

## **Organizational Communication and Mobile Media: possibilities and challenges**

### **Comunicação organizacional e mídias móveis: possibilidades e desafios**

*Camila Maciel Campolina Alves Mantovani*<sup>1</sup>

*Maria Aparecida Moura*<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The article seeks to reflect on how the variety of media and mediations (especially mobile media) brought new possibilities of interaction between organizations and their stakeholders, in particular the end customers. By extending the points of contact between subjects and brands, the presence and the almost constant use of digital media end up demanding that organizational communication starts thinking and proposing new strategies to approach and relate with stakeholders. Some initiatives will be presented and discussed here based on the reflections brought by mediatization e mobility theories.*

**Keywords:** *Organizational communication, mediatization, mobility, consumption.*

**Resumo:** *O artigo busca refletir sobre as possibilidades e os desafios das interações entre as organizações e seus públicos de interesse, em especial os clientes finais, diante da diversidade de mídias e mediações (com destaque para as mídias móveis). Ao ampliar os pontos de contato entre os sujeitos e as marcas, a presença e o uso quase constante das mídias digitais acabam por demandar da comunicação organizacional a proposição de novas estratégias de abordagem e relacionamento com os públicos de interesse. Aqui serão apresentadas e discutidas algumas iniciativas à luz das reflexões em torno da mediatização e das teorias da mobilidade no âmbito da comunicação.*

**Palavras-chave:** *comunicação organizacional; mediatização; mobilidade; consumo.*

1 Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte, MG, Brasil. E-mail: camilamm@gmail.com

2 Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte, MG, Brasil. E-mail: cidamoura@gmail.com

## Introduction

In last twenty years, electronic and digital technologies had modified the way we communicate. The discussion around the centrality of the mediatic sphere in the daily life and in social relations have been developed through the analysis of its economic, political and cultural implications. The studies on globalization, world-ification of culture and dynamization of informational flows have focused on the perception of the increasing penetration of media in the most diverse layers of the social life, playing an important role regarding the changes in the forms of social interaction.

The mediatic communication, since the development of technologies and the alterations in its uses, has been modified. Some authors even define this process as the mediatization of societies (FAUSTO GRANDSON, 2006, 2008, 2010; SODRÉ, 2002). However, beyond the technological determinism present in the critics regarding mediatization studies, it is necessary to understand the mediatic logics inserted in social practices and in the contemporary sociability processes.

Silverstone, when asking the question “why study the media”, offer us the following answer

[...] acknowledgement that our media is omnipresent, daily, as an essential dimension of our contemporary experience. It is impossible to escape the presence and the representation of media. We begin to depend on the media, both printed and electronic, as a means of entertainment and information, comfort and security, to see some sense in the continuities of experience and, also, sometimes, for the intensities of experience (SILVERSTONE, 2002, p. 12).

Facing this scenario, we highlight, in our discussion, another important element to compose the contemporary communicational landscape: mobility. In this sense, if before there was a time and a place for activities such as watching TV, playing games, sending an email, paying the bills or accessing a website, today, with mobile media, people can choose and

access different contents without many contextual restrictions for their interactions.<sup>3</sup>

Amongst the devices that help spreading info-communicational mobility, we highlight the use cell phones and smartphones. These equipments, that, beyond having voice services, add information in multiformats and have connection with the Internet, are increasingly present in the urban landscape.

Portable computers, tablets, wi-fi connections, bluetooth systems, amongst others, had also become more popular, being incorporated to the daily routine of many people that, in an almost compulsory way, need to keep their workforce available and connected while they are on the move and, also, to establish interactions related to their private life.

The communicational exchanges on the go had significantly modified the way people get informed, have fun, work, study, consume and express feelings. When contributing for the dissemination of new possibilities of interaction, either between people or between them and the content, such medias end up producing a society that is always online and available to enter interactive processes, acting as prosthetics of interaction, extensions of the human body.

