

## ABSTRACT

MORENO BECERRA, TABITA ALEJANDRA. *Anytime-anywhere? Mobile Communicative Practices and the Management of Relationships in Everyday Life*. (Under the direction of Dr. Stephen B. Crofts Wiley).

The present study examines how mobile practices of social-media use are integrated into individuals' everyday lives as a way to manage their relationships. Mobile communication technologies and social-media use intersect in people's everyday communicative practices, allowing individuals to engage in continuous interactions that take place on the move and are embedded in the dynamic physical and social contexts of everyday life. In this context, this qualitative and exploratory research examines how mobile social media fit into the ways young adults manage their personal and social relationships on the move and in contexts of limited movement. In doing so, this study extends the research within interpersonal communication and relationship-management traditions by connecting this line of inquiry to research on mobile communication, social media, and the sociology of mobilities. It considers the ways in which these perspectives challenge, and can help expand, traditional approaches to interpersonal communication.

Structured as a comparative analysis, this study is focused on young adults who live in Concepcion, Chile, and the Triangle area of North Carolina in the United States. My fieldwork employed a mobile and multi-sited ethnographic approach, including interviews with 36 young adults (20 Chileans and 16 Americans) and ethnographic observations in both Raleigh and Concepción. The methods included a shadowing process, which consisted of following and observing participants while they moved through their daily activities. The aim of this exploratory study was to collect naturalistic data to illuminate the complex processes through which mobile communication technologies and social media are woven

into participants' everyday social interactions. Given the increasingly complex media ecology within which individuals carry out their activities and social interactions, these methods made it possible to observe and analyze emerging practices naturalistically, within mobile social contexts. By examining the micro-contexts of mobile social-media practices, this research shows how individuals experience continual connectedness to others in a flow that merges online and offline interactions and blurs the boundaries between interpersonal and mass communication.

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Anytime-anywhere? Mobile Communicative Practices and the Management of  
Relationships in Everyday Life

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To the men of my life:

Lucas and Esteban, my beloved children,  
and Luis, my loving and unconditional husband.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Tabita Moreno Becerra is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at the Universidad de Concepción, Chile. She received her B.A. in Social Communication at the Universidad de Concepción, and her Masters in Communication and Multimedia Design at the Art Institute, Tracor, Chile.

Tabita's research interests are in the areas of mobile communication, social media, interpersonal communication, and ethnographic studies. Her research work has mainly focused on examining the ways mobile communicative practices among young people occur within a complex media ecosystem, in which mobile communication technologies and social media use are embedded into individuals' everyday lives.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Although Rachel (29, Raleigh) had checked her Facebook account several times since I began accompanying her that afternoon, she grabbed her phone and opened its Facebook app once again while she was walking to the gym. It was almost 5:00 p.m., and Rachel wanted to check any new information and respond to any new message she might have gotten since the last time she accessed her account. Despite having checked Facebook only ten minutes earlier, she in fact had a new message, so she replied to it while she continued walking.

Rachel is a fairly active Facebook user who updates her status and interacts with others, “liking” and commenting on their posts and using Facebook chat on a daily basis. She also uses other social media such as Instagram and Foursquare, though not as frequently as Facebook. The day I accompanied her during her routine afternoon activities, she was hardly ever disconnected from a discussion that had been taking place over Facebook that day. The discussion involved several of Rachel’s Facebook friends and also some people who were not on Rachel’s Facebook list of friends, but with whom she has offline connections. That afternoon, she went to get something to eat with a friend. In the restaurant, while she and her friend were eating and chatting, the still-active Facebook exchange emerged as a topic of conversation. In this way, a discussion that had started on Facebook continued in her face-to-face conversation, flowing from online to offline contexts and vice versa in a continuous interchange that lasted the entire day and, likely, part of the next day.

This situation illuminates the ways in which mobile communication technologies and social media<sup>1</sup> use intersect in our everyday communicative practices, illustrating the ways social media use now takes place on the move and is embedded in the dynamic physical and social contexts of everyday life. The widespread access to, and use of, social media and mobile communication technologies, followed by the convergence of both mobile services and social-media platforms, has enabled these new conditions. By allowing continuous interactions, mobile social-media practices are shaping the ways individuals socialize and interact with each other through unfinished conversations that are not defined by physical boundaries, raising questions about how daily communicative practices actually happen and flow in a context of convergent use of mobile communication technologies and social media. In such a context, it is important to understand how mobile social-media use has been integrated into individuals' daily communicative practices, how individuals' practices of communication come and go through online and offline contexts, and what modes of interaction individuals prefer in specific contexts and social situations.

These questions and others emerge from the new scenarios facilitated by the intersection of social media and mobile communication technologies. On the one hand, social media have become a massively popular Internet service, a phenomenon that has been documented extensively in research published by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. One study reports that two-thirds of online American adults (72%) use social media

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the definitions offered by boyd (2014, 2008), I use the term "social media" to refer to all those services that allow users to interact with others, as well as creating and sharing their own content using networked technologies. Thus, this definition includes media-sharing technologies (Youtube, Instagram), microblogging (Twitter), blogging (Wordpress, Tumblr), real-time messaging (WhatsApp, Line) voice-over the Internet (Skype, Viber), as well as social network sites (SNSs) (Facebook, LinkedIn) among several other services.

networks (Brenner & Smith, 2013), while another finds that, although Facebook remains the most widely used service, 52% of online adults use two or more social media, with Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn making up the most recent list of most-popular services (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart & Madden, 2015). Beyond the United States in the Global North, other countries within the Global South also show this world trend of high rates of social media use. Among those countries, Chile leads social media usage statistics in Latin America. As comScore Media Metrix reports, 93% of Chilean Internet users maintain a profile on social media. In fact, social-media engagement represents the largest proportion of online time of Chilean Internet users across all age groups, even though social networkers are more likely to be found in the under-35 age bracket (Daie, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014).

This widespread use of social media, particularly the use of social network sites (SNSs), has been widely documented in the last decade, with scholars looking at the role of these sites in identity construction and the presentation of self (boyd, 2008; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008; Utz, 2010), the construction of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007), the maintenance of preexisting social ties (Baym, 2010; boyd, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Bryant, Marmo, & Ramirez, 2011; Donath & boyd, 2011), and the transformation of the concept of friendship (Donath, 2007), among other issues.

Additionally, pervasive access to mobile communication technologies has introduced a type of “mobile logic” into individuals’ mediated social interactions to the point that individuals’ everyday actions are shaped by expectations of continuous availability via mobile devices (Ling & Donner, 2009). Within this “mobile logic,” the mobile phone is seen as an indispensable tool, especially for young people, whose expressive uses of the mobile

phone make it into a symbol of belonging to specific social groups or a way to measure one's popularity (Castells et al., 2007; Ling & Donner, 2009; Stald, 2008).

As a result, the ability to share information and to stay connected via social media has been enhanced with the ability to update those services potentially anytime and anywhere through mobile devices—for those who have access. Indeed, mobile social networking has been recognized as the fastest-growing mobile service because it makes use of the most-valued affordances of the mobile phone as a communication-based, convenient complement to existing activity, and a means to easily and efficiently manage social relationships (Vladar & Fife, 2010).

This convergence of social media and mobile communication technologies has fostered new communicative practices that individuals perform on a daily basis, often continuously, while moving through a variety of spaces and places in everyday life. By engaging in mobile social networking, individuals keep in touch with others and share content in a continuous process of updating social media profiles while moving (or not) potentially whenever and wherever they want. Users of mobile social media continually interact with physically distant as well as co-located others, and they update their profile status with a wide range of information from personal thoughts to reporting of news, including information about their physical location.

Therefore, the substantial research on social-media (Baym, 2010; boyd & Ellison, 2007; boyd, 2008; Bryant et al., 2011; Donath, 2007; Donath & boyd, 2011; Ellison et al., 2007; Tong et al., 2008; Utz, 2010) must now be extended to consider mobile practices. Although within recent years there have been some relevant studies in this respect, with

scholars looking at mobile social media, this research has mainly focused on location-based social networks and within the developed world (Frith, 2012; Humphreys, 2007, 2012, 2013; Licoppe & Figeac, 2015; Marvin, 2013). However, many people use mobile social media with no location-based functionalities (Humphreys, 2013), so my approach extends this line of inquiry to other issues that emerge from the different functionalities of mobile social-media use and the ways they are integrated within individuals' everyday practices of relationships management.

In this context, this study examines the ways mobile social-network practices are integrated into individuals' everyday routines. It thus extends the research within interpersonal communication and relationship management traditions (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Duck, 2007; Masuda & Duck, 2002) by connecting this line of inquiry to research traditions in mobile communication (de Souza e Silva, 2006a, 2006b; de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Licoppe, 2004; Licoppe & Heurtin, 2001; Ling, 2004; Ling & Donner, 2009; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Katz & Aakhus, 2002) and the sociology of mobilities (Cresswell, 2010; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2004). I consider the ways in which these perspectives challenge, and can help expand, traditional approaches to interpersonal communication.

In order to examine mobile social-media practices as new forms of interpersonal communication, I conducted an ethnographic study in two different geographical, cultural and socioeconomic contexts: Raleigh, North Carolina, USA, and Concepción, Chile. This comparative analysis included interviews with, and observations of, 36 participants—young adults between 25 and 34 years old—in order to understand the ways they integrate their

mobile social-media practices into their daily communicative interactions as a way of managing their personal relationships. For observations, I drew on a recent methodological innovation, the shadowing interview (Jirón, 2011; Marcus, 1995), which allowed me to observe participants within the naturalistic contexts of their everyday activities and mobilities. In what follows, I begin with a definition of my project. I then explain the theoretical and methodological decisions to structure the project as a comparative study of U.S. and Chilean contexts focused on the mobile social-media practices of young adults. Following that section, I discuss the contribution of my research to the fields of mobilities, mobile communication and relationship management. I then present my research questions and an outline of the dissertation chapters.

#### **DEFINITION OF MY PROJECT**

The present research focuses on individuals' mobile social-media practices. "Social media" is a broader category whose scope is not limited to social network sites (SNS), such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+. Instead, this broader term covers a wider range of "tools, services, and applications that allow people to interact with others, using network technologies" (boyd, 2008, p. 92), which is the case of Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube, among others. Even more, social media use can now also be mobile due to the accessibility of those tools and services via mobile communication technologies (Humphreys, 2013). Therefore, my research draws from this broader category, mobile social media, rather than any specific service. Given the variety of mobile social media, individuals'

communicative practices make use of many different services at different moments and in shifting contexts.

Several of my dissertation's examples come from Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp or an equivalent, but this is because at the moment of the fieldwork, those were the most widely used social media among my participants, both from fixed locations and on the move. Therefore, the focus on those platforms reflects my participants' practices and their preferences for particular social media. In this study, I do not address uses of other social media whose primary mode of interaction is anonymous (e.g., YikYak) because none of my participants reported using those kinds of networked services. In fact, all my participants were clearly identified and known "non-anonymously" within the social media they used.

Instead of focusing on any specific SNS, social media or mobile technology in particular, my research examines the actual mobile social-media practices that my participants performed on a daily basis to interact with others and to create and share information. This is an important methodological choice because the uses of mobile social media change over time, and we shouldn't only identify practices with specific devices, platforms, or applications, whose popularity may come and go. This does not mean failing to recognize the value of some previous research based on specific case studies and that identifies practices according to some devices and platforms. Some of these studies have analyzed the ways specific mobile social network systems (MSNS) like Dodgeball were used and their perceived influences on how individuals experience public space (Humphrey, 2007); other studies have focused on the analysis of some specific location-based social networks to analyze mobility in "augmented" public spaces and "onscreen" encounters

(Licoppe & Inada, 2006, 2010). Those studies have been relevant for subsequent research in this line of inquiry, which today needs to take a more integrative approach to capture the multiple ways that individuals experience mobile social-media in a daily basis. Thus, by looking at individuals' actual mobile social-media practices and experiences, my dissertation contributes to extending the understanding of mobile social-media practices and how those practices are part of the management of relationships in everyday life.

