MEDIATED INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN A DIGITAL AGE

Edited by
Ahmet Atay and Margaret U. D'Silva

Mediated Intercultural Communication in a Digital Age

This book focuses on mediated intercultural communication in the context of globalization. Analyzing social and traditional media using qualitative, interpretive, and critical and cultural perspectives, contributors engage with diverse topics—ranging from hybrid identities in different communities, to journalistic collaborations in the global media landscape. In addition, the authors examine the placeless and borderless communities of diaspora members, their transnational identities, and the social media stories that shape and are shaped by them.

Ahmet Atay is an Associate Professor at The College of Wooster. He is the author of *Globalization's Impact on Identity Formation: Queer Diasporic Males in Cyberspace* (2015, Lexington Books) and has recently coedited *Culture and Making in the City: Ethnographic Engagements in Urban Environments* (2017, Lexington Books) and *Critical Intercultural Communication Pedagogy* (2018, Lexington Books).

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New Directions in Mediated Intercultural Communication

Ahmet Atay and Margaret U. D'Silva

Over the past several years, scholars have been engaging in conversations among themselves and with colleagues around the globe about the changing face of intercultural communication (IC). Rapid variations in mediated environments have made both the editors of this book acutely conscious of social media's pervasive influence on communication. They have also realized that IC has become increasingly mediated, for example, keeping in touch with friends and family through digital technologies, communicating with colleagues around the world, and consuming visual international texts and products through online domains. Over the years, individually and together, the authors have presented their research on the relationship between the media and IC at a number of regional, national, and international conferences.

As immigrants, their lived experiences have been intercultural. Social media have allowed them to maintain contact with friends and relatives in their homelands. Mediated pictures of family festivities, weddings, and funerals have provided opportunities for long-distance participation in celebration and in mourning. Beyond fostering personal relationships, social media have delivered news updates and allowed professional intercultural relationships to grow. The authors have communicated over social media with each other (Ahmet from the College of Wooster and Margaret from the University of Louisville) as well as with their authors in the editing of this book. Working with authors from many countries including Finland, India, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Turkey, the U.K., and the U.S.A. has been a mediated collaboration. Ahmet and Margaret met briefly in person at the onset of this project and again to finalize it. All other communication took place over social media, a taken-for-granted process in today's world.

Ahmet is trained in critical IC, media and cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. Hence, his research revolves around issues of cultural identity, immigration, representations of different cultural groups, and transnationalism. He has widely focused on the cyber presence and community building of diasporic individuals as well as the ways in which diasporic and queer individuals use these technologies to construct and perform their cultural identities.

Margaret's scholarship has been at the intersection of media and IC. She has taught IC and the processes and effects of mass media for about 24 years, and has delivered keynote addresses at academic conferences in several countries. Her cumulative intercultural and media scholarship has led to a keen interest in researching the nuances of socially mediated IC.

History and Development of Intercultural Communication

The history of IC research dates back to the late 1940s and early 1950s to Edward T. Hall's efforts at the Foreign Service Institute. Since then, IC scholarship has focused mainly on the interpersonal, group, or organizational aspects of cultural communication. Nonetheless, profound changes in global communication, particularly in social media, are now causing us to reexamine our notions of culture, communication, audience, and identity. Considering that most of our IC is currently mediated or digitalized, there is a clear need to continue to bridge the gaps between IC and the traditional and new media scholarship.