Cell phones are considered resources of permanent connection. The individual becomes available all the time. The brand of mobile communication is the constant availability. Either in the middle of Budapest or in Manhattan, in a farm in the countryside of Minas Gerais or a in hotel in Manaus, the person is always reachable, therefore, as a material object, the cell phone work as an icon of dialogue, of a tecno-umbilical connection (Gergen, 2003, p. 111). It is clear that to be always reachable means to be always detectable, which makes the individual more visible to the business corporation that seek information about people, obligating individuals to develop strategies of protection (SANTAELLA, 2007, p. 238).

3 with reservations with issues linked to the infrastructure of the companies of telecommunication – coverage area, quality of service – to the own equipment – battery, memory, product specifications – and, mainly, financial issues: Brazil has one of the most expensive mobile services in the world (DANTAS, 2002), adding to the high cost of the devices, especially smartphones.

As the technologies have been motivating new practices in many social fields, in the field of the organizational communication would not be different. The variety of medias and mediations (especially the mobile medias) presents new possibilities of interaction between the organizations and their stakeholders, in particular the end customers.

With the possibilities of production and circulation of content through the web, new settings of interaction emerge and organizations come across, as said previously, other speech conformations that will modify the strategic dimension of communicative processes. New characteristics of interlocution appear, marked by the dispersion and fluidity (OLIVEIRA et al., 2012, p. 10).

With regards to the dimension of consumption, the possibilities arising from the use of mobile media, smartphones in particular, seem to extend the points of contact between subjects and organizations/brands. Such fact has challenged the organizational communication to think and create new strategies to relate with the customer.

In this context, we highlight the term mobile marketing, that has been used to characterize promotional actions through a cell phone and/or smartphones.

From SMS messages to QR Codes and games that explore the attribute of geomapping in mobile devices, the strategies to approach the consumer through mobile media have been multiplying, demanding a reflection on the interactions generated by the contemporary practices of consumption.

Regarding actions specifically of mobile marketing, we see that, in the Brazilian context, they have been happening in a very diverse manner. Some actions are timid; others, at times, are very incisive, provoking even a certain “irritation” in the costumer. Suddenly, the phone rings and there it is, a message with an offer not to be missed. In some cases, the user himself authorized the reception of the offer. However, it is not rare that many of these messages arrive in an unwanted manner to the cell phone.

The mobile medias - especially smartphones - present a set of intrinsic characteristics that become interesting for the marketing actions: portability, multifunctionality, connectivity and the individualized use. Such elements, in a combined way, generate opportunities for buying and selling, as well as for the creation of a channel of interaction between customers and brands.

According to a research published by Pew Internet<sup>4</sup> (September 2013) in the USA, 63% of adults that own a cell phone use their device to access the internet. Inside this percentage, 34% say they would rather access the web on their cell phone/smartphone. Therefore, 21% of the American adult that own a mobile phone browse the internet, preferably, through this device.

In Brazil, according to the research carried through by Google in partnership with Ipsos Media CT among users<sup>5</sup> that own smartphones and access the internet through their device, 82% of the people interviewed looked for a product and/or service through their cell phone and 30% already bought a product and/or service with their devices.

The potential of mobile media, when put in numbers, are very expressive; however, this is only one of the components of analysis around the subject. These medias are inserted in a complex universe of discussions and reflections around mobility. Therefore, it is necessary to be restricted to concepts related to the theme so we can, then, seek to understand its implications in the field of consumption and organizational communication.

4 Available on: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Cell-Internet/Summary-of-Findings.aspx>.

5 The sample was composed by a thousand adult brazilians (between 18 and 64 years-old) and internet users that declared using smartphones to access the web. According to the report, the distribution is in compliance with the study with national representativity and the data according to the age, gender, region, smartphone brand, frequency of internet use on the cell phone and tablet use. Available on: <http://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/omp-2013-br-local.pdf>. Accessed in: dec. 2013.