In order to understand the significance of new mobile social-media practices, I therefore moved away from a technology-centered analysis to observe the social contexts first, and then to examine the ways in which technologically mediated practices are woven into those contexts. This approach understands technology and society as mutually influenced in the consequences of new media. To examine how mobile social-media practices are actually woven into physical and social contexts of individuals' daily routines, I closely observed young adults' mobile communicative practices as they were embedded into face-to-face interactions within embodied contexts and broader media ecologies. To understand their experiences of those interactions, I interviewed them in both mobile and traditional interview settings. By looking at individuals' mobile social media practices, I sought to shed light on how young adults make, maintain, and unmake social connections, focusing on their everyday practices and motivations as they manage their social ties both online and offline. Thus, my research set online social networking within embodied contexts that occur on the move, as well as in contexts of limited mobility or temporary "emplacement" (Wiley, Moreno & Sutko, 2012; Wiley, Sutko & Moreno, 2010).

I structured my project as a comparative study of two contexts—Raleigh, North Carolina (USA) and Concepción (Chile)—that share some characteristics but differ in other ways. Raleigh is located in the Research Triangle, a technology-rich and highly educated region within a developed country that has one of the highest rates of mobile technology usage around the world (comScore, 2013). Concepción is also located in a technology-rich region focused on research, education, and economic development, but it is part of a developing country with specific social, economic, and technological challenges, as well as specific infrastructural, policy, and corporate characteristics that differentiate it from the US context. But in fact, Concepción and Raleigh urban conglomerates share some characteristics. While neither Raleigh nor Concepción corresponds to the political or civic centers of their respective countries, both are centers of research and technological development, as well as centers of education that include several universities<sup>2</sup>. With these characteristics of technological research and development, it would be expected that there would be high levels of access to, and use of, new technologies such as mobile communication technologies and social media. While both Concepción and Raleigh are key nodes of research, education, and economic development in their respective regional and national contexts, Raleigh is part of an economically developed country in the Global North, characterized by a “car culture” (Miller, 2001), which entails some specific patterns of

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<sup>2</sup> Concepción area groups three universities that belong to the 25 most important educational institutions in Chile: the Universidad de Concepción, Universidad del Bío-bío and Universidad de la Santísima Concepción, besides some smaller universities. Meanwhile, Raleigh Triangle area brings together the North Carolina State University, University of Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, besides other smaller college institutions.

mobility and communication. By contrast, Concepción is part of a developing country in the Global South.

Although my initial comparative interest emerged from this traditional division between the Global North and the Global South, I sought to avoid grounding my analysis in national populations as homogenous groups, which would mask the sharp inequalities of technology ownership and access within national contexts. As a result, instead of focusing on the Global North/Global South dichotomy, I carried out my analysis from a micro perspective as a starting point. This micro perspective consisted in observing individuals' actual practices and then asking the question of whether individuals' actual practices and experiences were distinctive of the "Global North" and the "Global South". In fact, it was expected that this comparative approach might reveal more similarities between Raleigh and Concepción (developed and developing contexts respectively) than studies based on a strict dichotomy between the Global North and the Global South have identified.

By deconstructing this division and the national-level focus, I did not compare two national contexts; in fact I compared participants' actual mobile practices and experiences within different media ecologies, understanding that those practices and experiences were part of specific socio-technical *assemblages* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Wiley, Moreno & Sutko, 2012; Wiley, Sutko & Moreno, 2010; Wise, 2012). These different *assemblages*, understood as "multiple and diverse collections of objects, practices, and desires functioning across a broad landscape of devices" (Wise, 2012, p. 159), go from micro to macro dynamics in a micro-macro articulation of assemblages.

Hence, my methodological approach was focused on observing my participant's individual assemblages, which in turn were part of other larger assemblages determined by national contexts first, and then those global divisions between rich and poor countries. From this perspective, in some cases it did not matter that participants were in Raleigh or Concepción because their mobile social-media practices did not differ so markedly, or the differences observed were not necessarily were related to national borders or the belonging to a developing or developed country.

In such a context, the relevance of this methodological choice is that it allowed me to look at specific contexts beyond national or geographical borders, which revealed how cultural and political features, telecommunication policies, technological infrastructures, and economical factors are part of assemblages that are present in both developed and developing contexts. All of those assemblages at some level intervene in mobile practices of communication and the ways people manage their relationships. And this is a fundamental contribution of my work that goes beyond both the Global North/Global South comparison and the analysis of national contexts, to shed new light on this research area at the same time deconstruct the terms that have framed previous inquires.

There are several reasons behind the selection of the analyzed contexts. First of all, the United States is characterized by a pervasive use of mobile communication technologies and social media, as the Pew Internet and American Life Project has widely documented (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Madden, 2012; Rainie, 2012; Smith, 2012, 2013; Wike & Oates, 2014). Doubling from the past year, tablet adoption now reaches a third of American adults (34%) and the increasing use of smartphones among American adults

(56%) (Smith, 2013; Zickuhr, 2013) has led analysts to talk about a new digital-media environment in which users are always connected and smartphones have begun to penetrate the “late majority” stage of the technology adoption curve (comScore, 2013). While all demographic groups in the U.S. have increased smartphone adoption, younger adults, those under age 35, continue to have higher rates of smartphone ownership. For example, 81% of adults 25-to-34 years old own a smartphone, and 79% of adults 18-to-24 years old are smartphone owners. Young adults are also more likely to use social media, so among Internet users between 18 and 29 years old, 87% use some social network site (Duggan et al., 2015). While the use of social media continues to be dominated by Facebook, which accounts for 5 out of every 6 minutes spent using those services, other social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn, have experienced important growth as well (Duggan et al., 2015; comScore, 2013). A great deal of research has been carried out in response to these trends; as a result, the United States leads world in research relation to both mobile communication technologies and social media use (Castells et al., 2007).

By contrast, as a major city in a developing country, Concepción is part of the Global South where, although mobile communication research has increased steadily, studies “have appeared in relative isolation from each other, separated by regions, and by disciplines” (Donner, 2008, p. 3). Research in developing regions has been focused primarily on the use of the mobile phone for voice communication; and the mobile use of social media has not yet been widely considered although there is some recent scholarship, such as Donner and Gitau’s (2009) research on the use of mobile Internet in South Africa.

In the case of Chile specifically, there are very few studies that deal with mobile communication technologies and social media use beyond statistical accounts of technological diffusion (Daie, 2012, 2013, 2014; García, Fernández, Gallo, & Larraín, 2002; Ureta, 2008; Ureta, Artopoulos, Muñoz, & Jorquera, 2011; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2014). Research on mobile communication and social media has been scarce; it has independently addressed either mobile technologies or social-media use, but there are no studies in Chile that consider the mobile practices of social media and how those practices are embedded in individuals' communicative practices to manage relationships.

Focusing on the use of the mobile phone for voice communication, research in Chile has examined mobile-phone use and appropriation, aiming to describe the social and cultural implications of mobile communication (García et al., 2002; Ureta, 2008; Ureta, Artopoulos, Muñoz, & Jorquera, 2011). In the mean time, social-media studies in Chile have focused mostly on the statistical description of particular social-network sites (SNS) in terms of use and penetration rates (Daie, 2012, 2013, 2014), as well as their impact on political participation (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2014). Therefore, the convergence of mobile communication technologies and social media, as well as the ways this intersection impacts individuals' everyday communicative practices, remains largely unknown. In short, there is a lack of empirical research related in general to mobile communication and social media, and particularly research that examines the modes that individuals engage in technologically mediated

communication and mobile practices of social media use within the context of personal and social interactions.

While scarce research on mobile communication and social media in Chile justifies attention to the Chilean context, there are other reasons for this focus. First, Chile has experienced an extremely rapid and pervasive diffusion of communication technologies in comparison to other developing countries in South America (World Internet Project Chile [WIP Chile], 2009). In particular, it has one of the highest rates of Internet use in Latin America (Rivera, Lima & Castillo, 2014; WIP Chile, 2009), and mobile Internet connections have exceeded fixed connections since 2011. In this context, over 70 percent of mobile Internet traffic runs over smartphones (Subsecretaría de Telecomunicaciones [SUBTEL], 2013). Moreover, Chile also leads Latin America in social-media usage (93%) (Daie, 2011, 2013), and in fact Chile is in fact among the top 10 countries worldwide in which people spend the most time on social media, with an average of 7.2 hours a month (Daie, 2013).

Among Chilean users, young people lead the consumption of Internet services (53.5%). Those between 15 and 24 years old comprise the largest group of Internet users (27.2%), followed by those between 25 and 34 years (26.3%). This distribution is mirrored when looking specifically at the use of social media. Young people between 15 and 24 years old continue to be the largest group of social-media users (28.1%), followed by those between 25 and 34 years old (26.3%) (Daie, 2012). As of 2013, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter were identified as the most frequently accessed social media, and among them Facebook use comprised 94% of the total hours spent on social media (Daie, 2013). Indeed, Facebook is still the third-most-visited web site in Chile, immediately after Google Chile and

Google.com, according to Alexa traffic rankings (“Top Sites in Chile Alexa”, 2015). As a result, the use of social media has become the main Internet activity in Chile, displacing email to second place on the list (SUBTEL, 2013).

With regard to the mobile telephony, there are more than 20 million cell phones in Chile for a population of approximately 17 million, and mobile phones are the means most widely used for fast communication (SUBTEL, 2014). Following the widespread diffusion of mobile phones in Chile, mobile broadband use has experienced an explosive increase, with an annual growth rate of 104% between December 2010 and December 2011. In this regard, the International Data Corporation Latin America (IDC, 2013) asserts that Chile leads the use of smartphones and tablets in Latin America, while the Pew Internet and American Life Project states that 58% of Chilean adults own a smartphone and that smartphone usage rates are greatest among well-educated and young people between 18 and 34 years old (Poushter, Bell, & Oates, 2015).

The growing use of smartphones in Chile is due in part to the existence of more affordable prices of mobile devices and 3G data plans, due to increasing competition among providers. Corporate competition has been stimulated by governmental policies that implemented number portability and the unlocking of devices, as well as the incorporation of new telecommunication service providers within Chilean market during 2012 (SUBTEL, 2013). Other factors have also contributed to the increasing diffusion of smartphones in Chile. According to Castells et al. (2007), young adults led the diffusion of mobile telephony in Chile in the 1990s, in part because they used it for work activities. The same situation is happening today. As Chilean young people pay more attention to their own mobile media

rather than to traditional media as the television, press or radio (Santos, Covarrubias & Argel, 2012), they are leading the diffusion of smartphone and social media.

However, while high rates of social-media use and mobile technology access in Chile tell part of the story, statistics do not tell the story of what is happening in terms of actual uses and the impacts of these technologies within society. In this regard, Chile shares some characteristics with the situations documented in relation to other developing countries. As others have argued, ownership and access rates are not adequate for understanding the actual impacts derived from these technologies in the Global South (James & Versteeg, 2007). Indeed, within the developing world, the mobile phone, particularly mobile voice services, is embedded in pre-existing social practices, and its use reflects significant social asymmetries (de Souza e Silva, Sutko, Salis & de Souza e Silva, 2011; Madianou & Miller, 2011; James & Versteeg, 2007; Ureta, 2008; Wiley, Sutko & Moreno, 2010). These asymmetries include, for example, how the use of mobile phones replicate and intensify power relationships between rich and poor people (de Souza e Silva et al., 2011) or between employers and employees, given the affordances of surveillance that mobile communication networks make available to the former group (Wallis, 2011). Thus the mobile phone is not just a liberating and equalizing technology; it is also used to reinforce power relationships. Moreover, research has shown that economic differences influence the ways people use mobile telephony in developing countries. Madianou and Miller (2011), for instance, show how transnational communication between migrant mothers and the children they left behind in the Philippines illustrates unequal access and use, in which the children cannot afford to call their mothers. Meanwhile, one of the few existing studies of mobile communication in Chile

found that the ways low-income family members use the mobile phone reflects their still-incomplete integration within society (Ureta, 2008).