In late 1990s, IC research took a new and critical direction as scholars began focusing on issues of power, diversity, and cultural identity. Yet, most of this research widely ignored the relationship between these issues and the traditional and new media texts, contexts, and production. Similarly, scholars in media studies also bypassed critical IC research and failed to see the natural linkage between these two subfields. Recently, scholars such as Atay (2018), Gajjala (2004, 2006), and Shuter, Cheong, and Chen (2017) began to draw attention to these ignored relationships and bring together media and IC discourses to examine the mediated aspects of cultural communication. Likewise, most of the IC textbooks historically ignored the relationship between IC and media studies, and they failed to recognize how much IC is now mediated or takes place on social media platforms. Lately, some of the leading textbooks in the area, such as Judith Martin and Thomas Nakayama's *Intercultural Communication in Contexts* (2017) and Kathryn Sorrells' *Intercultural Communication: Globalization and Social Justice* (2013), began including chapters on popular culture and media. In this book, therefore, the editors bring these scholars together and attempt to fulfill the void in IC research by calling attention to the need for a critical examination of the ongoing relationship between IC and (new) media studies in the context of globalization.

Media in Global Context

Media texts, social media platforms, global applications, and cyberculture play a paramount role in IC, particularly in the context of

globalization. This changing role can be observed in four interrelated ways. First, mediated texts circulate globally and hybridize local, national, and global cultures, including media and popular culture. For example, Hollywood genres and filmmaking often influence media forms in different parts of the world. Likewise, popular global cultural products and mediated texts, such as Japanese anime and Bollywood films, influence not only the U.S. media but also media in other countries. Second, the consumption of globalized mediated texts can impact the ways in which the audience cultivates an understanding of different cultures, cultural groups, and cultural identities. Considering that visual culture and visual persuasion are extremely influential, it is not accidental that the audience is often led to construct cultural meanings as well as adopt and embody cultural practices through these texts. Third, global media texts carry powerful meanings and are impactful enough to co-construct our cultural identities. It can therefore be argued that our identities are constructed heavily through our interactions with mediated texts. Finally, as Sorrells (2013) argues, "Media frame global issues and normalize particular cultural ideologies" (p. 126). Certain ideologies may thus be continuously perpetuated through globalized mediated texts and media industries. All these factors make mediated IC a very important area of study.

When we consider social media, it becomes apparent that social media play an even larger role than traditional media when it comes to facilitating IC. Global social network sites such Facebook or Twitter, online gaming sites, online courses that are taught on a global scale, online service platforms that allow banks or other companies to create a web of digital and international global services, global blogs, and all the applications that appear in smartphones, tablets, or computer devices are part of a very complicated and multifaceted digital or cyberculture that moves beyond the borders of nation-states.

These social platforms allow global communities to emerge; immigrants, diasporic bodies, and cosmopolitans can communicate and connect across the globe with one another and with people from their home cultures. These social media platforms also allow the members of traditionally oppressed groups to find their voices, express their issues, cultivate communities, create homes away from home, construct their cultural identities in multiple ways, and simply express facets of their identities. National digitalized social movements around the world, identity performances of diasporic queer bodies, and long-distance relationships between partners and family members are some of the most common examples of cyber or digital IC forms, moments, or narratives. This cyberculture centers around communication between people who are culturally, nationally, and linguistically similar or radically different. Therefore, studying traditional and social media in relation to IC is extremely crucial and timely.

This book takes qualitative, interpretive, and critical and cultural perspectives in examining the reciprocal relationship between media and IC. The book's interrelated goals are to:

- Examine the ways in which media in general, and social media in particular, influence and contribute to our IC.
- Take an intercultural approach to looking at social and traditional media and to examine IC from a media perspective, employing both IC and media theories to study the complex and multidimensional relationship between culture and media in the context of globalization.
- Understand how media, particularly social media, construct identities and enable or disable individuals to express their cultural identities.
- Analyze how globalization as a cultural and political process impacts mediated and IC, blending approaches from IC and media studies.
- Theorize about mediated IC by fusing theoretical frameworks from each subdiscipline.
- Look at different contemporary issues relevant to IC scholarship, such as immigration, diaspora, social movements, religion and spirituality, and intercultural/ international relationships, from a media perspective.
- Examine both negative and positive influences of media, particularly social media, on IC.
- Focus on issues of diversity, oppression, and identity, in the context of media and IC.

