



1. Introduction: Mediated Intercultural Communication Matters: Understanding New Media, Dialectics, and Social Change

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At the start of the second decade of the new millennium, there is increasing awareness of the development of newer “smart” and more interactive media that is happening in precipitate speed in many parts of the world. The uprisings in the Arab region in 2011, for instance, have focused attention on using digital social media and acknowledged their role in movements for political engagement and change. Terms such as the “Twitter revolution” and the “Facebook revolution” have been used widely, conceptualizing the notions of “dynamic media” or “Web 2.0” as potentially radical, disruptive, and socially transformative. The concept of change—in contrast to continuity—is thus central to the increasing interest in digital media. This focus has not, however, been vigorously matched by substantive theoretical discussions or by extensive empirical examinations of computer-mediated communication and intercultural communication.

What do we mean by “new media”? Our interest here ranges far beyond the simple proliferation of the “new” technologies, gadgetry, or artifacts that are frequently associated with digital media—and beyond the more recent participatory or social media networks and geo-locational mobile applications. Rather, we view new media in its wider significance as a globally distributed web of sociotechnical relationships, imbricated with culture in its design, interface, reception, and appropriation. The field of new media that we examine in this collection is effectively framed by Lievrouw and Livingstone

(2006), who position new media as information and communication technologies *and* their social contexts, in particular the material devices as well as the activities around device use and development and the larger societal arrangements and organizational forms around devices and their practices.

Preoccupations with and debates about new media are largely structured around the premise that novel technologies will drive changes in the way people relate to each other, within and across cultures. The dominant perspective stresses empowerment, standardization, and assimilation into alleged global norms and the World Wide Web culture that particularly exists among “digital natives” and the millennial generation. Yet what *actually* happens in praxis when digital media are implemented within and across cultures is contested and negotiated within complex local and political conditions. Processes of mediation are not friction free. Quantitative studies demonstrating increasing adoption of Internet and social media and simple counts of worldwide users provide only the skeleton of the technology story. Even though current activities and certain “best” current practices exist for the implementation of digital media, ongoing critiques conceive of changes in intercultural communication as reinforcing boundaries, exclusion, and tensions. These relational tensions or dialectics in established rituals and identities generate both diversity and plurality of opportunities and challenges within distinctive ethnic, racial, and religious communities. Therefore, a growing corpus of investigators in this realm have sought to ask which of the values, practices, belief systems, forces, and structures of different social groups influence the ways in which these groups design, perceive, adopt, or utilize information and communication technologies . . . if they have access to them at all. And they ask how these conditions energize and enervate the ways in which societies are able to participate in contemporary systems of knowledge and wealth generation.

This book seeks to contribute to the growing body of work that is exploring the complex, reciprocal, and evolving interactions between dynamic human cultures and information and communication technologies. A testament to the growing vibrancy of this area of research is the enthusiastic response to our initial call for papers. We received many inquiries and considered more than 60 proposals. This collection represents the best of these submissions. The collection as a whole, and the individual contributions to it, interweave theoretical insights, fresh evidence, and rich applications to assess the nature of digital culture(s) in order to address assumptions about the present state of mediated global society/societies and their trajectory into the future.

Attention is given here to showcasing prominent interpretative and critical research from diverse voices in multiple locations and with varying backgrounds. As such, this volume presents a rich and colorful tapestry that offers

opportunities for comparative analyses and deepened international understandings of digital media connections, particularly in the areas of identity, community, and politics. For the rest of this discussion, we turn to the title of this chapter to address several compelling descriptive, conceptual, practical, and normative reasons why mediated intercultural communication matters. Here, we offer our reflections on the past, present, and needed future research areas of mediated intercultural communication, leaving the task of summarizing each individual chapter to the introduction of each section (in this volume).

