images and serves as lever of people's visual awareness; like most portable media of today, the transistor radio is first appropriated by younger people and operates as an integral element in youth culture. Both are personalised media with a rapid take-up upon introduction.
3. Japan's largest operator is NTT DoCoMo (DoCoMo means anywhere) that in 2001 held 60 per cent of the national market and which in 1999 launched the so-called i-mode that allows email communication, access to Internet with highly popular dating sites, which are mobile chat rooms. The operator KDDI has introduced a camera unit, a GPS navigation system and a moving image transmission system, while J-Phone has been successful with Sha-mail through which users may send and receive still and moving images along with text mails. In 2001, KDDI and J-Phone each held 18 per cent of the Japanese market (Nikkei Research 2003).
4. The reality effect of the public sphere ideal includes, not only the obedience to its ramifications but, equally important, the challenges to and violations of the ideal, e.g. through minute and concrete accounts in the public sphere of sex and violence, and through the publication of celebrities' and politicians' private affairs. This dualism is evident throughout modern media history, as in the so-called penny dreadfuls of the 1840s in Britain, in the popular press early in the early 20th century and in today's webcam mockeries.
5. That mobile communication seems to highlight the processual, fluid nature of audiencing more than is the case with broadcast audiencing should not be conflated with degrees of interpretive activity. Both broadcast and mobile audiences are involved in sense-making processes of involvement, comment and possibly critique.
6. Similar performative aspects are evident in the use of 3G technologies on dating sites, when pictures are taken, or sound bites recorded and sent. Conversely, the GPS facilities are less conspicuous than sms, emailing or going on the Internet, since they operate without any actions

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7. Fan cultures and ritualised live broadcasts are clear examples of reflexive audiences (e.g. Katz & Dayan 1992, Stacey 1994, Baym 2000). But, in more mundane terms, reflexive audiencing is found in people's watching of the national news, in net gaming and in special radio channels for e.g. teenage listeners.
8. Howard Rheingold's book *Smart Mobs* (Rheingold 2002) is a clever pun on the relations between social formations and mobile technologies.
9. Most "textual" analyses of mobile communication rest on users' accounts or logs or on archival material provided by individuals and institutions such as is the case with the text message archive at the Finnish Information Society Research Centre. Examples of more textual approaches to mobile phone culture, focusing on single entities, are found in e.g. Androutsopoulos & Schmidt 2002, Kasesniemi & Rautiainen 2002, while Laursen (forthcoming) studies sms and conversation sequences.

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**Audiences and Publics:
When cultural engagement matters for the
public sphere**

Changing Media, Changing Europe Volume 2

Edited by Sonia Livingstone

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