Chapter Summaries

The chapters in this collection tackle different issues to offer insights about mediated IC. Collectively, these pieces argue that our everyday lives have become increasingly more mediated as we use new media technologies, social media platforms, and quick media applications to communicate with people from various backgrounds in different locations and contexts. The chapters are ordered and put together to create a larger narrative about the everyday usage of new media technologies as well as to facilitate and question intercultural relationships online.

The collection features 12 chapters. In their piece "Color-Blind Ideology in Traditional and Online Media: Toward a Future Research Agenda," Sommier, van Sterkenburg, and Hofhuis theorize the notion of color-blind ideologies. By examining the previous research on color blindness in social media, they discuss the main challenges and potential future directions for mediated intercultural research in this area. While

providing future directions in "Multilayered Interactions: Culture, Communication, and New Media," Haslett looks back to the history of IC research and provides a rich contextual exploration of communication and media using structuration theory. In her piece, she also articulates how media and IC inform and influence each other.

Michael McCluskey, in his piece "Intercultural Collaboration—A Focus for Journalism in the Digital Era," uses the social butterfly effect theory to question the role and current status of journalism and journalists in the digital era, and argues for intercultural collaboration among journalists around the world. Through the process of cyber-ethnography and textual analysis, former journalist Dhiman Chattopadhyay, in his essay titled "I Think I Know Who You Are: How Cultural Performance and Identity Negotiations Take Place during Online Discussions over a Book," explores how cultural identities and cultural norms are constructed and performed in online spaces.

Two pieces in the collection shed more light on different cultural translation processes in online domains. In "Global Intercultural Communication and Mediated Translation," Zoya Proshina discusses the translational approach to mediated IC that occurs in different everyday mediated experiences, such as in personal or face-to-face, print, broadcast, electronic media, and, finally, in digital media. Ahmet Atay, in "Examination of Transnational Geolocation-Based Dating and Hookup Applications," elaborates on the ways in which transnational queer individuals use geolocation-based transnational quick media applications to communicate, create communities, look for romance, and find sexual partners for hookups.

In her chapter titled "An Online Travelers' Forum: Where Cultures Meet (Israel on *TripAdvisor*)," Maria Yelenevskaya explores the influence of travelers' differing objectives for their visit to Israel and their interpretation of their experiences during their visit. She analyzes a *TripAdvisor* forum to examine how cultural learning ensues in online forums and how online conversations boost user participation on the forum. A similar analysis of online discourse occurs in Maria Sharapan and Nick Swann's chapter, "Negotiating Tradition in a Postmodern Society: Tibetan Buddhism Online." Here, they look at how an ancient religion such as Tibetan Buddhism is presented in the current online environment.

Researching in the Netherlands and Norway, Clyde Moerlie and Robert Vaagan use quantitative and qualitative methodologies to contrast the representations of diversity on television in the two countries in their chapter, "Diversity and Media in the Netherlands and Norway." Not too far away in Turkey, Cagri Yilmaz describes online Caps that use a digital image and a sentence to form an eclectic piece of satire in her chapter, "Know Your *Meme*, Mine is *Caps!*: Caps Phenomenon in Turkey."

In "Imagining Homeland: Television and New Media Use among South Korean International Graduate Students in the U.S.A.," Claire Shinhea Lee and Ji-Hyun Ahn use empirical analysis to examine the sense of homeland in the South Korean diaspora. In the final chapter of this book, Caitlin Brooks, Krista Sutherland, Margaret U. D'Silva, Greg Leichty, and Kyeland Jackson discover the motivations for participation in the Standing Rock Reservation social movement in "Protest Motivations of the Standing Rock Movement: A Facebook Page Analysis."

