

# H-Net Reviews

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Noah Arceneaux, Anandam Kavoori, eds. *The Mobile Media Reader*. New York: Peter Lang, 2012. vi + 198 pp. \$139.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4331-1301-7; \$35.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4331-1300-0.

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## Mobile Media in Historical Perspective

On April 4, 2013, Facebook founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, announced the launch of a much-anticipated new product in a live presentation from Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park, California. Facebook Home, Zuckerberg explained, promised to shift mobile phones from an app-centered environment to a people-centered experience. Technology analysts and pop culture pundits had been speculating for quite some time about a possible Facebook “Phone,” but Zuckerberg explained that Home is more than an app and more than an operating system. Users can download the Facebook launcher software to any Android phone. The app will change a phone’s interface to be Facebook-centric and will run your apps such as text messages (SMS).

Facebook’s effort to change the very nature of users’ relationship with their mobile devices is one example of many in today’s emerging media landscape. In *The Mobile Media Reader*, editors Noah Arceneaux and Anandam Kavoori present essays that connect today’s media practices with the past. In twelve essays, scholars explore a variety of social, cultural, and economic factors surrounding the use and development of mobile media technologies. Explaining that the adoption and use of mobile media depends as much on cultural factors as on “combinations of micro-circuitry and cutting-edge software,” Arceneaux and Kavoori selected essays for this anthology that should broaden any reader’s understanding and conceptualization of mobile communication technologies (p. 3). The editors aim to open a dialogue to situate mobile

media technologies as an evolutionary process shaped by the give and take between industry producers and media content.

The collection includes twelve chapters organized in two sections: “Foundations” and “Forms/Functions.” Arceneaux and Kavoori explain that these essays “historicize, contextualize and diversify our thinking about mobile media by taking a relatively circumscribed area of analysis ... and connecting [it] with wider institutional/technological and sociological elements in play” (p. 3). The five essays in the first section present readers with a historical foundation for thinking about mobile media. For example, Scott W. Ruston addresses mobile media as an entertainment form in “Calling Ahead: Cinematic Imaginations of Mobile Media’s Critical Affordances.” He argues for a conceptual framework for mobile media by defining five critical affordances: ubiquity, portability, personality, connectivity, and locativity. Ruston explains that these “critical affordances” enable users to evaluate mobile media as well as situate them in the larger media system. Matthew A. Kilmeier’s essay, meanwhile, examines car radio culture as a mobile media technology after World War II. Coeditor Arceneaux presents a study on the citizens band (CB) radio, used first by truckers and later by hobbyists, as an interpersonal communication and mobile social network, citing that little scholarship exists on this popular form of communication in the 1970s. For those who remember the CB radio phenomenon, Arceneaux’s essay “CB Radio:

Mobile Social Networking in the 1970s” is an excellent reminder that our smartphones and Twitter apps have roots in past communication technologies. Arceneaux was inspired by CB radio culture to examine the growing phenomenon of mobile media software—“MoSoSo.” Noting several parallels between CB radio and social media today, Arceneaux refers to the widespread disbelief among scholars that meaningful social relationships can be made through media: “Such critiques foreshadowed popular culture’s frequent denouncement of the nature of online relationships” (p. 56). The final chapter in this section, “A Brief History of the U.S. Mobile Spectrum” by Thomas W. Hazlett, historicizes the tussle between the government and commercial interests that hindered cellular and mobile media development. Hazlett posits that political problems related to allocating the spectrum under the Federal Communication Commission’s mandate to “serve the public interest, convenience or necessity” complicated the process and hindered development of the cellular spectrum.[1]

Section 2, “Forms/Functions,” includes pieces on e-readers, ringtones, apps, gaming, and mobile media technologies for political purposes. One chapter is devoted to mobile media’s impact on journalism. In “As It Happens: Mobile Communications Technology, Journalists and Breaking News,” Collette Snowden addresses mobile media’s challenge to the news industry. Anyone, theoretically, has the ability to generate content and challenge a news outlet’s ability to be the first to report events. Today, anyone carrying a smartphone with Internet access can “scoop” legacy media. This reality, Snowden argues, is requiring journalists to change their ways: “The capacity to adapt quickly and creatively to developments in technology has therefore become a requirement for professional survival in journalism” (p. 130). An original piece of research, Bruce Çelik’s essay, “Appropriation of Cell Phones by Kurds: The Social Practice of Struggle for Political Identities in Turkey,” tackles minority groups’ use of cell phone technology. Çelik conducted in-depth interviews with Kurds on their use of mobile phones to obtain political and social power. He found that young Kurds used mobile phones as a tool for political resistance. Mobile media were favored over other forms of communication, as they enabled decentralized messaging to organize and mobilize politically. In the final chapter, “Through the Looking Cell Phone Screen: Dreams of Omniscience in an Age of Mobile Augmented Reality,” Imar de Vries documents mobile media as both a blessing and a curse. His study examines the stories

surrounding mobile “Augmented Reality” (AR) to better understand the mythos behind media technologies as a path to both utopia and dystopia. De Vries articulates the problem in this passage to set up his argument regarding the politics of emerging media technologies: “New media are highly charged with political ambiguity: on the one hand they are celebrated for liberating the individual from the grasps of mass media and governmental deception or oppression, but on the other they reinsert a disciplining mechanism by subjecting users to the semi-masked logic of information and communication networks: connect, or die” (p. 178).

Through the exploration of several modes of media, this collection of essays illustrates that mobile communication is nothing new, but rather has a long and complex history. While it is not possible for any collection to be comprehensive, this volume offers something that many do not: scholarship that truly delivers a diverse *history* of mobile media. Any scholar studying today’s media environment needs to understand how we arrived at an economic and political climate that favors corporate appropriation over independent innovation. A weakness is certainly its American-centric focus, but that is perhaps a larger reflection of the dearth of scholarship historicizing media outside of the United States.

*The Mobile Media Reader* would be an excellent addition to any reading list for upper-class curricula on digital and emerging media or graduate courses to introduce students to historical inquiry as a way to understand media communication today. It provides a historical complement to books that explore how our relationships are changing, such as Sherry Turkle’s *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2012) or Joseph Turow’s *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth* (2012) that examines privacy and advertising in the digital age. Another, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (2012), by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, addresses the breakdown of corporate media hegemony in the current digital media environment. All of these have different goals, of course, but would nicely complement *The Mobile Media Reader* in any course looking to further our understanding of the cultural, social, and economic circumstances surrounding the digital and mobile media environment.

Note

[1]. U.S. Code: 47 USC § 307.

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