## Mobility

When covering the historic path of the means of communication, we perceive a dynamic movement: from orality to writing, from writing to the press, from press to electronic medias (radio and television), until arriving at the digital technologies, that had created the dematerialization and hybridization of the devices.

From personal computers to “collective computers” - connected through cyberspace (LEMOS, 2005) - in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there comes the time to mobile technologies exemplified in the wi-fi connection by smartphones, tablets and notebooks. The information, that already transited the net, covering places until arriving to the subject located in specific points, now starts to move along with these subjects.

This situation of generalized mobility, where bodies, information, products and capital are set in circulation, is inserted contemporarily in the context that some theoreticians of the field of social sciences defined as the paradigm of mobility<sup>6</sup> (URRY, 2007). Such paradigm surpasses the communicational and informational issue and points out the idea of the movement as a key for better understanding the contemporary social phenomena. Amongst the diverse meanings of this paradigm, we are interested in focusing, in this context of reflection, the aspect referring to mobility by informational flows.

According to Urry (2007), the development of information technologies and communication provided what was called productive mobility. In this landscape, beyond typical activities of being in movement, the author highlights the fact of that mobile technologies had allowed the accomplishment of several other activities, mainly those related to work and personal interactions.

The potential supplied by the mobile technologies to perform the micro-coordination of the daily life has also been discussed by researchers as Ling (2004) and Katz and Aakhus (2002) and are frequently used

6 From the theoretical development and the increasing empirical analysis regard the phenomenon of mobility in the most diverse aspects of life, there is, according to the author, a diverse way of thinking the characteristics of economic, social and political relations that would point towards a mobility turn in the social sciences (URRY, 2007).

in the advertising campaigns around mobile devices. Since the pace of modern life imposes a speedy routine on people, for a part of the adult population that is urban and economically active, mobile devices had extended the possibility to co-ordinate routine activities at a distance.

In this sense, the use of mobile media corresponds to a lifestyle. To Elliott and Urry,

Life ‘on the move’ is the kind of life in which the capacity to be ‘elsewhere’ at a different time from others is central. Email, SMS texting, MP3 audio, personal DVD recorders, internet telephonic services and so on enable people to seek escape from the constraints of pre-existing traditions or traditional forms of cultural life, under more fluid patterns and practices. Such mobile lives demand flexibility, adaptability, reflexivity – to be ready for the unexpected, to embrace novelty, as even one’s significant others are doing different things and at different times. People’s experiences are de-synchronized from each other, so that systems and people have to be available ‘just in time’. (ELLIOTT; URRY, 2010, p. 4).

This movement narrated by the authors and attributed to one determined global elite was characterized by Bauman (1999) in the paradigm of the tourist, having as counterpoint of the vagabond. The tourist is the one that moves by choice, which can be an effect of the “seduction operated by the magic of the movement” or to be established in a strategical rationality, in view of the presented “circumstances”.

Although mobile technologies bring a “innovative” character to mobility, the human relation with movement is historic – so much so that the concept of nomadism, adopted contemporarily to cover the processes that are set in this context, has its origin in the practices of the nomadic peoples. In this process of locomotion through space, these peoples used resources offered by the environment until they were depleted, initiating, thus, a new journey, seeking another region that allowed survival conditions.

Maffesoli (2001), in the text *About nomadism*, calls attention to the fact that this ancestral desire of movement has been manifesting itself, in different ways, throughout human evolution. According to the

author, the term “wander” was domesticated under the term “mobility”, referring itself, therefore, to the constant movements of contemporary subjects, which would be: daily migrations (work, consumption), seasonal migrations (tourism, trips) and, finally, the social mobility, provoked by economic disparities.

According to Maffesoli (2001), these trips are the way the modern man has to relive the “adventure” of nomadic times. This desire, that underlies to the desire for wander, can, according to the author’s perspective, be satisfied by experiences created by mobile technologies, including not only communication and information technologies, but also transportation.