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1 Color-Blind Ideology in Traditional and Online Media
Toward a Future Research Agenda

Mélodine Sommier, Jacco van Sterkenburg, and Joep Hofhuis

Introduction

Changes in media landscapes have opened up possibilities for media users to access and engage with a variety of content going well beyond the scope of national imagined communities. For this reason, new media landscapes raise questions regarding the visibility given to difference and diversity in what is shared online as well as users' practices and interactions. Previous research has widely examined discourses of difference and diversity in traditional media in relation to audience effects, representativeness, and (mis)representations (e.g., Jacobs, Hooghe, & De Vroome, 2017; Schlueter & Davidov, 2013). These studies have highlighted the role played by traditional media in shaping society's response to diversity in general. On the other hand, far fewer studies have explored the way diversity is dealt with in online (social) media, and results point to different directions. Findings indeed suggest that online content and practices could be going either into a more diversified and multicultural direction (e.g., Barberá, 2015) or into a more discriminatory and segregated one (e.g., Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015). Addressing this research gap and ambivalent findings is a pressing issue given the increasing role played by online (social) media in the social construction of realities. Furthermore, being able to properly address intersections between diversity and traditional and online media is an essential step to understand how they reshape intercultural communication (Sommier, 2014). This chapter therefore sets out to provide an overview of the current state of research on these topics and sketches directions for future research. For this purpose, this chapter discusses the main trends and findings in existing literature on the topic of color blindness in both traditional and social media.

We first introduce the concept of color blindness from a social psychological perspective. This part lays a clear theoretical ground to understand differences between multiculturalism and color blindness and implications of these concepts across strands of research in intercultural

communication. Following this brief discussion, we successively discuss the state of literature regarding operations of color blindness in traditional and online (social) media. The compilation of previous findings provides an overview of the main research areas, remaining research gaps, and discrepancies in results. In the light of previous research, we conclude by discussing some of the main challenges and directions for future research.

Examining Color Blindness from a Social Psychological Perspective

When examining how members of majority and minority groups in society react to diversity, scholars often use theories rooted in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). At its core, this theory poses that individuals have the tendency to categorize their social environment into groups based on shared characteristics. People consequently identify with *in-groups* that share their own characteristics, while individuals who appear different are categorized as belonging to an *out-group*. This categorization helps individuals to predict and give meaning to their social environment; a positive evaluation of one's in-group as compared to out-groups can provide a source of self-esteem. However, the downside is that social categorization leads to the emergence of stereotypes and group representations that tend to favor the in-group over the out-group. Culture, race, and ethnicity are considered among the most prominent categories along which individuals organize their social environment, and are some of the most salient and deeply rooted social identities (Fiske, 1998). Examining societies' reactions to diversity in cultural identities, scholars have identified two contrasting ideologies: multiculturalism and color blindness (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008).

The multiculturalist ideology is characterized by an emphasis on the positive side of individual differences: It explicitly recognizes that diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity, race, or any other social category provides added value to society. Extending this to the social identity paradigm, multiculturalists allow or even encourage minority members to identify with their own cultural in-group. Research shows that multiculturalism leads to more positive and secure identities and to an openness to and acceptance of a wider range of opinions and behaviors within society at large (Verkuyten, 2005). The downside of multiculturalism, however, is that the side-by-side existence of many group identities complicates social interactions and may cause prejudice and conflict (Fiske, 1998). Furthermore, as we have recently seen in many Western societies, majority groups often view multiculturalism as a threat to the dominant culture, leading to frustration and increasing prejudice and anti-immigrant sentiments (e.g., Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2015).

In contrast, the color-blind ideology is based around the idea that it is more beneficial to actively ignore or downplay cultural/ethnic differences. From a color-blind viewpoint, it is important to reduce minority members' identification with their in-groups, in favor of an overarching identity, such as an organization or society as a whole. One of the areas where the color-blind ideology is most visible is in statements about diversity in the workplace, for example, in organizations whose recruitment policies state that they "exclusively focus on a candidate's qualifications" and ignore their cultural background (Jansen, Vos, Otten, Podsiadlowski, & van der Zee, 2016). A similar discourse is upheld by politicians who promote a color-blind approach to immigrants' acculturation into society, by emphasizing overarching common values and identities (Jugé & Perez, 2006). As will become clear from this chapter, mainstream media play a significant role in the popularization of this ideology (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2017).