Although Chile leads the use of smart phones and tablets in Latin America, there is indeed a qualitative digital divide (Halpern, 2013) among mobile telephony users, as in other countries in the Global South. The qualitative digital divide is not about who has a mobile phone but instead what people can do with their phones in terms of data transfer and the quality of their Internet access. This qualitative digital divide in Chile, as in other contexts, is related to the problem that many developing countries face: a highly uneven income distribution combined with sustained economic growth and deepening interdependence on transnational economic networks. As the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports, the top 20% of Chilean households have an average income 13 times higher than the poorest 20% households (OECD, 2013). These economic discrepancies certainly entail differential access and to, and use of, Internet and computing technology, thereby producing different practices and experiences around these new media (Avilés et al., 2009; Godoy, 2007; Godoy & Gálvez, 2012; Godoy & Herrera, 2004, 2008; Godoy & Helsper, 2011; Helsper & Godoy, 2011).

Moreover and within the Chilean context, the decision to focus my research on the urban area of Concepción, a major city in the central-southern part of the country, is an attempt to break a very deep-rooted trend in Chile, which is to analyze economic, social and cultural issues from a very centralized perspective, based in the capital, Santiago. The few existing studies of social media and mobile communication in Chile are either focused on Santiago or are developed in Santiago-based research centers (Halpern, 2013; Santos et al.,

2012; Ureta, 2008; Ureta et al., 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2014). It is critical to examine these issues from a perspective outside the Chilean capital, in order to decentralize the production of knowledge about the realities of the Global South and to incorporate the perspective of different geographical and cultural areas, such as Greater Concepción, the most important urban conglomerate in the south of Chile.

Concepción also provides an important contrast to Raleigh, North Carolina, in terms of transportation infrastructure and practices of mobility. Unlike people in Raleigh, the people of Concepción have mostly relied on public transportation in a number of different forms, leading to different assemblages of mobility, emplacement, and communication (Wiley, Sutko & Moreno, 2010; Wiley, Moreno & Sutko, 2012). A comparison of the experiences of mobility within these different assemblages will make it possible to understand how “different ways of moving mark [...] different ways of life” (Vannini, 2012, p. 11). To put it differently, recent research in Chile has shown that physical mobility impacts media attention, the use of public transportation promotes the use of different media, while simultaneously media convergence is facilitated by mobile technologies (Santos et al., 2012).

In summary, by examining mobile social-networking practices in these two different cultural, geographical and socioeconomic contexts, this comparative analysis looks at how micro-macro assemblages articulate and contrasts the realities of a region of economic dependency (as a specific site in the Global South) to what occurs in a wealthy, economically developed context (in the Global North). The Chilean context reflects some of the common realities in the Global South with regard to mobile communication. For example, the study paid close attention to the ways in which Chilean users carry out mobile-communication

practices common in other developing countries, such as “beeping” and sharing of the mobile phone. According to the broader literature on these phenomena, these practices have been highly influenced by the systems of payment such as pre-paid and calling-party-pays systems (Donner, 2007). Similarly, the majority of Chilean mobile-phone users (70%) subscribe to pre-paid systems, and the calling-party-pays model is the primary method of payment within the Chilean mobile-telephony market (SUBTEL, 2013). In this sense, the Chilean context, and Concepción in particular, is characterized by some of the familiar mobile-communication practices common in other developing regions, which distinguish these regions from the Global North. However, specific local practices respond to different assemblages formed by several social and cultural factors that certainly include economic constraints, but also involve other factors, such as the ways in which mobile data access is structured and marketed, telecommunication policies, and technological infrastructures. Therefore, it is important to look at specific practices that respond to the singularities of those particular constellations of assemblages.

#### **THE CONTRIBUTION OF MY STUDY**

The existing research on social media and mobile communication technologies is extensive, especially among countries within the Global North. However, there are several gaps in that research, which this study seeks to address. We already know that social-media practices are widely diffused, and we understand that social-networking services are used to support existing offline social networks because users have the opportunity to reinforce those ties with people who already share some offline connections (boyd, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2007;

Ellison et al., 2007; Choi, 2006). We also know that much social-media use now takes place on the move through mobile devices embedded in the dynamic physical and social contexts of everyday life (Vladar & Fife, 2010; Plew, 2009; Urista et al., 2008; Hargittai, 2008).

Nonetheless, although social network sites “provide a dramatically new way to enact relational maintenance” (Walther & Ramirez, 2010, p. 302), this issue remains under-explored, focusing on studies that only consider computer-based online interactions (Awan & Gountlett, 2013) or isolated social-media usage (Craig & Wright, 2012; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008). Additionally, these studies, which are usually survey-based, ask participants to provide information about what they think to do on social media instead of focusing on describing and analyzing what they actually do. Consequently, the analysis of social media as a primarily desktop-based activity, mainly measured through survey-based studies, has resulted in a lack of research that considers the use of mobile devices to access and use social media and an understanding of how this use is intertwined within individuals’ physical and social contexts of everyday life. Many studies make claims based on self-report, rather than on observations of actual practices and an understanding of participants experiences of mobile social-media usage.

For these reasons, I focus on individuals’ everyday mobile social-media practices, rather than focusing on any particular social-media or mobile-communication technology, whose popularity may change over time. Therefore, one of the major contributions of my study to the research on relationship management lies on my methods. Drawing on a naturalistic, ethnographic approach to the observation and description of individuals’ actual mobile social-media practices, my research contributes to a better understanding of the ways

people are actually managing their social relationships on the move through their mobile social-media practices. This approach will also shed light on the role that mobile social media are playing within a continuous flow of interactions that can potentially happen regardless of individuals' time and space limitations. As a result, my dissertation extends relationship management literature by demonstrating the value of combining different methods and developing others to make it possible to study relational management in naturally occurring contexts.

Additionally, this study extends the research within interpersonal and relationship management traditions by connecting this line of research to research traditions in mobile communication and the sociology of mobilities, in order to consider the ways in which these perspectives challenge, and can help expand, traditional approaches to interpersonal communication. It is true that most of my findings support existent mobile communication literature, but this dissertation contributes with a deeper level of understanding based on detailed evidence collected through micro-descriptions of individuals' daily mobile practices of social media use. These micro-descriptions of daily activities facilitate a much more concrete understanding of phenomena such as "perpetual contact" (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) and "connected presence" (Licoppe, 2004). We indeed already know these phenomena exist, but my study contributes to the understanding of what those actually mean and how people actually experience that "perpetual contact" in their everyday lives, in what moments and with what nuances. This research, therefore, sheds light in relation to how and why people engage in mobile practice of social media use and how those practices are integrated into embodied and social contexts.

Moreover, most empirical research on SNSs has focused on younger users, such as teenagers or college students, within developed countries, with many studies based on the U.S. context (Awan & Gountlett, 2013; boyd, 2008, 2010, 2014; Chistofieds, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009; Livingstone, 2008; Turkle, 2011). However, the widespread use of social media and mobile devices has extended the use of these services to different age groups of people and in different world locations, including developing countries, which show increasing rates of social-media and mobile-communication access and use, as was established earlier in this chapter. The present study makes a contribution by extending both the geographical scope and the age range of mobile-communication and social-media research. Thus, my study looks at these issues in Chile, a developing country full of contradictions, with sharp social inequalities and highly uneven income distribution—a country where 93% of Internet users keep an updated social-media profile while just 57% say they are able to search for information on the Internet and send an email (Chilean Census, 2012). In Chile, although there is a widespread use of mobile phones and a growing adoption of smartphones, these areas of research are completely new and there have been very few empirical studies to date.

Furthermore, I focus on young adults, those between 25 and 34 years old, who—as indicated above—have the highest rates of social-media and mobile-communication technology use, especially in Chile and Latin America. My analysis also includes the examination of mobile communication practices in a city located in the Global North (Raleigh, North Carolina, USA), in order to compare those practices with what occurs in Chile. By comparing these different assemblages within different contexts, one in a

developed country (the U.S.) and another in a developing country (Chile), this study sheds light on the differences and similarities between the participants' actual mobile social-media practices and how different assemblages of geographically, economically, and culturally dissimilar sites combine and influence those practices. Because the analysis of this topic in Chile is limited to statistical accounts of Internet and social-media use, very little is known about people's actual technologically mediated practices and how individuals integrate their mobile social-media interactions into their daily practices and experiences. Hence, this research emerges as the first qualitative study of mobile social networking in Chile and the first study to undertake a comparative analysis of the Chilean context in relation to a developed-country context such as the U.S.

There is certainly an important body of research on mobile communication technologies in the Global South (de Souza e Silva, Sutko, Salis & de Souza e Silva, 2011; Madianou & Miller, 2011; James & Versteeg, 2007; Ureta, 2008; Wiley, Sutko & Moreno, 2010). Beyond some isolated studies, such as Donner and Gitau's (2009) work on the mobile use of the Internet in South Africa, much of the research in the developing world is focused on the use of mobile phones for voice communication, leaving a gap in the examination of mobile social-media use and, consequently, in the study of individuals' mobile social-media practices. In the specific case of Chile, there are some isolated studies, but these do not develop a systematic reflection on mobile communication within Chilean society (García, et al., 2002; Halpern, 2013; Ureta et al., 2011; Ureta, 2008). At this juncture, it is important to develop a line of inquiry that contributes to the theoretical understanding of the ways these increasingly widespread practices are being integrated into individuals' daily routines and

social interactions. In such a context, my dissertation constitutes the first study, set in Chile, that examines the convergence of mobile communication technologies and social media, focuses on individuals' mobile practices, and examines those practices in the context of the everyday routines of social life.

Additionally, my research draws on a methodological innovation that allow for exploring the embeddedness of mobile communication technologies in social and physical contexts, seeing the richness of individuals' communicative practices as they take place on the move and in spaces in which the boundaries between online and offline realities are no longer clear. Drawing on distinct research traditions in mobilities, mobile communication, and the management of relationship, I employed traditional ethnographic methods such as in-depth interviews, as well as innovative mobile methodological techniques that work in naturally occurring contexts, such as mobile interviews and the shadowing method, a type of mobile participant observation (Jirón, 2011; Marcus, 1995). This method was used to follow and observe young adults as they moved through their everyday activities, with the purpose of witnessing how they experienced and gave meaning to mobile social-networking practices in relation to their face-to face interactions and everyday routines.

The use of this diverse set of methods allowed me to observe more closely and, consequently, understand more deeply, the social phenomenon under study while also contributing to the development of new mobile methods. Additionally, my research introduces this type of mobile inquiry into interpersonal communication studies, thus observing interpersonal interactions with research methods that take into consideration “the way life is woven together by mobility practices, the way this experience affects life as a

whole and the way spatial practices become embedded in space and vice versa” (Jirón, 2011, p. 51). In sum, the present study contributes to our understanding of the complex intersection of mobile social-media practices and everyday life, to knowledge of mobile communication practices in the Global South, to the integration of interpersonal communication research and mobilities studies, and to the development of new mobile methods for ethnographic inquiry.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Building on the existing scholarly literature in mobilities, mobile communication, and relationship management, and keeping in mind the gaps in research described above, four key research questions guided my study of the embeddedness of mobile social networking in the multiple social practices of everyday life:

- RQ1. How are social media and mobile communication technologies incorporated into actual personal interactions and relationship management behaviors as they happen within the fabric of everyday life and broader media ecologies?
- RQ2. What are individuals’ motivations to manage their social ties in different ways, both online and offline and using different mobile social media?
- RQ3. What are individuals’ mobile communicative practices and how are those practices incorporated into their daily routines of face-to-face and technologically mediated personal interactions?
- RQ4. What are the differences or similarities among Chilean and American contexts in relation to the mobile practices of social media use?

To address these research questions, this empirical study examined individuals' mobile practices of social media use as they are integrated into everyday life and employed for interactions with others on the move, as well as in contexts of reduced mobility or stillness. These research questions are addressed throughout the following chapters, particularly chapters 4, 5, and 6, which detail the findings of my study. Chapter 4 addresses my first and second research questions, while chapters 5 and 6 address my third and fourth research questions respectively. Below I briefly summarize the chapters that structure my dissertation.