The Minitel, the airplane, the “Internet” and the variety of electronic nets, the television and the information roads, every one of these elements allows the subject to live cultural, scientific, sexual and religious experiences that are natural to the existential adventure, in real time and over all collectively. The potentialities of cyberspace are far from depleting, but they already testify the cultural enrichment that is always connected to mobility, the circulation, whether it is from the spirit, from a daydream and even from fantasies, that everything does not let to induce (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 30).

In the previous passage, Maffesoli (2001) was still mentioning the cyberspace to talk about mobility through informational flows. Nowadays, mobile technologies enhanced this type of movement, in so far as it expanded the points of connection on the web. However, contemporary mobility creates a contradiction, because at the same time that the technologies allow the movement, they perform the function of regulation and control. We are free to move, however, our movement through technologies is registered, mapped, monitored.

To Manovich (2006), this would be one of the main points of the notion of augmented space: the fine line between surveillance/control and assistance/addition of information. In the perspective of the author, when the physical space becomes an informational space, the subjects start to live a double situation: there’s the possibility of use of devices



(mobile or not), that extract information from the space - contributing for action of monitoring, tracking and surveillance -, as well as extending the perception of space from the insertion of layers of information, that can be set in motion through many devices.

Bruno (2013) reinforces the idea when he affirms that the constant presence of the subject on the web, beyond notably allowing to articulate action of diverse nature – from the exposure of self to collective actions of a politic nature -, also makes it more vulnerable to the surveillance.

[...] at the same time that the possibilities of expression and individual and collective action are enhanced, devices of surveillance and capture of data of the users become increasingly present in these same platforms and nets, tending to integrate their own parameters of functioning and efficiency. Under the visible flow of the exchanges and social conversations, it is constituted a huge, distributed and manifold system of tracking and categorization of personal data that, in turn, feed strategies of advertising, security, development of services and apps, inside and outside of these platforms (BRUNO, 2013, p. 9).

It is valid to remember, at this point, what Bauman said (2001) when he calls attention to the fact that, in the “solid stage of the modern age”, the nomadic habits were badly seen, in this context, being a citizen meant to make use of a fixed place, to be based in the space (work, family, social status). Nowadays, however, despite the wanderers and homeless continue to be badly seen, there is the return of the nomadism in the format of the extraterritorial global elites. “The contemporary global elite is formed by absent gentlemen”, he says.

To be modern started to mean, as it means nowadays, to be incapable to stop and to be even more unable to stand still. We move and we will continue to move, not as much for the “postponement of satisfaction” as Max Weber suggested, but because of the impossibility of attaining satisfaction: The horizon of satisfaction, the finish line of effort and the moment of calm self-congratulation move way too fast (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 37).

Thus, in the vision of Bauman (2008), the mobility of contemporary subjects resembles less to the travelers or migrants - that had as objective

to arrive somewhere - and more to the wanderers, that have as their main objective to be "on the move".

To the movement, it is added the issue of consumption, that, in the perspective of the author, becomes the main contemporary requirement. "The way as the society nowadays molds its members is dictated first and foremost by the duty to play the role of the consumer" (BAUMAN, 1999, p. 88).

With this affirmation, Bauman (1999) wants to highlight the current emphasis in the consumption and, in that sense, the idea of movement is extremely pertinent, therefore it always puts the subject looking for something. Moreover, this incessant search, even though it provokes a certain discomfort, talks about a new form of being in this world, of participating and integrating socially. To have new desires to be satisfied and to always be looking for something are representative actions of the idea of being alive. In the words of the author: "immobility, in the end, means death".

Facing this reality, it is necessary to begin a reflection around how the day-to-day appropriation of technology, especially the mobile media, are reflecting not only in the interaction between subjects and society, but also detaining us in specific contexts, such as those that bring us to organizations and their stakeholders.

### **Mediatization and organizational communication**

In a world full of stimuli and needs to be created and fulfilled continually by the market, the organizational communication, focused on the dialogue between clients and companies, play an important role acting in the symbolic dimensions of consumption. As for the interaction between customers and brands, mobile media has become, time and time again, an important mediator.