Why mediated intercultural communication matters

The present picture of intensified digital media uptake resoundingly underscores the growing practices and importance of mediated intercultural communication. The widespread and seemingly meteoric growth in the numbers of Internet users is one manifestation of the globalization of digital media and its practices and infrastructures. As of April 2011, aggregated statistical reports show that there are almost two billion Internet users in the world (Internet World Stats, 2011). Contrary to earlier decades in which Internet users were predominately located in North America and parts of Europe, the largest number of Internet users now reside in Asia, with sizable growth rates also seen in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. It is important to point out that the growing use of social media by people in all regions of the world has profound communicative implications and consequences. One critical component of this contemporary process of change is the potential offered by new media for the formation of new identities, ties, and activities that express and represent non-Western values, norms, and systems, which is occurring as a greater diversity of social and political actors around the world interact and work within and across cultures using a spectrum of digital media.

A short history of scholarship in mediated intercultural communication

To bring to the foreground further reasons why mediated intercultural communication matters, it is instructive to briefly consider the landscape of scholarship in the field of mediated intercultural communication research that has prevailed in the recent past. A survey of this landscape reveals two parallel *and* intersecting lines of inquiry. *Parallel* because the scholars in each line come from disparate disciplines, often not building on each others' research; *intersecting* because their scholarship often investigates similar topics, resulting in limited cross-pollination between the two fields. Thus, one goal of this collection is to bring together scholarship from different disciplines. As described by Ess and Sudweeks in the Foreword of this volume, one line of inquiry

originated in the late 1980s and early 1990s with a diverse group of communication technologies scholars (from subdisciplines such as informatics, human-computer interaction, computer-mediated communication) who realized the importance of culture in the design, implementation, and use of the tools of mediated communication. From such efforts emerged organizations and conferences such as Cultural Attitudes towards Technology and Communication (CATaC) and a range of international, interdisciplinary scholarly exchanges and collaborations.

In the same era, a parallel but less developed line of scholarly inquiry was initiated within the field of intercultural communication. This area of research and study originated in the 1950s and 1960s as scholars and practitioners came together to facilitate postwar rebuilding projects in Europe and Japan. An interdisciplinary effort of anthropologists and linguists eventually came to reside in the field of communication—with various foci in different world regions (for example, linguistics in Europe, social psychology in the United States and Japan (Martin, Nakayama & Carbaugh, 2012)). A shared research emphasis in the various regions was on the impact of culture in *face-to-face* (FtF) interpersonal communication between members of different cultures (for example, on how verbal and nonverbal communication patterns vary from culture to culture, the role of communication in the formation and development of intercultural relationships, and identification of dimensions or components of effective communication across cultures). Little if any attention was paid to mediated communication.

Intercultural communication scholars have engaged a rich and varied breadth of questions about culture in various communication contexts, employing a wide range of metatheoretical perspectives—from variable-analytic social psychological research, to interpretive ethnography of communication studies, to critical postmodern and postcolonial studies (Gudykunst, 2005; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). A review of recent research, however, reveals that these scholars have rarely engaged in digital media research. In the broader field of communication studies, *mediated* communication was originally seen as the research domain of the field of media studies, interpersonal communication scholars (e.g., Walther, 1996; Walther & Parks, 2002), and organizational communication scholars (e.g., Poole & Holmes, 1995; Poole, Holmes, & DeSanctis, 1991), few of whom routinely engaged questions of *culture* in their studies (for an exception, see Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004).

Recent developments, however, signal a blossoming interest in new media by intercultural communication scholars. For example, in our 2009 communiqué with Professor Ling Chen, then Chair of the Intercultural Communication Division of the International Communication Association (ICA), she encouraged scholars engaging in new media research to submit papers to her

division, as the members of the Intercultural Communication Division had recently voted to include digitally mediated aspects of intercultural communication in their conference call for papers. This move reflected an increasing desire to integrate new media contexts into traditional research trajectories of intercultural communication scholarship. A textbook by Wood and Smith (2005) focusing on cultural elements of mediated communication was published in the middle of the current decade. Moreover, an upcoming issue of the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* hosted a special forum with commentaries on new media (Cheong & Gray, 2011), edited by Professor Robert Shuter (who has also contributed to a chapter in this book). Professor Shuter, the current chair of the International and Intercultural Communication Division at the (US) National Communication Association (NCA) also launched the Center for Intercultural New Media Research in June 2011 (www.interculturalnewmedia.com).