#### **DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION**

The first half of this dissertation develops the conceptual framework that informs my research project and my methodological approach, drawing on research traditions in social-media use, mobile communication, and interpersonal relationship management. The second half includes three analytic chapters that address young adults' mobile social-media practices and the ways those are integrated in everyday relationship management. In the first half, Chapter 2 reviews existing literature and develops the conceptual framework I employ. Then, Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach I utilized. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the findings of my study. Drawing on my ethnographic data, each of these chapters addresses one of the three major themes that emerged from my analysis of young adults' everyday mobile social-media practices. In each chapter, my findings are linked to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2. In what follows, I offer a brief summary of each chapter.

Chapter 2 accounts for the three conceptual frameworks that inform my study: social media research, mobile communication studies, and relationship management research. These areas of inquiry are addressed in relation to the convergence of mobile communication and social media within individuals' everyday communicative practices, as people engage on mobile practices of social media use. The chapter develops an integrated conceptual framework to examine mobile social-media practices, and considers how those practices call us to rethink the ways in which relationship management is understood.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological choices I made to develop a mobile, exploratory approach to qualitative research. First, it outlines the conceptual frameworks that guide my methods, discussing the methodological design and describing the procedures I used to collect data, as well as the theoretical framework that directs my ethnographic approach. Then, the chapter details the procedures that guided my fieldwork and the process of data analysis. It ends with some reflections on the challenges I faced using mobile methods for collecting data and a consideration of methodological lessons learned for future research.

Chapter 4 addresses my first and second research questions and offers an interpretation of the first major theme that emerged from my data analysis: **social affordances and assemblages of distributed attention**. The discussion in this chapter underscores the importance of looking at specific practices in specific contexts to understand why individuals decide to use one means of communication or another as they interact with others and manage their relationships. This theme is developed through three categories: 1) *social affordances*, 2) *assemblages of distributed attention* (Wise, 2012), and 3) *social*

*pressure as part of social contexts*. These three categories are linked together because they highlight the relevance of looking at social contexts when examining individuals' mobile social-media practices.

Chapter 5 addresses my third research question and discusses the second key theme that arose from my analysis, **mobile social-media practices as strategies of relationship management**. That theme linked together two categories and several subcategories related to the ways my participants employed mobile social-media practices as a way to manage their relationships in everyday contexts. It describes mobile practices of social-media use and the ways that those practices have been integrated into personal interactions and the management of relationships, entwined with mobile and situated contexts of everyday life. These kinds of practices are considered in relation to two main categories: 1) *mobile social-media practices and daily interactions* and 2) *mobile social-media practices as multi-activity involvements in everyday life*.

Chapter 6 addresses my fourth research question through the discussion of my third theme, which is **assembling mobile social spaces in diverse geographies of technical development**. That theme emerged from a comparative approach to Chilean and U.S. contexts, describing some differences and similarities between both contexts in relation to individuals' mobile practices of social media use and interprets the significance of the findings. Two categories are included within this theme: 1) *new practices as control-cost strategies*, and 2) *The relevance of social contexts*.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, summarizes my findings and addresses their implications for our conceptualization of relationship management in a technologically rich

media environment, an environment where multiple modes of mediated interaction allow individuals to communicate with others in everyday life.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: TOWARD A SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH IN MOBILITIES, MOBILE COMMUNICATION, AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

As the introduction pointed out, social media are used by many young people to manage relationships, and mobile communication technologies enhance those capabilities. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research that considers the incorporation of mobile social-media practices into the complex fabric of everyday life, allowing individuals to keep in touch with others and to share information while on the move as a way to manage their personal relationships.

In order to examine the intersection of mobile-communication technologies and social media, along with relationship management behaviors, this chapter reviews three recent traditions of inquiry: social media research, mobile communication research, and the scholarship of relationship management. The aim is to initially outline some of the key issues that arise in the highly convergent, mobile and networked technological environment in which social interactions occur today. In addition to tracing these lines of research, the chapter develops a theoretical framework that takes into account the ways in which social media and mobile communication research have complicated some customary definitions and blurred distinctions between traditional divisions like private/public, physical/digital spaces and interpersonal/mass communication. The literature review also addresses issues of surveillance, power relationships, and identity production. The chapter places this scholarship into conversation with relationship-management studies, which today must

consider how individuals perform relationship management behaviors when face-to-face interactions converge with technologically mediated exchanges.

### **FROM SOCIAL NETWORK SITES (SNS) TO MOBILE SOCIAL MEDIA**

Research on social media has largely focused on desktop-computer-based uses of social network sites (SNSs), paying scarce attention to the mobile use of social media in general. Nevertheless, within recent years there have been some relevant advances, with scholars looking at mobile social media (Frith, 2012; Humphreys, 2007, 2012, 2013; Licoppe & Figeac, 2015; Marvin, 2013). Before considering this incipient mobile social-media research, this section first discusses two definitional categories and research trajectories that preceded mobile social media. These categories—social network sites (SNS) and social media—are outlined below in order to clarify the direction this study takes by connecting these earlier research perspectives with mobile communication technologies use.

*Social-network sites* (SNSs) refers to web-based services that allow their users to create a profile and a list of contacts with whom they can share content, as well as seeing content and lists created by those contacts (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+). By contrast, *social media* is a broader concept that includes any services that allow individuals to interact with one another and create and share content using networked technologies (boyd & Ellison, 2008; boyd, 2014, 2008) (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc.).

First of all, SNSs have been recognized as one of the activities that consume largest share of online time of Internet users because they have been incorporated within

individuals' daily routines. In fact, these services offer their users an online space where they can share content and stay connected with both physically collocated and distant others.

SNSs have been defined as: “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211)

Due to the ease of publishing and sharing content with a list of contacts, SNSs have become an important medium to communicate with others who already belong to an individual's social networks<sup>3</sup>. In fact, looking at the pervasive use of SNSs, Urista, Qingwen and Day (2008) argue that the reasons individuals use them are: the opportunity for efficient and convenient communication, curiosity about others, popularity, and relationship formation and reinforcement. *Efficient communication* is a key motivation because individuals value the possibility of using SNSs for distributing messages to multiple friends at once, initiating communication with others to satisfy their needs and wants, attaining others' attention quickly and efficiently, and communicating without delay. Unlike efficient communication, which places the emphasis on the opportunity to communicate rapidly with many people at the same time, *convenient communication* highlights the fact that SNSs allow users to stay in touch with friends and family, easily and continually managing communication with those closer social ties. Individuals value the ability “to communicate with others at a rate and manner that he or she desires” (p. 14) through SNSs. *Curiosity about others* is another

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the dissertation, when I use the concept of “social network”, I am referring to social networks in a sociological sense, that is the ways people relate to each other, the connections individuals establish and through which they construct their identity and participate within social interactions. When referring to platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn or others, I use either social network sites (SNS) or social media terms.

motivation to use SNSs whenever individuals want “to acquire information about people they are interested in. This includes romantic interests, old friends, new roommates, classmates, and people in their community who they would like to know better” (p. 15). Thus, individuals use SNSs to stay informed about old friends and to get more information about new people they meet. *Popularity* is also a motivation, since individuals generally seek to become more popular. In this context, the number of friends, and the number and type of comments on pictures and wall postings, are understood as a sign of (and a means to increase) a SNS user’s popularity. Last, relationship formation and reinforcement is an important motivation because individuals use SNSs to meet new people and to maintain existing relationships. Based on this research, it is apparent that young adults are motivated to use SNSs to satisfy both personal and interpersonal desires. Individuals even use SNSs to identify who their true friends are based on the interactions that occur on those services. According to this, more frequent interactions are understood as a closer friendship (Urista et al., 2008).

SNSs are used to support the maintenance of preexisting social networks and to help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Nonetheless, “What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks” (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211); in other words, SNSs offer an opportunity to maintain ties with people who have some offline connections. By supporting sociability, SNSs are primarily used to communicate with people who are already part of users’ social networks. Because of this, social-network services have been integrated into the heart of individuals’ everyday lives

(boyd & Ellison, 2008). For instance, Ellison et al. (2007) indicate that Facebook is used to maintain or intensify offline connections that might be weak ties, but typically they are offline-based connections that are maintained through SNSs. Hence, Facebook allows individuals to maintain their social connections as they progress through different periods of life (p. 1146). As Baym (2010) points out, “Simply having access to one another’s updates on a SNS may facilitate a sense of connection” (p. 135). As a result, beyond direct interactions like chatting or exchanging comments, other ways of being in touch emerge among SNS users, who keep a sense of continuous connection from, for example, “liking” or simply checking others’ updates on social network sites.

This sense of continuous contact is especially relevant among young people, who update their SNS profiles as a way to stay in touch with their list of friends, even though they may not specifically be sending a message to an identified other. By looking at the motivations that push users to maintain and continually update SNS profiles, Plew (2009) argues that high-frequency users and younger people are more likely to be motivated to use SNSs. Those reasons are related to escape and control, interpersonal utility, passing time, convenience, entertainment and self-reactive reasons. Somewhat related, the use of SNSs has been also linked to the formation of impressions of others. As noted by several researchers, SNS users form impressions of others through these services, in which the number of friends another person has is a particularly important factor (Haddon & Dong, 2007; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008). By contrast, self-generated, other-generated, and system-generated information on SNSs impact impression formation differently (Utz, 2010).

After analyzing the different social practices of SNS users and their levels of engagement on those services, Hargittai and Hsieh (2010) proposed a typology of SNS users, identifying four categories: Dabblers, Samplers, Devotees and Omnivores. Dabblers are those users who use only one SNS and do so only sometimes; Samplers are those users who visit more than one SNS, but none of them often; Devotees are those users who are active on one SNS but do not use any others; and Omnivores are those users who are visitors to more than one SNS and use at least one of them often. This group, the Omnivores, constitutes by far the biggest category, including almost half of the respondents of Hargittai and Hsieh's study. Concordantly, a recent inform of Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that although Facebook continues to be the most popular social medium, more than half of American online adults (52%) use two or more social media, so other services such as Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn experienced important rates of growth in 2014 (Duggan et al., 2015). The same trend is evident in the Chilean context, where 93% of Internet users maintain a profile on different social media (Daie, 2014).

Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google+, among other similar services, fit within boyd and Ellison's (2008) definition of SNS, which highlighted web-based characteristic of these platforms and therefore their use through web browsers and within fixed contexts. However, all these SNSs now have mobile versions that enable their use while on the move. Additionally, other services originally thought for being used through mobile devices also afford social connections with a list of contacts. Such is the case of Instagram and Foursquare, for example.

Therefore, even though most of research has been focused on desktop-based access to SNSs, these services are part of a broader concept: social media. This broader term refers to “the set of tools, services, and applications that allow people to interact with others using network technologies” (boyd, 2008, p. 92). Thus, the term social media includes “The sites and services that emerged during the early 2000s, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their own content” (boyd, 2014, Loc. 153). As a result, the social media category covers all those services that allow for one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communication through network technologies. All these services allow people to continually interact with others, sharing some pre-existing online content while also creating their own content to share with others. Accordingly, social media include, for instance, media-sharing technologies (Youtube, Instagram), microblogging (Twitter), blogging (Tumblr, Wordpress), Internet-based messaging (WhatsApp, Line) and voice-over-Internet (Skype, Viber, FaceTime), to name a few.

Uses of these social media now also take place on the move. As a result, the concept of social media has to be extended, taking into account mobility. Humphreys (2013) outlines a mobile social-media definition, stating that they “can loosely be considered software, applications, or services accessed through mobile devices that allow users to connect with other people and to share information, news, and content” (p. 21). In this characterization, she emphasizes the need to avoid definitions based on specific technologies or services because permanent technological change will constantly alter the boundaries of what can be considered (or not) a mobile social medium. Other applications fit within this categorization

as well, such as recommendation services (Yelp) and location-sharing platforms (Foursquare) that work as location-based social networks (LBSN).