In this sense, such technologies start to be a part of the lifestyle of the subjects, that, in turn, begin to guide the development of equipment not only in terms of design, but mainly in relation to functionality. All

the infrastructure that are mobilized to deliver content/service turn their attention to the subject.

Therefore, the strategic communication in the field of mobile media goes beyond the development of advertisement, but also refers to the consolidation of the presence of organizations in a mobile environment. Numerous actions, from the creation of an app or a responsive website to the adoption of a new (dialogic) posture in relation to the customer/client, represent important steps.

An initial reflection around the potential and challenges of communication – through mobile technologies – between an organization and its target audience can be developed through the analysis of strategies of approaching the customer, such as a promotional email or SMS. Usually, in the content of such messages, there is always a link to the brand's website or even the telephone of the company. That way, if that offer calls the customer's attention, he/she will look for ways to get in touch with the company, either by clicking on a link (to get more information or starting the process of purchase) or through a phone number.

However, in the first case, a lot of times the customer gets frustrated because the website was not developed for the mobile environment, making it hard or even impossible to browse remotely. Something even more common usually happens: the contact information is in an image format and it does not allow the user to click and start a call/interaction. Therefore, in this context, it is necessary to have in mind that, the same way it happens on the web, in the mobile media, the mean where companies advertise is the same place where the customer can initiate (and even conclude) the process of acquisition of a certain service or product.

It is important to highlight that, in the case of cell phones, the presence or acceptance of the strategic communication did not happen (and still doesn't happen) in an easy way. Many people do not feel comfortable to receive messages with advertisement on their devices, for example. Research shows that the "indiscriminate" use of SMS as tool to propagate sales and offers cause a certain discomfort and even rejection to this form of communication (KATZ; AAKHUS, 2002; LING, 2008).

This perception can be explained by the fact of that the interactions through SMS (as well as calls) are part of a universe of connections that are established, most of the time, between people with strong connections in the network of the subjects. It is a territory of personal interactions. Thus, when someone receives a message, there is a big expectation around the importance of that message by the subject who is receiving it. Therefore, there is some frustration when the content is a 'once-in-a-lifetime sale' or a reminder of a bill.

So, before the consolidation of the Internet in cell phones and, therefore, the presence of different informational and communicational flows in these devices, the communication between organizations and end customers happened from the logic of the "marketing of permission". It was necessary an authorization of the user to send offers through SMS or MMS. However, to minimize the negative effect of the rejection, it was also necessary (and still it is) to be attentive for the individualization of offers. The more personalized, the bigger the possibility of these messages to be perceived as services of valuable information, as opposed to be considered annoying and disturbing messages with no relation to the customer (BARNES; SCORNAVACCA, 2004).

In face of the potential of this media in establishing a bidirectional flow of communication, many brands adopt, as a strategy of individualization of offers, a speech that simulates an "one on one" dialogue between the organization and consumer. However, such interaction can reveal itself as being very fragile and innocuous, since many times, even though it may seem individualized, the message is set to be a communication one for all.

Another characteristic element of the mobile media and that is presented as an important factor for the communication between organizations and customers is the relation of these technologies with the place. In this case, services of geomapping allow the creation of messages/interactions specific to the environment where the subject is located.

Many times, due to technical restrictions and others linked to the preservation of privacy, it is necessary for the user to insert certain coordinates (through a number – large account – sent via SMS, QR code or bluetooth activation) in the system, so that he/she can finally access offers or services thought for that specific context.

About this last aspect, it is important to remember that not only the brands can use this type of function, but also the customer can benefit from it. To be able to access information on products and services within the point of sale, for example, is something that allows the customer to perform a more conscious purchase. Mobile technologies, in these contexts, are used to consult detailed information on products, prices and offers, interfering on the negotiation process.