In the past, intercultural communication scholars and CATaC scholars shared a common interest in exploring the role of culture in human interactions, the traditional conceptualization of which was first borrowed from anthropology (e.g., E. T. Hall, Geertz, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck), and then from social psychology (e.g., Hofstede). It is not surprising that the first efforts of intercultural communication scholars involved theoretical speculations about how cultural values would influence interpersonal communication in mediated contexts (Olaniran, 2001). More recently, intercultural communication scholars, influenced by European critical theory, have stressed the importance of incorporating an understanding of power relations and historical impacts into their scholarship on neocolonialism (e.g., Ono, 2009). Gajjala (1999) was one of the first to examine the intersections of culture, gender, and power inequities in online encounters, from a postcolonial perspective. Olaniran continues this line of research by illustrating the impact of varying cultural values in e-learning contexts (chapter 4), particularly in relation to unequal access to technology in less economically developed countries (LEDCs), when compared with economically developed countries (EDCs).

The importance of dialectics

We introduce the perspective of mediated intercultural dialectics here to draw attention to the complex, dynamic, and intertwined relationships between new media and culture and as an attempt to move beyond the static, dichotomous, and essentializing conceptualizations of culture and intercultural communication (Chuang, 2003). The dialectical intercultural perspective is a metatheoretical framework that focuses on the simultaneous presence of the two relational forces of interaction and recognizes their opposing, interdependent, and complementary aspects. This notion, well-known in Eastern philosophies,

is based on the logic of *soku* (not one, not two), which places emphasis on assumptions that the world is neither monistic or dualistic but on the yin-yang principle or completion of relative polarities (Yoshikawa, 1987). Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's work on language and culture to advance research beyond traditional paradigms, Martin and Nakayama (1999, 2010) have explicated dialectics in intercultural communication to refer to the processual, relational, and contradictory logics of intercultural knowledge and practices. These include cultural-individual, personal-contextual, differences-similarities, static-dynamic, history/past-present/future, and privilege-disadvantage dimensions.

In particular, mediated intercultural dialectics refer to the fluid relationality between opportunities and challenges, tensions, and uneven gains within virtual world experiences, given the emergent cyber-cultures and the paradoxical and dynamic culturally variable beliefs, practices, and preferences in the design of and responses to technology, as well as our knowledge about communication with cultural "Others." Even as digital media facilitates more frequent and faster intercultural communication, present and persisting cultural rhetorical differences may amplify zones of contention and contradictions between different cultural audiences (St.Amant, 2002). Intercultural dialectics help highlight differences experienced within groups and between individuals that may account for identity and relational complexities (Collier, 2005).

A particular area of research interest in intercultural communication is *identity* and the role of *cultural* identity in intercultural encounters (Collier, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Several chapters in this volume extend this research focus and illustrate the dialectical dimensions underpinning instances of mediated intercultural communication, either by offering more nuanced theoretical frameworks for the exploration of culture in mediated communication or by investigating selected instances of culturally influenced mediated encounters. Boniwell Haslett (chapter 3) combines Giddens's structuration theory with Goffman's notions of identity and applies this new synthetic framework to the analysis of a range of studies on online communications, including avatars in Second Life and other virtual worlds. Rybas (chapter 6) explicates how minority online users experience fluid and enduring tensions as they attempt to produce an authentic self on Facebook while negotiating gender and class differences to fit the expectations of their imagined audiences. Extending the work of Martin and Nakayama (1999), Yang (chapter 7) identifies additional intercultural communication dialectics that undergird these authors' identity presentations of college students in online intercultural interactions. Chen and Dai (chapter 8) discuss the ways that online encounters may bring about changes in cultural identities, examining in particular the processes of developing individualistic and collective identities and

a sense of belonging. Rodan, Uridge, and Green (chapter 9) meanwhile illustrate how medical conditions shape one's identity and interaction with others online.