Within the broad category of mobile social media, Humphreys (2012) recognizes three kinds of communicative practices: connecting, coordinating and cataloguing, which are related, respectively, to the social, physical, and informational aspects of public social interaction. Connecting refers to managing social distance in relation to others. Coordinating refers to the interactions to organize and situate our physical selves in relation to others. “The coordination of our physical bodies in space becomes a communicative act that situates and organizes our daily lives” (p. 504). And cataloguing refers to the possibility that users have to catalogue and classify information. Cataloguing practices also include the ability to search for information, people and places (Humphreys, 2012).

Drawing from these understandings of social media and mobile social media, I focused my research on these more broadly defined phenomena rather than restricting the focus to any specific service. Given the variety of social media, individuals’ communicative practices can happen over many different services at different moments and in shifting contexts while on the move. Consequently, my research examines the actual mobile social-media practices that my participants performed on a daily basis to interact with others and to create and share information, instead of looking at any isolated SNS, social media or mobile technology in particular. This is a very important methodological choice because uses of mobile social media change over time, and we should avoid defining practices based on specific platforms or applications whose popularity may come and go.

Research on mobile social media has been mostly US-centered and, as Humphreys (2013) establishes, it has been focused especially on location-based mobile social media (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2010; Frith, 2012; Humphreys, 2007, 2010). However, many people use mobile social media with no location-based functionalities (Humphreys, 2013), so it is relevant to extend the analysis to other issues that emerge from the different functionalities of mobile social-media use and to examine how those uses are integrated within individuals' everyday practices. As individuals use mobile social media more and more, their communication exchanges are more varied and frequent, so it is important to figure out what role these mobile social media are playing into individuals' patterns and flows of communication.

#### **MOBILE COMMUNICATION: REDRAWING BOUNDARIES**

The widespread use of social media has been intensified by the pervasiveness of mobile-communication technologies. By promoting individual addressability and the ability to interact on the move regardless of physical locations, mobile devices such as the mobile phone have introduced a type of "mobile logic" (Ling & Donner, 2009) into individuals' interactions. This "mobile logic" means that

our everyday actions are determined, at least in part, by our expectations that others we may interact with are always available via the mobile phone; thus, planning is different, travel is different, togetherness is different, and privacy is different. (Ling & Donner, 2009, p. 136)

Continuous availability entails the disposition to be reached at any moment, as others require. Related to this continuous availability, Stald (2008) argues that the mobile phone is seen as an indispensable tool for young people and especially for those who have moved away from home and do not have a landline telephone. The mobile device and the Internet are the only available channels for fast communication in a context where availability is a key issue for young people. The desire for continuous availability among young people is expressed through phatic conversations, the absence of free moments, and some stress due to uninterrupted flux of interactions with their social and familial ties. Given the portability of mobile phones, individuals can “access and exchange information independent of place, of physical location, while being on the move” (Stald, 2008, p. 145). This has transformed the meaning of “mobile,” which now also refers to the ability to be continuously prepared to respond to last-minute changes and to change directions and decisions as circumstances demand.

Claims about continuous interaction and availability emerged from research focused on mobile voice communication and conducted mostly within the developed world. Within this body of research, mobile telephony has been intensively studied as a way in which individuals interact and manage time with others while moving through their daily activities (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2001; Ling, 2004; Ling & Yttri, 2002). Mobile time management is characterized by micro-coordination and hyper-coordination (Ling, 2004; Ling & Yttri, 2002). The first term refers to those changes in the ways people organize, with a great level of specificity, the flux of daily interactions with their closest friends and family. The mobile phone has facilitated this organization by providing ubiquitous accessibility (Ling, 2004).

The second term refers to symbolic meanings linked to the mobile phone and to more expressive uses of these devices —the communication of emotional preferences—that is especially common among younger users. For instance, it has been demonstrated that teenagers who have high access to mobile phones understand sending and receiving calls and messages as a symbol of belonging to specific social groups. In such a context, the more calls or messages they receive or send, the higher their sense of belonging to a social group. In addition, the number of messages as well as the number of contacts in a user's telephone is a kind of objectification of popularity, according to which an individual is seen as more popular if she/he can send or receive more messages (Stald, 2008). Even though Stald's analysis is specifically describing the Danish context, something similar was found in a different scenario like Chile, where the use of the mobile phone embodied some values and ideas related to changes in the status of children because a child's initiation into mobile phone use is understood as an important aspect of the transition from childhood to adolescence (Ureta et al., 2011). Another dimension of hyper-coordination is the presentation of self that is expressed through the selection of specific mobile phone brands, devices, features, and even stylistic elements such as stickers or cases. Thus, especially among teenagers, the style and type of device they have express part of their particular identity (Fortunati & Manganelli, 2002; Ito, Okabe & Matsuda, 2005; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Ling, 2004; Skog, 2002; Stald, 2008; Ureta et al., 2011). These results have been found in studies carried out in Japan (Ito et al., 2005), Norway (Ling & Yttri, 2002; Ling, 2004), Denmark (Stald, 2008) and Chile (Ureta et al., 2011).

Therefore, questions arise about how the newness of one's phone, as well as the brand and operating system, function as expressions of social class, social status, and cultural identity. Extending these questions to the use of Internet-enabled mobile phones, we must wonder if the choices young people make about social media or mobile applications could also be seen as a meaningful expression of an individual's identity.

Research on the expressive use of the mobile phone is part of an extensive body of literature within mobile communication studies that has recognized a deep connection between mobile communication and a youth culture (Castells et al., 2007; Goggin, 2013; Ito et al., 2005; Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002; Ling, 2008; Stald, 2008). By arguing that young people have found a form of expression and reinforcement in mobile communication, Castells et al. (2007) argue that young adults (those in their twenties and early thirties), teenagers, and children share a common culture of communication in which they have a wider range of socialization and identification options, diminishing the influence of traditional socialization structures such as the home, educational system, and broadcast media, raising deep questions about changes in the ways young people experience their everyday life.

In his examination of this connection between youth culture and mobile communication technologies, Stald (2008) addresses four broad themes related to young people's identity: availability, presence, the mobile as personal log, and the mobile as a tool for learning social norms. First, availability is a key issue for young people, and they are always available through their always-on mobile phone. The portability of mobile phones allows young people to access and exchange content on the move; this modifies their

experience of presence by allowing a differentiation between embodied co-presence and “connected presence” (Licoppe, 2004). This experience of presence varies widely according to the knowledge of the other people and the content, the characteristics of the situation, and the intentions of the communication.

Second, as a form of personal log or journal, the mobile phone enables users to keep all their stuff on their mobile, which becomes “a kind of life diary that saves experiences, memories, thoughts, or moments in a visual and textual form” (Stald, 2008, p. 157). Even further, the mobile “may also be perceived as a “data double,” a mobile extension of the body and mind, even a kind of “additional self.” [...] It represents a life-line to self-perception, a means of documenting of social life, expressing preferences, creating networks, and sharing experiences” (p. 158).

Lastly, young mobile-phone users share a process of social learning in which the social rules associated with mobile-phone use are tested and modified by young people in the context of changing patterns of use and the meaning of the mobile in everyday life. “Norms vary between groups and individual behavior mirrors the collective norms in a particular setting: personal behavior may change depending on whom you are with. Here again, behavior with the mobile is a signal of collective and individual identity” (Stald, 2008, p. 160). Young mobile-phone users modify their practices and traditionally accepted social rules depending on the social situation they are in and the people with whom they are interacting.

In order to understand these changes in behaviors and social rules, Castells et al. (2007) propose the concept of technosociality, which understands communication

technologies in relation to “contexts, environmental conditions that make possible ‘new ways of being, new chains of values and new sensibilities about time, space and the events of culture’” (p. 142). This gives rise to conflicting expectations, practices, and valuations in social interactions. For example, conflicting expectations and valuations can be seen between generations (e.g., parents and children), so the negotiation of acceptable practices becomes a key site of family and relationship conflict—for example, when parents establish a rule of “no cell phones at the dinner table.” Thus, new communication repertoires fostered by mobile communication technologies challenge traditional social rules about the flux of face-to-face conversations.

Other tensions between parents and children have been identified in studies of mobile telephone practices among younger users. While young people often live simultaneously under the close supervision of parents and the desire for more independence and privacy, mobile telephony also provides parents and children new ways of negotiating and resolving these tensions, modifying—though not eliminating—the power relations between them (Stald, 2008). The general evidence shows that parents largely drive the trend of increased mobile-phone ownership among young people due to safety concerns, the desire to keep children from falling behind in a possible technological divide, and as a status symbol for their children (and, indirectly, for the parents) (Castells et al., 2007; Ling, 2004; Miyaki, 2005; Ureta et al., 2011).

Addressing this literature about young people’s (primarily teenagers’) use of mobile phones is especially relevant for this study if we consider that, by the time young people have reached their 20s, many have already been socialized within a technology-rich environment

in which they experience their communicative practices on the move and embedded in the dynamic physical and social contexts of their everyday lives.

Another body of work has focused on the notion of co-presence and the ways in which people manage the interactional disturbances that telephone communication produces among co-present parties. This literature analyzes the implications of being connected to physically distant others while simultaneously interacting with those who are nearby (Baron, 2008; Campbell, 2008; Licoppe, 2004; Turkle, 2008). In fact, concepts such as “perpetual contact” (Katz & Aakhus, 2002), “connected presence” (Licoppe, 2004), and “always on/always-on-you” (Turkle, 2008) suggest that people’s use of mobile devices and mediated communication in general is associated with the desire to maintain contact with family, friends or colleagues who may be physically distant. The mobile telephone provides a way to augment what Würtzel and Turner (1977) called “symbolic proximity” and even a way to perform social rituals that enhance social cohesion within small groups (Ling, 2006). Therefore, the ways in which multiple modes of presence are managed, performed, and articulated to different social contexts is an important issue and one that shifts historically with the changing technologies as well as evolving social practices and norms. Those practices and norms also vary by social class and cultural background.

From a technologically determinist point of view and based primarily on studies of mobile voice communication, it has been argued that individuals use diverse strategies to manage availability and sometimes consciously *avoid* contact. Thus mobile-phone use is characterized by a process of “continuous partial attention.” As a result, individuals are seen as being “tethered” to their devices, ignoring what is happening in their immediate physical

environment—a social phenomenon that, may impact the ways in which people socialize in urban spaces (Turkle, 2008, 2011). In this regarding, earlier research on mobile communication dealt with the dichotomy between public and private (Ling, 2004; Ito, Okabe & Matsuda, 2005; Turkle, 2008). Rich Ling (2004), for instance, examined how workers used the mobile phone to coordinate their work-related activities and their private lives, blurring the boundaries between these two spheres, or how teens used mobile phones to privatize their social interactions (via SMS or voice calls) that are brought into the house, which in turn makes the house a more public space.

This disruption of social boundaries and social norms is also analyzed by Marvin (1988) in her study of the adoption of telephones in the early 1900s. As she points out, the emergence of a new medium entails “a special historical occasion when patterns anchored in older media that have provided the stable currency of social exchange are reexamined, challenged, and defended” in new social contexts and situations, within both domestic and public spaces (Marvin, 1988, p. 4). Marvin’s work describes how new media have an impact on social life, often entailing a challenge to and redefinition of customary social boundaries. Because each new medium reshapes imagined social boundaries, those limits are challenged and redefined when another medium is introduced.

All these studies, which as noted have focused primarily on voice calls and text messaging, have highlighted the intrusive nature of the mobile phone and focused on the ways in which its use “privatizes” public spaces, such as restaurants, parks, public transportation, and theaters. While Ling (2004) talks about the colonization of the public

sphere, Turkle (2008) suggests that public spaces like train stations are now social collections of individuals who are physically together without interacting.

However, a more recent body of mobile-communication research has questioned this focus on the privatization of public space, complicating the notion of public space and reconceptualizing the public/private dichotomy (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011). In this regard, in conjunction with Sheller and Urry's ideas (2006) about "private-in-public hybrids," Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) argue that mobile technology use in public spaces foregrounds the blurred boundaries between public and private. These practices make visible the intersections between these spaces and foreground their fluid and permeable qualities as subjectively experienced by individuals.