Color blindness appears to be intertwined with traditional Western values such as meritocracy, individualism, and a high need for belonging. Advocates of color-blind ideology often claim neutrality or objectivity toward cultural/ethnic differences. However, others have argued that color-blind ideology constitutes a denial of the complexity of a diverse social environment (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000). In fact, color blindness has been shown to be positively related to racial bias (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004).

There is quite some evidence that minority members generally are not supportive of the color-blind ideology (Jansen et al., 2016). Stevens et al. (2008) provide some reasons for these findings. First, although the color-blind perspective is based around the ideal of treating all people the same, minority members appear to view it as neither color-blind nor color-neutral, but instead as exclusionary (Markus et al., 2000). The color-blind perspective implicitly downplays the importance of cultural identification and openness to diversity, which is interpreted as a denial of minority members' own cultural heritage and an attempt to erase diversity (Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2016). The threat to their in-group identity, as well as a lack of room for cultural maintenance, has been associated with lower well-being among minorities (Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2016). Furthermore, when minority members perceive a devaluation of cultural/ethnic differences, frustration, dissatisfaction, and conflict are more likely to occur (Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2012; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009).

Second, the color-blind ideology places importance on individual competences and ability to navigate the complexities of the majority society. However, these criteria of merit are often a reflection of the norms and values of the majority group, and are thus inherently biased against the minority group (Goldberg, 2005). As a result, color-blind ideology, although grounded in rhetoric of equality, plays mostly into the hands

of the majority group, by protecting the existing status quo of group hierarchies. Rooted in a denial of cultural differences, color blindness therefore conditions the acceptance of out-group members to the dismissal of their ethnic/cultural backgrounds. The color-blind perspective is thus associated with expanding exclusion of minorities, and a demand for assimilation of majority norms and values.

Racial/Ethnic Stereotypes and the Operation of Color Blindness in Mainstream Media

In the past decades, much research has focused on how mass media act as a powerful frame of reference for media consumers to think and communicate about cultural difference. Some of that research has focused on the ideological and discursive work the media *do* in framing racial and ethnic relations. The common assertion in those studies—mostly conducted in the U.K. and the U.S.A.—is that media coverage mainly reinforces hegemonic discourses surrounding race and ethnicity, and strengthens racism through unconscious bias and simplified representations (e.g., Drew, 2011; Nishikawa, Towner, Clawson, & Waltenburg, 2009). Campbell, Leduff, and Brown (2012) showed, for instance, that the U.S. news media routinely represent Black people in a dichotomous way, either as completely assimilated or as violent criminals. Behind the first type of representation, which Campbell et al. (2012) coined the *assimilation myth*, lies the idea that Black people are fully assimilated and racial discrimination no longer exists. In contrast to this *assimilation myth*, the U.S. news media have also framed Blacks as criminals, thereby perpetuating a centuries-old widespread discourse that associates blackness with danger and amorality. Campbell et al. (2012) showed how the combination of these two contrasting discourses not only provides people with a simplified narrative around a complex reality but also leaves no space for addressing wider racial inequalities in society at large that may constitute a wider background for deviant behaviors like criminality. As a result, Black criminality in the media is represented as solely a result of *non-racial* dynamics (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, as cited in Alemán, 2014). This fundamental ignorance or blindness to existing racial dynamics and inequalities can be seen as one of the main characteristics of color-blind racism. Color-blind racism is a commonly used racial discourse in today's society and operates through a claim that racial discrimination does not play any significant role in society anymore and is something of the past, while reality- and race-based research actually shows otherwise (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Color-blind racism thereby allows people—including media professionals—to deny structural and institutionalized forms of racism while at the same time using every day, racial/ethnic stereotypes without being aware of that.