The study of mediated intercultural communication also matters because cultural stereotypes persist. The impacts of cultural stereotyping perpetuated by traditional media on FtF intercultural communication have been extensively investigated (e.g., Merskin, 2001; Vargas, 2000; Ono & Pham, 2009). Recent intercultural communication media research extends these analyses by exploring how digital (re)presentations can be constructed in response to/ in resistance to dominant media portrayals. For example, Ng (chapter 16) describes and highlights the Asian American community's proactive use of contemporary communication technologies (e-mail, Web logs, and social network sites) to reshape cultural and political imagery in the US national context.

It follows that intercultural communication matters also in the grounded, geographic sense. We have moved away from the separate virtualization of third spaces and purely virtual communities to increasingly integrated and interoperable mediated worlds (Cheong & Poon, 2009). In other words, *matter matters*, as online communication is rooted in biographical and physical histories and realities. Several readings in this volume reflect this focus. Lee (chapter 11) examines the impact of neoliberal politics on traditional South Korean funeral culture with the introduction of cyber-memorial zones; Gordon and Sorenson (chapter 17) compare the influence of the differing geopolitical contexts of Jamaica and Chile on Internet use and access. Privalova (chapter 18) describes how citizen journalists using new media technologies are changing the nature of political engagement in postcommunist Russia—and the ways in which Russian values and sociopolitical norms undergird Russian usage patterns of YouTube as well as other Russian social media that differ from their Western and American analogues. In terms of transnational ties, Alzouma (chapter 12) discusses how the use of mobile technologies among migratory workers in West Africa presents relational dialectics as the use of mobile phones help overcome family fragmentation but also bring unwanted contacts and communal obligations to contribute remittances back to extended family members. Likewise, Ganito and Ferreira (chapter 15) explore the changing cultural rituals as women—the “tellers” and preservers of family stories—increasingly use mobile phones as family photo albums. Again, a dialectic tension exists, as these mobile family photos are useful in preserving family stories but are also more fragile and fragmented than traditional photo albums.

Last but not least, mediated intercultural communication matters in a normative sense, in that mediated dialectics and digital divides are supposed to matter in contemporary societies concerned about social participation,

justice, and cohesion. Because of the uneven opportunities and challenges that shape the design and appropriation of new media in intercultural communication, digitally linked stratification exists and is operant at many levels, in spite of and in light of the grounded corporeality of social and mobile media use. As such, mediated intercultural communication is a crucial issue for scholars, as well as policy makers and practitioners. In this volume, van der Velden (chapter 2) describes the challenges of representing various “knowledges” (e.g., Western or indigenous) in constructing Web-based databases and digital archives and proposes a strategy that locates design as a thoroughly ethical practice, which should be accessible to indigenous and Western users. Hrachovec (chapter 19) cautions us about the uneven gains that come from communication technology adoption for activist groups, being that the mainstream media are relatively more eager to report on the innovative digital dissemination of their political event than to cover the substantive issues at hand. The resulting technical hype thereby allows the entertainment and media conglomerates to assert their influence “by the back door.”

Intercultural communication scholars have also recently begun to investigate social and global inequities, influenced by critical theory and postcolonial sensibilities (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Several authors here extend this work into mediated contexts. For example, Shuter (chapter 13) examines the impact of existing gender relations on the gender text-messaging divide in India, which poses unique challenges for women who aspire to professional careers. Sun and Critchfield (chapter 10) highlight how some cancer patients (and some of their family members acting as proxy Internet users) communicate grief, depression, encouragement, and health advice to those marginalized and shunned by health providers who repress health diagnoses in China. Lev-On and Neriya-Ben Shahar (chapter 14) describe the dilemma of a group of Jewish ultra-Orthodox women: They use the Internet, although it is forbidden by their community, admitting its negative effects (on others) and struggling to negotiate their own media use in their privileged position at the crossroads between modernity and Orthodoxy.