Similarly, de Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) argue that mobile technologies function as interfaces that culturally mediate people's everyday spatial practices, constructing a more personalized experience of public space while still occupying that public space:

What is considered private and what is considered public changes with time period, cultures, and the interfaces we use to interact with these spaces. The use of mobile technologies challenges the traditional borders between public and private spaces because individuals are able to interface with their experience of space in new ways, as they co-exist with others in public (and private) spaces (p. 54).

In this sense, mobile interfaces are understood as tools to better manage the experience of urban spaces, but that does not mean these interfaces necessarily withdraw users from their surroundings. Rather, mobile communication technologies work as interfaces for understanding public and private spaces by allowing individuals to filter the information

available and manage their interactions with other individuals in urban spaces. Thus, private and public spaces are defined by individuals' own experiences and their sense of control over those experiences in urban spaces.

### **THE CONVERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND MOBILE COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES**

As mobile communication technologies have become one of the main modes of accessing social media, a new body of research has developed, extending concepts such as coordination and calling into question other traditional perspectives on mobile-communication studies.

Research on coordination was based mainly on the analysis of mobile-phone practices of voice communication and texting. New research has extended those approaches by analyzing the use of cell phones as a social, collective medium through which young people are able to keep connected through social media and locative devices that allow for coordination through locative mobile social networks (LMSN) (de Souza e Silva, 2006a; Humphreys, 2007, 2012; Sutko & de Souza e Silva, 2011). Thus, while short calls and text messages facilitate micro-coordination and hyper-coordination, LMSN allow for location-aware coordination in which users rely on the visualization of space and other individuals' locations to coordinate encounters and social life (Sutko & de Souza e Silva, 2011). With the use of LMSN, for example, individuals make qualitative judgments about places based on the quantity of people in those places and whether or not there are known people in those locations. Thus, known people in an unknown place make that place more attractive to users, and individuals decide to visit some locations based on the presence of friends (Humphreys, 2007). In the context of social interactions performed through locative mobile social

networks, the term coordination describes those “communicative exchanges around organizing and situating our physical selves in relation to one another” (Humphreys, 2012, p. 503), which in turn can alter individuals’ experience of physical distance.

The idea that mobile-phone use disconnects people from places has also been questioned, considering that location awareness brings place (especially location) to the forefront of users’ interactions, both with information and with other users. Drawing on the blasé attitude described by Simmel, Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) assert that mobile technologies are useful interfaces to filter our interactions with the world or to cope the complexity of urban spaces. This in turn produces what the authors termed “net localities”—physical spaces that are socially constituted beyond fixed geographical spaces and are linked to networks of information. According to this research, practices of connecting to those networks of information from different geographical spaces change the logics of public spaces because the use of them is now both physical and digital. Thus, when individuals participate in a net locality, they are present in a physical space, but at the same time they have the ability to associate with remote information and people. “In net localities, the local space is the dominating involvement; however, the local space is not always solely physical” (p. 93) As a result, mobile technologies provide interfaces for both face-to-face and remote interactions, complicating individuals’ understanding of public spaces and locations (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Dourish & Bell, 2007; Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011).

Another relevant issue at the intersection of mobile communication technologies and social media is the question of how location-aware technologies, specifically location-based social networks (LBSN), produce and sustain different types of power relationships,

disciplining people's movements and social relationships (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012). Drawing on Foucault and Gordon's (1980) concepts of disciplinary societies and micro-powers, and on Deleuze's (1995) arguments about societies of control, de Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) argue that "by tracking the locations of people and things, new power networks are constructed, and these networks influence interpersonal relationships, people's patterns of mobility through the city, and people's relationships to places" (p. 138). The authors point to several forms of power, including collateral or social surveillance in interpersonal contexts such as the relationships between parolees and parole officers, children and parents, and friends in LBSNs. Additionally, top-down or vertical surveillance functions as a tool for governmental institutions to surveil populations and for corporations to surveil consumers. In this context, for example in location-based advertising, location becomes a valuable commodity. Thus, "advertisements that target people depending on their location makes the relationship between people, location, and advertisements even more complex because these ads are only seen by the small subset of the population using LBSN" (p. 150).

Within these contexts, location-aware interfaces facilitate different forms of social exclusion and fragmented perceptions of public spaces. Attaching information to places produces a variety of locations of consumption that are experienced differently by each location-based social network user. As de Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) point out, the use of location-aware interfaces produces differential spaces because individuals are able to selectively visualize their surroundings, so they will have a radically different and more individualized experience of public spaces in relation to those who do not use location-aware technologies.

As we have seen, existing research that considers the intersection between mobile communication technologies and social media has focused on how location-awareness enables new forms of coordination, sustains different types of power relationships, and affords changes in social practices that alter the logics of public spaces—spaces that are now both physical and digital, blurring the boundaries between public and private. However, while it is clear that social media are used to maintain relationships and that mobile devices enhance those capabilities, there is a lack of research that considers how mobile social media practices are being integrated into the complex fabric of everyday life. Although there is in fact some research on this area, it has been either carried out in a less empirical manner (de Souza e Silva, 2006b), or it has focused on location-aware technologies (Frith, 2013; Licoppe & Inada, 2006, 2010). I therefore focus my research on this gap, empirically observing the ways mobile social media practices are part of individuals' daily routines. These practices help to make, maintain, and unmake interpersonal connections, but the incorporation of new technologies and new practices into our relationships may also be dysfunctional in some ways, or disruptive and conflictual.

## **MOBILE SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHANGING NORMS OF MEDIATED INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS**

It has been established that social media have become a means to manage relationships (Baym, 2010; boyd, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Donath & boyd, 2011). By serving relationship management functions, social media have allowed individuals to perform everyday interactions that help them to actualize relationships with others. For instance,

posting on friends' social media profiles or wishing friends happy birthday can be seen as relationship management strategies to preserve relationships with friends who are physically distant as well as those who are nearby (Bryant, Marmo & Ramirez, 2011). In fact, four characteristics of social media have been highlighted as relationship management facilitators: the asynchronicity of messages, which allows for them to be carefully checked before publishing; the fact that those messages can be highly disseminated, but at the same time, limited in their expected audiences; the creation of new spaces for participation and interactivity; and the opportunity to enrich messages with multimedia sources (Tong & Walther, 2011).

In the same way, the use of different technologically mediated forms of interactions, such as the use of emoticons, responds to interactants' desires to communicate emotions and feelings. In other words, these kinds of technologically mediated expressions are used to convey nonverbal social cues. That is how "We show others that we are approachable, and that we are interested in them, through immediacy cues" (Baym, 2010, p. 61). As people use media to pursue social and relational goals, it is important to question how individuals actually perform relationship management behaviors as part of their communicative practices, when those practices include the use of social media and mobile communication technologies on a daily basis. How are the affordances of technology integrated into face-to-face interactions and the minutia of everyday life? How do mobile social media enable and disable different communicative practices? How do they become sites of changing expectations and norms, and how might uses of technologies could be disruptive to interpersonal relations or simply alter the ways in which we interact?

Research on mediated interpersonal communication has highlighted the need for a more integrative approach that leaves behind the dichotomized perspective that has characterized technology-driven versus face-to-face (FtF) relationships or online versus offline interactions (Baym, 2004; Haythornthwaite, 2001; Howard et al., 2001). As Baym (2010) argues, instead of contrasting mediated communication and FtF interactions, “it might be more fruitful to think of digital communication as a mixed modality that combines elements of communication practices in embodied conversation and in writing.” (p. 63) Thus, an integrative view seeks to analyze “how online time and use fits with and complements other aspects of an individual’s everyday life” (Haythornthwaite, 2001, p. 364). This perspective understands that “the Internet is a complex landscape of applications and purposes as well as users and should be studied that way,” (p. 364) recognizing the complexity of human experience within which mediated interactions are woven into the everyday management of relationships.

In such a context, Baym (2010) calls us to think about “what people do with mediated communication” (p. 59). As she establishes, individuals use media to pursue social and relational goals; through media “people show feelings and immediacy, have fun, and build and reinforce social structures even in the leanest of text-only media.” (p. 59) Within this use of media to manage relationships, she adds that the selection of one or another medium is shaped by the kind of individuals one wants to reach, the stage of a relationship, the relationship type, and the physical distance between interactants. Due to its connectivity affordances, “the internet has expanded our access to weak ties and enabled us to have more specialized and intermittent contact with more people” (p. 125). Even further, with the

convergence of social media and mobile communication technologies, individuals now engage on a flow of continuous interactions through those networked services that afford mobile practices of social-media interactions that happen continuously, with both weak and strong ties.

Given the convergence of mobile communication technologies and social media usage in mobile communicative practices, there are several reasons to state that literature on relationship management needs to be expanded and put into conversation with mobile communication studies and mobilities research. First, the use of social media, enhanced by mobile communication technologies, has complicated the notions of relationship management and, consequently, the way traditional research perspectives tackle these issues. While Stafford and Canary's (1991) analysis of interpersonal relationships relies heavily on individuals' strategic behaviors, unconscious behaviors and non-strategic routines also contribute to relationship management. Indeed, relationship management can be also understood as the result of the everyday *ordinariness* of relationships: "Ordinariness itself presents many simple, routine, and unconscious ways to maintain and manage relationships" (Masuda & Duck, 2002, p. 13). More specifically, this everyday ordinariness of relationships is facilitated today by social media, which offer efficient and convenient communication, intensified by mobile technologies that promote an uninterrupted flux of social interactions while on the move, potentially in any physical location. In such a context, it seems important to question if this continuous contact might disrupt, attenuate, or even contribute to ending a relationship. Additionally, the incorporation of mobile communication and social-networking technologies may make starting or ending a relationship a more public process.

Second, the received approach to interpersonal communication has been complicated because social media usage and mobile communication have challenged the traditional division between interpersonal and mass communication. Instead of individualized interactions, or rather, in addition to individualized interactions, social-media users engage in multiple exchanges within “collapsed contexts” (boyd, 2008), keeping connected and sharing content with different audiences at the same time. Those audiences are not always known by the sender of the message, which is enhanced by the highly embedded nature of mobile communicative practices in the fabric of everyday interactions. Traditionally, mass communication has been conceptualized as one-way transmission messages from one source to a large and anonymous audience, while interpersonal communication has been considered two-way message exchanges between two or more individuals in a more private, usually face-to-face context. However, new communication technologies have made it necessary to integrate the analysis of mass and interpersonal processes to better understand the ways that those processes are blurred and impact each other (Walther, Carr, Choi, Deandrea, Kim, Tong & Van der Heide, 2011). In this context, other approaches like “mediated interpersonal communication” (Cathcart & Gumpert, 1986) and “masspersonal communication” (O’Sullivan, 2005) attempt to capture the flows and intersections among different types of interactions. Furthermore, beyond the dichotomy of mass communication vs. interpersonal communication, and even “mass-personal” communication, we now communicate with dynamic and unknown groups and contexts, including the potential circulation of our “personal” communications in much broader (even global) contexts.

Third, since the concept of cost includes time, effort and other resources, some researchers (Tong & Walther, 2011) have already noted that information technologies reduce the cost required to maintain relationships. Technological tools have facilitated the ways people connect and create messages to one person or to several people at the same time. Somewhat related, studies on mobile communication have demonstrated that, thanks to the portability of mobile phones, users (especially younger users) engage in a series of short communications or “phatic communication” (Malinowski, 1923), a kind of ongoing dialogue that lasts through the day even within the inner group of family and friends (Stald, 2008; Castells et al., 2007). Other authors refer to “nomadic intimacy” to indicate the use of mobile communication to maintain a “symbolic proximity” with social contacts and keep a sense of presence regardless of physical distance (White & White, 2008). As a result, “the social ties people enjoy today are more abundant and more easily nourished by contact through new technologies” (Rainie & Wellman, 2012, Kindle location 400), which allow individuals to manage their relationships through multiple media (Baym, 2010) in an easier and more efficient way.