Another important aspect to be highlighted regarding strategical communication in mobile media refers to the capacity of a certain advertisement or campaign to be retransmitted by the consumer to its network of contacts. Called viral marketing or buzz marketing, the “word of mouth” through information and communication technologies gains a new dimension.

To a large extent of the informational flows that transit and are accessed by the Internet - either by computer, smartphones and/or tablets -, the logic of intervention and manipulation of the message is perceived. The subjects are stimulated to give their contribution to the communicational process through production and/or recycling contents of a diverse nature, promoting their dissemination. Such behavior, in the field of marketing, for example, creates a special interest for the fact that a message sent by someone who keeps a close relation to the customer has more possibilities of being well received than a message sent by third parties - in this in case advertiser/companies (BAUER et al., 2005).

From the point of view of the customer, with regards to the use of mobile media to establish communicational exchange towards the acquisition of services and products and/or interaction with the organizations, it is important to highlight the expansion of the capacity of action.

The presence of brands/organizations in social media, in which a great part of the contemporary informational flow circulates, although invasive, operates inside a logic of the two-way street, talked about by Bruno (2013): to see and be seen.

So, at the same time the presence of these organizations in these circles allows the brand to obtain precious information related to customer's behavior, habits and preferences, they also are exposed and target of criticism from the customers when those are not satisfied with the services/products offered/acquired.

In the society of mediatized ambiance, the proposition of the institution can be modified by the subjects. The emergency of new spaces of interaction, especially in the Internet, extends the possibilities of reply and the interpretation of these subjects that have the condition to build their own spaces of performance and, that way, to put in question issues of their interest (BARICHELLO, 2008, p. 244).

In this sense, we can affirm that such actions are inserted in a wide context of management of relationships of the organization with social actors. It is not only about the promotion of an offer/service, but also about the complex production of senses due to the relationship between organization and society.

## **Final considerations**

To approach and reflect on the relation between the audience and organizations imply to think about the perspective of the mediatization along with the studies of organizational communication. Organizations are increasingly more "sensitive" to the end customer's behavior - and go to him through numerous techniques. Many researches are made with the intention of empowering industries and markets. So, their reflexive potential is decreased by the guidelines of development of products/services and by the logic of market/capital. That is, a critical outlook to this uses and consumptions is not developed.

In this sense, it is necessary to ask something about the relations under the cultural, economic, politic and social point of view. What is the path that has been taken by the organizational communication processes?

What clues do they bring us about emerging ways of interaction and relation between audiences and organizations?

There are still important issues about surveillance and control, that are presented, sometimes, in well intentioned ways – to know more about the customer, to present the best offer, to narrow the communication between organizations and target audiences - but also talked about strategic interests linked to big corporations or even to the government.

The analysis of phenomena based on the interaction between subjects and organizations, in view of mobile communication on the web - and the possibilities that it offers for the exchange of information, the publication of opinions and the creation of new channels of interaction -, is essential to the understanding of organizations and their communicational processes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## About the authors

*Camila Maciel Campolina Alves Mantovani* - Professor of the Department of Social Communication of UFMG. Graduated journalist (UFMG/2002) and doctor in Information Sciences at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG/2011), with research on *Narratives of mobility: communication, culture and production in informational spaces*. Her fields of study comprise: Mediatization, informational mobility, organizational communication, usability studies, information architecture, informational culture, consumption studies (applied research) in digital environments.

*Maria Aparecida Moura* – Full professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Graduated in Library Science at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (1993), master in Education at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (1996), doctor in Communication and Semiotics at PUC-SP (2002) and postdoctoral in Cognitive Semiotics and New Media at the Maison de Sciences of l'Homme (2006-2007). She coordinates the Center of Studies for Mediation and Social uses of knowledge and Information in Digital Environments (Nemusad – Núcleo de Estudos das Mediações e Usos Sociais dos Saberes e Informações em Ambientes Digitais). She is a professor in the PPGCOM/UFMG and a permanent member of the PPGCI/UFMG. She has experience in the area of Science of the Information, Communication and Education, with emphasis in information technologies.

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