Pragmatics of mediated intercultural communication

Intercultural communication research has a strong history of emphasizing the pragmatic. This emphasis was established by early studies whose goals were the facilitation of interactions between construction project leaders and policy makers in post-World War II Europe and Asia (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). Later, investigators sought to understand (and offer solutions to) the intercultural challenges faced by host communities, immigrants, and refugees streaming into Europe in search of a better life (Kramsch, 2001). Subsequently, intercultural research has broadened to include studies of structural and social

inequities among ethnic and racial groups in the US (Gonzalez, Houston, & Chen, 2004) and other countries, of the experiences of international students fanning out all over the world, and of efforts at promoting a resolution to ethnic strife (Broome, Carey, De La Garza, Martin & Morris, 2005). Intercultural communication scholars now also emphasize the pragmatic in their studies of new media (Cheong & Martin, 2009). Without oversimplifying, and within the space constraints of each chapter, several authors in this collection offer prescriptive insights and intelligent actionable proposals on how to ameliorate intercultural relations and offer more fruitful intercultural communication exchanges. For example, St. Amant (chapter 5) extends research on intercultural communication competence with particular reference to the question of “credibility,” and proposes context-related strategies to employ when collaborating on multicultural virtual teams. Chen and Dai (chapter 8) identify common asymmetries as the source of tension in mediated communication between the West and non-West and propose strategies for easing these tensions.

Future directions

The dialectical landscape of the Internet’s third age

Contributions to this collection add to the growing body of literature exploring the complexity (and, often, the unpredictability) of relationships between culture and mediated communication in this “third age” of the Internet (Wellman, 2011). They reveal the thinness of the utopian and technological determinist hopes of the Internet’s “first age,” which proclaimed the arrival of a new technological enlightenment and the inevitable development of McLuhan’s long-forecasted “global village.” At the same time, these studies deny the pessimistic predictions of dystopian naysayers who insisted (as did commentators on earlier technologies) that the Internet and new media would fragment human relationships and cultures and divide us from each other. Instead, the studies give evidence to the multiple, often contradictory and apparently muddled ways in which our online and offline lives interweave and interact with one another, as communication technologies become ever more seamlessly integrated into our lives.

Taking a dialectical perspective assists in illuminating our global “current state” and permits us to acknowledge and embrace the opposing forces and themes emerging from the data. We can therefore recognize, for example, the equally “real” logic of nationalist and internationalist projects promoting new technologies in the service of human development and poverty reduction and also the continuing evidence of a global digital divide—an acknowledgment that highlights the weakness of simple instrumentalist assumptions. We can

acknowledge (and celebrate!) the ways in which new media are facilitating new modes of citizen representation and the creation of “new intercultural forms,” (Ng, chapter 16)—a shift that Wellman (2011) characterizes as a move from objectivity to subjectivity. But, at the same time, we must also recognize that in many digital contexts, *objective* representation is still all that exists for the poor and marginalized—if they are represented at all. We can acknowledge and explore novel modes of civic and political engagement facilitated by new media and the ways in which these technologies are subverting tightly regulated mainstream media (Gordon & Sorenson, chapter 17; Privalova, chapter 18) and transforming the world of “mass media” to hybrid developments that Castells (2009) calls “mass self-communication.” But we must also consider evidence provided by studies that illuminate the mass integration of commercial interests into mediated communication and the degree to which corporate and capitalist interests are shaping mediated communication praxis in different cultural contexts, (Lee, chapter 11; Hrachovec, chapter 19). Others argue that mediated communications are diffusing and de-centering political power and may in some contexts be reducing the effectiveness of social action.

This increasingly complex picture demands that we move beyond narrow visions guided by simplistic theoretical, ideological, or sociopolitical agendas. Following the mediated intercultural dialectics perspective as discussed above, we must embrace (or develop) theoretical and methodological approaches that can accommodate and offer greater insight into the “processual, relational, and contradictory logics” of *mediated* inter- (and intra-) cultural communication and its local and global consequences.

Problems of paradigm: Functionalist models of culture

In the past decade, we can observe a new convergence of research in the fields of intercultural communication and the field of Internet and technology studies on questions of power, participation, justice, and social cohesion. Across these disciplines, scholars are exploring the ways in which new media may facilitate increasingly globalized participation by groups of people around the world in the so-called information society and the possible consequences for human development, conceptions of local identity, ethnic differences, and regional subcultures. Such investigations call for attention to theories and models of culture.