Fourth, due to these multiple technological landscapes within which people manage personal connections, technologically mediated and non-mediated contexts are no longer clearly separated in people’s everyday communicative practices. Due to the proliferation of mobile technologies and their imbrication in everyday interactions, many spaces are now both physical and digital. This has led Internet studies scholars and mobilities researchers to call for a rethinking of the common offline/online division (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Benford & Giannachi, 2011; Taylor, 2006; Orgad et al., 2009), considering that much of

individuals' social practices happen in spaces where the digital and physical are blended. As a result, as noted earlier, individuals' social practices occur within what Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) termed “net localities”—physical spaces that are socially constituted beyond fixed geographical spaces and linked to networks of information.

Thus, individuals interact within “hybrid spaces” (de Souza e Silva, 2006a), which are connected, mobile, social spaces that blur the boundaries between physical and digital environments. In such a context,

users do not perceive physical and digital spaces as separate entities and do not have the feeling of “entering” the Internet, or being immersed in digital spaces, as was generally the case when one needed to sit down in front of a computer screen and dial a connection (de Souza e Silva, 2006a, p. 263).

Hybrid spaces blur the boundaries between physical and digital spaces due to the use of mobile technologies as connection interfaces. Hybrid spaces are also mobile spaces that have been “created by the constant movements of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the Internet and to other users” (de Souza e Silva, 2006a, p. 262). Thus, in a mobile network, mobile phones become the nodes that users carry through physical spaces. Hybrid spaces are also social spaces because mobile devices “are used not only to communicate with people who are distant but also to socialize with peers who are nearby, sharing the same physical space, even if they are not at eye-contact distance” (de Souza e Silva, 2006a, p. 270). Indeed, mobile devices “strengthen users' connections to the space they [users] inhabit” (p. 270). Therefore, interactants come and go between online and offline

environments as part of their routine interactions, which occur on the move as well as within contexts of temporal emplacement.

In fact, online and offline interactions are currently highly entwined (boyd & Ellison, 2007), to the point that individuals are involved in connections performed in the context of in-between sites where online and offline lines are interwoven, and where online life “has a broader context in everyday offline lives and practices” (Taylor, 2006, Kindle location 299). Therefore, making a clear distinction between online and offline environments does not consider those in-between sites and the ways offline and online persona are interwoven. As Taylor (2006) argues,

One of the biggest lessons from Internet studies is that the boundary between online and offline life is messy, contested, and constantly under negotiation. Issues around gender or race, for example, do not simply fall away online but get imported into the new space in complicated ways. (Loc. 2076)

In the same vein, Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi (2011) talk about a “mixed reality continuum” in which different spaces intersect. This mixed reality brings together real and virtual spaces to create a hybrid space that “emerges out of the relationship between perceived, conceived, lived physical and digital spaces” (p. 44). They emphasize the relevance of “complex spatial tapestries” (p. 69) that are developed when communication technologies bring together physical and digital spaces. These “complex spatial tapestries” appear even more intricate when we consider what happens with mobile-technology users whose phones are not data-enabled. In what ways does the *lack* of Internet connection

determine differential uses and access to the depicted hybrid spaces when the mobile phone *cannot* be a node within those mobile networks?

The literature I discussed in this chapter situates my analysis about how young adults integrate mobile social-media practices into their everyday routines as a way to manage relationships. By combining research traditions in mobile communication, social media, and the sociology of mobilities, interpersonal and relationship management lines of inquiry are extended in order to think new ways to examine the modes people manage relationships in an increasingly complex media environment of networked and mobile media. Next chapter delves into the conceptual frameworks that shape the methodological decisions I made to develop my ethnographic study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO MOBILE COMMUNICATION

New communicative practices that have emerged around the use of social media through mobile communication technologies complicate traditional research methods for studying communication and relationship management in everyday life. When everyday interactions occur on the move, as well as in contexts of temporary *emplacements* (Wiley, et al., 2010, 2012), in *hybrid spaces* (de Souza e Silva, 2006a) and in *collapsed contexts* (boyd, 2008), the selection of methods for gathering and analyzing data becomes a critical issue. It is imperative to develop research methods that effectively capture individuals' actual communicative practices as they occur in the complexities of everyday life, which unfolds within an increasingly complex ecology of networked mobile media.

When they engage mobile social-network practices to manage relationships, individuals move in “hybrid spaces” (de Souza e Silva, 2006a), in which technologically mediated and unmediated exchanges are blurred. Those interactions are highly entwined with mobile and situated contexts and flow as conversations or messages intended for a few but often reaching wider audiences, mixing together interpersonal and mass-media messages. In such a context, “The focus of analysis should not only be on artificially isolated media usage in one single field or situation, or with one specific device. Rather, the complex interplay of communication practices and exchange as a whole has to be examined.” (Linke, 2013, p. 35) Consequently, in order to understand the significance of new mobile practices of social media use for mediated communication, my research does not focus on any specific mobile social media. Instead, I move away from a technology-centered analysis to examine the

social contexts, the ways in which technologies are woven into those contexts, and how technologies also create contexts.

This approach requires one to work beyond the dichotomized perspectives of technological determinism and the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), a dualistic and influential debate that has framed past understandings of the role of digital media in social life. A technologically deterministic view sees technologies as active forces that impact society, while Social Construction of Technology, by contrast, sees people as the primary sources of change in both technology and society. My research stands between these two polar perspectives, seeing technology and society as mutually influenced in the consequences of new media. In this sense, I subscribe to the domestication approach (Haddon, 2003), which examines how technologies become parts of everyday life, rather than viewing them as autonomous agents of change. This perspective “is particularly concerned with the processes at play as new technologies move from being fringe (wild) objects to everyday (tame) objects embedded deeply in the practices of daily life” (Baym, 2010, p. 45). While I build on the idea of domestication and its focus on the processes through which technologies are integrated into the practices of everyday life, that approach does not adequately consider other elements that intervene the process of technology use.

To extend the concept of technology domestication, I draw on Wise’s (2012) analysis of assemblages in a “clickable world” (p. 159), a rich conceptual framework for examining individuals’ mobile social-media practices in everyday life. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of *assemblage* (or *agencement*), Wise (2012) explains how “Machines are part of assemblages—multiple and diverse collections of objects, practices, and

desires functioning across a broad landscape of devices” (p. 159). As the author makes clear, from the characteristics of these assemblages emerge an ability to act (*agency*) on individuals, who is put in a particular relation to the world. Therefore, Wise argues, agency is distributed, and not equally distributed, across individuals, devices, networks, and spaces. Due to the dynamic articulation of assemblage, which “is always in process” (p. 160), agency is uneven and continually rearticulated within a multiplicity.

Drawing on this understanding of technologies as components of assemblages, along with individuals, social contexts, practices and desires, I work in an ethnographic mode focused on individuals’ actual communicative practices performed around the use of mobile communication technologies and social media. As Hine (2009) points out, both technology development and technology appropriation are well-suited for ethnographic study. However, it is necessary to see the development of technologies as a social process in which research should pay attention to the social dynamics around the new technologies, considering how technologies’ “interpretative flexibility” (Hine, 2009) determines the ways in which they are differently perceived and utilized by diverse social groups. This highlights the need to look at actual individuals’ social practices and to understand their experiences, instead of focusing solely on the technologies themselves.

This chapter details the methodological strategies I developed for this qualitative research project. As an exploratory study, this research does not seek to test any hypothesis or generalize any findings. Rather, my aim is to understand and describe the embeddedness of mobile communication technologies and social media within individuals’ everyday

communicative practices, and the implications of these practices for the ways in which people manage their personal and social relationships.

In the next section, I describe the methodological design and the procedures I used to collect data, which included some innovative techniques such as shadowing (Jirón, 2011; Marcus, 1995) and mobile interviewing (Brown & Durrheim, 2009). The chapter continues with a description of my sample and a discussion of the process of data analysis. The chapter ends with some reflections on the challenges I faced using mobile methods for collecting data, and some thoughts about what we can learn from that process.

### **METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN**

My research employs a phenomenological approach, developing an interpretive analysis of the *webs of meaning* (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) surrounding individuals' communicative practices in mobile social networks, in the context of their everyday lives. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) point out, looking at the webs of meaning entails producing “thick descriptions of performances and their significance for participants” (p. 36). So, I decided to take a reflexive path by embarking on a multi-sited and mobile ethnographic approach. This approach allows me to observe participants' practices and to inquire about their manifold experiences of mobile communicative interactions and, subsequently, to develop “thick descriptions” of those practices and experiences as ways that participants manage their relationships.

First of all, I employed a methodological design based on a multi-sited ethnography, which makes it possible to observe the embeddedness of mobile technologies within the complexity of everyday life (Burrell, 2009; Hine, 2009; Hine, 2007a, 2007b). Multi-sited

ethnography is a way to follow “the thread of cultural process” (Marcus, 1995, p. 97) within which “the object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated” (p. 106). It is an appropriate method when looking at the complexities of individuals’ everyday communicative practices, which move fluidly between mediated and unmediated contexts, and when we are interested in the minutiae of everyday interpersonal and social interactions, as they happen on the move or in contexts of immobility. A multi-sited approach to ethnography allows us to describe the entanglement of physical movements, representations, and practices that have traceable histories and geographies (Cresswell, 2010). It facilitates close-up observation of intersecting and overlapping social flows because it allows us to carry out research across connected sites. Hence, it is a more appropriate way to register mobile communicative practices that entail studying people’s movements and personal interactions on the move.

This approach also took into account different spaces beyond the physical sites of traditional ethnography, as a way to follow the social phenomenon. From an emic approach based on Burrell’s arguments (2009), the field site was understood as a network that included “physical, virtual and imagined spaces” (p. 181) composed by “fixed and moving points including spaces, people, and objects” (p. 189). Approaching the field site as a network of online, offline, and hybrid spaces (de Souza e Silva, 2006a) allowed me to see social processes as a continuous space in which the connections of points and flows were key elements for the analysis without presupposing social hierarchies or physical boundaries. Thus, the field site was understood as “the point of origin, the destination(s), the space between, and what moves or is carried along these paths” (Burrell, 2009, p. 190).

As a result, through the lens of Burrell's network-driven approach, the fieldwork included mediated and unmediated interactions as well as interactions that happened within hybrid spaces that were "built by the connection of mobility and communication, and materialized by social networks developed simultaneously in physical and digital spaces" (de Souza e Silva, 2006a, p. 265). Such interactions happened on the move but were also situated within temporal and spatial emplacements (the workplace, the university campus, and others). The fieldwork also included diverse social contexts and social groups in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of the social phenomenon under study (boyd, 2008).

In addition, a mobile ethnography, framed by the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006), facilitated a more integrative methodological approach that enabled me to consider different kinds of movements, material immobilities, and people's interactions beyond what the limits of the "metaphysics of presence" (Büscher et al. 2011)—that is, without assuming physical presence and static place are the "real" bases of social experience.

Mobile social media use, enabled by the use of mobile devices, responds to individuals' desires to keep connected with their social networks (boyd, 2011; Turkle, 2011; Pew, 2011; boyd & Ellison, 2007). Just to be clear, when I talk about social networks I am not referring to "social networking services" such as Facebook, but rather to social networks in a sociological sense—that is, the ways people relate to each other, the connections individuals establish, and the ties through which they construct their identity and participate within social interactions. Specifically, "A social network is a set of relations among network members —be they people, organizations, or nations" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012, location 674). Social networks may be extended and diversified through to the use of technology,

which in turn is reshaping the ways people relate to others (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), but the fundamental component is the social relation, not the technologies that may or may not mediate its expression.

As Urry (2004) reminds us, social networks are far more complex than just nodes and links because they involve combinations of mobilities and structured material *immobilities*. Thus, from the general standpoint of mobile communication, traditional approaches have been challenged to put the issue of mobility at the center of discussion, calling us to rethink studies of space and place beyond the dichotomy of sedentarist perspectives and deterritorialized approaches (Cresswell, 2010; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Wiley et. al, 2010). While sedentarist approaches focus on physical boundaries as a way to examine the social phenomenon, taking for granted received spatial categories such as community or nation, deterritorialized approaches overemphasize fluidity and liquidity as a pervasive condition of societies. For example, traditional approaches to mobility research were focused on transportation, examining travel patterns while considering places as end points and as fixed containers of people's experience.