At the start of this second decade of the new millennium, there is increasing awareness of the need to move beyond the theoretical models of “culture” whose main thrust is the classification of people into “cultural groups” (the labels predicting they will interact with information and communication technologies in particular ways). Increasingly evident is the need to instead examine the dynamic processes by which social, institutional, technical,

economic, and political forces at any given moment “yield intelligible meanings, enter the circuits of culture—the field of cultural practices—that shape the understandings and conceptions of the world of men and women in their ordinary everyday social calculations” (Hall, 1989).

Models of culture founded on functionalist assumptions about “kinds of people” (Hacking, 2006) may have a certain utilitarian value—and may fruitfully offer an early tool for opening up “what is otherwise a black box of cultural factors” (Williamson, 2002, p. 1391). But at least three difficulties of such models are worthy of elaboration. One is the assumption that culture is a “national” phenomenon, a classification that rests entirely on (relatively recent) history and vagaries of the modern political state and ignores both internal cultural diversity within political states and national cultures that span multiple political states. A second difficulty of such models is their static and essentializing nature. They seek to classify kinds of people, and they permit nonalert investigators to view individuals as “cultural dopes,” lacking agency and carrying uniform cultural attributes. Last, functionalist models of culture are inherently reductionist and determinist. Geneticists would say, wisely, “you get what you select for” (Shuman & Silhavy, 2003); that is, if you create conditions to test for an expected difference, that difference is the only difference you will see.

In the context of culture, overreliance on functionalist models of national culture fools us into identifying and studying only a small number of a priori cultural dimensions and blinds us to the myriad cultural and noncultural conditions that influence values and behavior in specific places and times, as well as to emic conditions that are specific only to an individual culture. In an era in which we are increasingly acknowledging that societies can be best understood as a dynamic formation of competing truth regimes rather than a mythical unity (Hall in Grossberg, 1996, p. 136), this is a critical weakness. Such “closed paradigms” (Hall in Grossberg, 1996, p. 19) may be seductive in their ease of application and their apparent existence as objective, value-free tools, but by definition they will make new phenomena—which arise out of continuously evolving “new conditions”—difficult to interpret. Such theories and models simply “let you off the hook, providing answers which are always known in advance” (Hall in Grossberg, 1996, p. 19). The increased interest in and focus on social and cultural “change” in relation to new media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) therefore calls for theoretical approaches that can describe, explain, and accommodate newly emerging sociocultural conditions and practices.

Theory, methodology, method: Moving forward

Williamson (2002) reminds us that it is methodology that underlies our choice and justification of research methods. Methodology depends both on the theoretical models employed and on the values and beliefs of the researcher,

including the assumptions and beliefs about epistemology, ontology, and human nature (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Selection of a methodology is therefore essentially political in nature (Llewellyn, 1992); it cannot and should not be adopted for simple utilitarian reasons. For these reasons, it is important that we continue to examine and make overt the assumptions of our methodologies, beginning with our assumptions about what culture is and how it might best be studied; that we create, seek out, and embrace countermethodologies or counterparadigms; and that we understand theorizing as “an open horizon, moving within the magnetic field of some basic concepts, but constantly being applied afresh to what is genuinely original and novel in new forms of cultural practice” (Hall in Grossberg, 1996, p. 138).

Certainly, by giving up on functionalist models of culture, we lose the speed and neatness they provide. We lose the credibility currently bestowed upon (apparently) “objective” methods and “scientific” approaches. And—at no small cost—we lose the easy communicability and applicability of parsimonious models. But meaningful investigation of the complex landscape of mediated intercultural communication in societies and cultures around the globe requires a shift to alternative learning and discovery paths that will allow us to build on the first-stage understandings revealed within the functionalist research paradigm, and by earlier theories of culture, that we are coming to understand as insufficiently dynamic. Such a shift will allow us to flesh out the skeleton of the global technology story revealed by quantitative work and investigate emerging and as-yet-unpredicted phenomena in this rapidly evolving terrain. In our continuing investigation of culture and communication in the dialectical landscape of new media, we might take for guidance Hall’s (in Grossberg, 1996) strenuous rejection of closed theoretical paradigms. “I am not interested in Theory,” he insisted. “I am interested in going on theorizing” (p. 150).

Similarly, whereas we tend to think of a “method” as implying the application of “rigid templates or practical techniques to organize research,” we propose instead a perspective of “method as practice”—which views method both as “research techniques” and as the activity of “practising or trying out” (Slack, 1996, p. 114). While quantitative studies will continue to provide basic figures about new media penetration rates and access to technology, understanding praxis and impacts requires that we adopt methodologies and research methods that will allow us to examine the dynamic relations of power that structure the many social worlds we study, in pursuit of contextualized understandings of human behavior. This calls for investigation, elaboration, and comparison of specific cases (beyond a search for universals) and an assumption that while individuals are organized and constrained by their intersubjective social realities, they are also actively involved in reproducing these realities, emphasizing the important role of culture within the

wider context (Packer, 1999). Moreover, we cannot abstract culture “from its material, technical and economic conditions of existence” (Hall in Grossberg, 1996, p. 139). Indeed, many contributions to this collection lay heavy emphasis on the differing conditions created by variations in political and socioeconomic context—a critical consideration if we seek to meaningfully explore the digital divide.

Future directions?

At the time of this writing, debate was raging over Wikipedia’s decision to petition UNESCO for status as a World Heritage Site, based on the argument that the Web site meets UNESCO’s key criteria for representation: The site claims that it can be considered an endangered “world cultural treasure” and “a masterpiece of human creative genius” (Keller, 2011). That the proposition has arisen at all is evidence, we believe, that new media are now valued and perceived by some as an important cultural resource. Against such a backdrop, this volume represents a step in the direction of deepening understanding of mediated intercultural dialectics to further knowledge in the areas of digital media and intercultural communication. What insights can it offer about future directions? The varied contributions in this book that come from a range of geographic and scholarly standpoints illustrate both the necessity of comparative research and the value of new media and intercultural communication being international in nature—emphasizing the need not only for the study *of* different cultures around the globe but also for the study *by scholars from* different cultural contexts.

In particular, contributions here have begun to open up our understanding of culture as it may operate in a range of mediated contexts. Expanding our paradigmatic range and exploring cultures in their many dimensions that go beyond their definition as “national,” with affiliations that are not only characterized as “ethnic” or “racial” will, one hopes, offer greater insight into social contexts whose relations with new media have, as yet, been dramatically understudied. Examples include social groups whose shared culture may have emerged out of a shared language, shared differences in physical ability, or common religious beliefs and practices. Embracing the impact of socioeconomic and political contexts on cultural phenomena should also allow a more careful investigation of subcultures within national or regional settings and the different mediated communicative beliefs and practices of a variety of people whose identities position them outside mainstream or dominant cultures: the poor and the marginalized, locally and globally. In particular, contributions to this volume are overt in noting the dearth of research on certain populations outside the Anglo-American sphere of influence: women in the Middle East (Lev-On & Neriya-Ben Shaha, chapter 14) and South Asia

(Shuter, chapter 13), diasporic migrants in Africa and elsewhere (Alzouma, chapter 12) and the cultures of less economically developed nation states (Olaniran, chapter 4) to name but three.

Moreover, as both technologies and cultures continue to rapidly evolve and interact, and as revealed by studies in this volume and elsewhere, the diversity and differential impacts of differently mediated digital contexts calls for continuing attention. Mediated communication contexts can vary dramatically, and new tools and contexts are proliferating as we write—for example, geo-locational mobile or fourth-generation cellular wireless (4G) media. Thus, this volume does not constitute the terminal intelligence in this complex arena. Instead, its diversity also reveals gaps in current scholarship and points to myriad paths of further study to enrich this field. It is our hope that this book will inspire new intersecting bricks and clicks to propel scholarship, praxis, and policy going forward.

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