Arguing that today everything is on the move, Sheller and Urry (2006) criticized the a-mobility of earlier research in social sciences, which "failed to examine how the spatialities of social life presuppose (and frequently involve conflict over) both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, person to person, event to event" (p. 208). In this sense, the mobilities paradigm understands places as part of network of connections and movements instead of seeing them as fixed geographical containers. The mobilities paradigm also accounts for differential capacities for movement and the ways in which

mobility is embedded in immobile infrastructures that organize and regulate people's movements and activities. Furthermore, mobilities research emphasizes the analysis of how people move with the help of a myriad of materials and technologies; a mobilities approach does not just consider physical movements, but also movements enhanced by technologies, as is the case in the focus of this study, on individuals' interactions and relationship management through mobile social media.

I explore the embeddedness of mobile communication technologies in social and physical contexts, seeing the richness of individuals' communicative practices as they take place on the move and in spaces in which the boundaries between online and offline realities are no longer clear. Hence, this study describes the ways participants actually engage in personal relationships and communicative practices that occur on the move and in contexts of temporal emplacements, in co-located face-to-face interactions as well as geographically distant interpersonal exchanges, and within broader social contexts that include different media. Framed by the above depicted theoretical approaches, I chose methods that allowed me to capture how online and offline interactions are increasingly entwined (boyd & Ellison, 2007; de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Benford & Giannachi, 2011; Taylor, 2006; Turkle, 2008; Orgad et al., 2009) and how mobile social-network practices blend public and private or interpersonal and mass communication, transforming the private nature of relationship management behaviors (Bryant et al., 2011). Thus, I employed traditional ethnographic methods (participant observation and in-depth interviews), but I also developed several innovative methodological techniques. I took the new mobilities paradigm as the theoretical and methodological framework for examining the interdependencies of differential mobilities

that produce social life and for adopting the mobile methods I used to gather data (Büscher, Urry & Witchger, 2011; Sheller and Urry, 2006).

## **DATA COLLECTION**

To gather data, I employed traditional ethnographic methods, such as in-depth interviews, and innovative mobile methodological techniques that work in naturally occurring contexts. One of them was the shadowing method, a type of mobile participant observation (Jirón, 2011; Marcus, 1995) that also included a photo-voice interview and a mobile interview as part of its execution. In conjunction with my interviews, I also applied a small questionnaire to collect basic demographic data about participants' socioeconomic conditions, as well as their educational and socio-cultural backgrounds.

First, in-depth and semi-structured interviews (see the interview script in Appendix A) were conducted to develop an understanding of the ways in which users' motivations guide their communicative practices in mobile social networks and their daily interactions. In these interviews, I encouraged users to discuss their personal histories and their choices of mobile social networks, as well as how they came to use them, and why and in which circumstances they used one or another. The interview format was developed based on Ferguson's (2011) argument that interviews allow the capture of a wide range of emotions and embodied experiences. A semi-structured interview was chosen because it would be open to new topics that could appear during the conversation and had not been considered in the initial instrument. As Christensen (2009) claims, semi-structured interviews "are especially suitable when the intention is to explore everyday practices that are not well

understood, and to uncover new connections that the researcher has not considered beforehand” (p. 437). Thus, my original interview script was a guide for the initial conversations, but it was flexible enough to admit new topics and questions as respondents introduced new themes I had not considered in advance. Through the elaboration of their own experiences, participants added new issues beyond what I had originally included in the original interview script.

These interviews also included a “guided tour” of participants’ online presence—a section in which participants were asked to look at their profiles on the social media they used most frequently and to reflect on their self-presentation, their management of privacy concerns, and why and with whom they interacted and shared specific information. Reviewing the participants’ social-media profiles with them allowed me to understand mobile social networking from their own point of view: which strategies of coordination they used, the ways they experienced their technologically mediated interpersonal interactions intertwined with their unmediated interactions, and the motivations they had for updating personal information and sharing content through their mobile social-network profiles.

Considering that in the new mobilities paradigm “methods will need to be on the move” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 217), along with traditional in-depth interviews I employed a “shadowing” method. Shadowing is a mobile participant-observation technique (Jirón, 2011; Marcus, 1995), whose “procedure is to follow and stay with the movements of a particular group of initial subjects” (Marcus, 1995, p. 106). Within mobile ethnographies, the shadowing method—following and observing participants as they move in their daily routines (Jirón, 2011)—is an innovative technique that allows the researcher to witness how

participants experienced and give meaning to mobile social networking practices in relation to their face-to-face interactions and everyday routines and social practices, as they moved and connected with others. "Following the people" (Marcus, 1995, p. 106) makes it possible to better capture participants' communicative practices on the move (as well as within fixed physical locations) and their efforts to manage their relationships.

Specifically, shadowing the different and intermittent movements of participants and their daily social interactions allowed me to more closely observe the complex ways individuals actually experienced their everyday life, as well as the ways in which technology was woven into those social contexts. As Büscher et al. (2011) establish, "Especially significant in observation is to see how people bring about face-to-face relationships with other people, places and events. Mobility involves occasioned, intermittent face-to-face conversations and meetings within certain places at certain moments, encounters that seem obligatory to some or all of the participants." (p. 7) Therefore, observing mobile bodies also allowed me to see how individuals developed face-to-face relationships with other people in different places and in different moments, facilitating the development of in-depth descriptions of social practices through a "co-present immersion" (Büscher et al., 2011) in participants' natural settings.

As part of the shadowing process, I took pictures of participants' social interactions (both online and offline) in order to develop a follow-up photographic interview using the photo-voice technique (Hergenrather et al., 2009). This method allowed the informants to describe the recorded situation and reflect about it once the observation period had finished. In conjunction with the initial interview and the shadowing method (Jirón, 2011), the follow-

up photo-voice interview allowed me to understand participants' own reflections about the ways they developed face-to-face and mediated relationships with others in different places and in different moments, making possible thick descriptions of their social practices from their particular emic points of view. This helped me to explain how participants experienced and gave meaning to mobile social-networking practices in relation to their collocated interactions and everyday routines while moving and connecting with others.

Photo-voice interviews became an opportunity to hear my participants reflecting on the moments they experienced during the observation. By seeing and describing the scenes portrayed on pictures, informants came back to those moments and reflected on them, describing their specific motivations, the feelings involved in their social interactions, and their uses of social media and mobile devices. They explained to me in detail their own interpretations of those experiences, which contributed to developing a more holistic view of both my participants and the social situations they were observing and describing.

Also within the shadowing process, I used mobile interviews (Brown & Durrheim, 2009), which entailed a more naturalistic approach to research participants' social contexts. By conducting a conversation on the move, the interview was "partially 'conducted' by the (moving) situation/space rather than by the interviewer's questions" (p. 913). This helped to attenuate the power relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, a dynamic that is commonly produced in traditional interviews because the researcher directs the conversation. By contrast, in the mobile interview, conversations were "conducted" by the participants' specific situations and by the actual environments where their experiences happened. The mobile interview made the process of shadowing easier and more complete,

and it helped attenuate the intrusive nature of shadowing, facilitating a discussion of different issues as they emerged as part of the activities performed by my participants.

In order to register much detail as possible and to construct a more complete portrait of my participants, I wrote field notes, interpretive portraits of my participants, and memos. When possible, I wrote my field notes at the same time I was observing my informant, using a basic shadowing script (see Appendix B). However, most of the time I wrote my notes as soon as I left the participant, once the observation period was over. I also composed interpretive portraits of most of my participants as a way to identify them, drawing from specific aspects of their life trajectories and the social, cultural and economic aspects of their lived experiences, as they were related to their specific mobile social media practices (see Appendix C for an example). These narrative descriptions were part of my process of writing memos, which allowed me to see the relations between these portraits and the categories that were emerging from the analysis of the interviews. This process helped me place interview data into situational and social contexts. From the initial stages of my research process, I also wrote numerous memos to register interesting aspects I wanted to consider in subsequent interviews, to define emerging categories, and to record my own reflections about the research process. As Charmaz (2006) asserts, “Memos provides ways to compare data, to compare ideas about the codes, and to direct further data-gathering” (p. 12). Therefore, memos also enabled me to register my experiences of shadowing and mobile interviewing people, including those challenges I found and what I learned from them.

## **SAMPLING**

Using these methods, I conducted a comparative analysis that included 36 young adults—20 Chileans and 16 Americans. All participants signed written informed consent forms. In Chile, I conducted the interviews in different places, wherever the participants preferred to meet. I interviewed people in their workplaces, at coffee shops, and in the university library. Only one interview was conducted in my own university office. In the United States, I interviewed people at coffee shops and in the university libraries. With both Chilean and U.S. participants, my interviews ranged from 55 to 120 minutes. All were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Before engaging in fieldwork with my 36 participants, I conducted several pilot interviews, and I shadowed several acquaintances in Chile and in the United States. This allowed me to test my interview protocol and to finalize the script for participant observation, once the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board had approved those protocols. These preliminary interviews allowed me to discover some initial themes, which I explored more deeply in subsequent interviews as my data collection continued.

I conducted fieldwork in Concepción, Chile, and in Raleigh, North Carolina, U.S.A. While the fieldwork in Chile was conducted at two different times (May-June of 2012 and January-March of 2014), the fieldwork in Raleigh was conducted during a single period (between July and December of 2013). All participants were interviewed, but only some participated in the shadowing process (12 in Chile; 9 in the United States). By doing fieldwork at different moments, I gained experience in the field sites, which helped guide the

way I engaged in subsequent periods of observation. Additionally and most important, it allowed me to observe some relevant changes in relation to mobile social-media practices, especially in the case of Chile, where the periods of observations were a little more than a year apart.

Because my aim was to develop a more holistic understanding of mobile practices of social media use among young people, I defined some criteria that allow me to select a sample that included young adult people coming from diverse social contexts and social groups. Thus, the participants, both Chileans and Americans, were selected using a criterion sample (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). To recruit a diverse group, a variety of participants were selected based on their age (25-34 years old), the diversity of their economic and educational levels, their place of residence (Concepción, Chile and Raleigh, North Carolina), and their mobile phone use (both smartphone users and feature-phone users). As a result, participants were defined as young adults, 25-34, living in Concepción, Chile, or Raleigh, North Carolina, in the United States; individuals that belonged to different educational levels and socio-economic strata, and people who used any type of mobile phone.

To recruit my participants, I used a chain-of-referral technique. Thus, I asked my own contacts to refer me to potential participants not previously known to me, after which the initial participants helped me to recruit the rest of interviewees. Each interview was conducted in a place chosen by the participant according to his or her availability. All the interviews were also audio-recorded and then transcribed for later analysis. For the shadowing process, in general I accompanied my participants either in the morning (from the time they left their house or arrived at their workplace, until 1:00 p.m. or lunch time) or in

the afternoon (from 3:00 pm, until they returned home or left their workplace in the evening) on a regular weekday or weekend day. In Chile, I carried out 12 shadowing observations and mobile interviews; in the United States, I completed nine.

At the end of the study, my Chilean interviewees included 8 women and 12 men, while American interviewees included 10 women and 6 men. My Chilean participants' ages ranged from 27 to 34 years old, whereas the age of my American informants ranged from 26 to 34 years old.

In the following chapters, I use some of my participants' quotes to present my results and illustrate findings. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality, I have employed pseudonyms. Each pseudonym reflects the participant's gender, and along with the pseudonyms, I include their actual ages and country-level location.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

A Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) guided my entire process of data collection and analysis, whose aim was to construct an emergent theory anchored in the gathered data. Drawing from Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach to Grounded Theory, I began my data-gathering and data-analysis stages understanding that "Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 45). Therefore, Grounded Theory shaped the ways I collected and analyzed my data during my research project.

Charmaz's work on Grounded Theory critiques the positivist approach of Glaser and Strauss and takes a more constructivist perspective that "assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate" (p. 187). This first recognizes the impossibility of separating the researcher from the context under study because she is also part of the process of gathering and analyzing data. Second, this approach recognizes the co-construction of reality. According to this view, "any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). Therefore, data analysis and writing become an exercise of interpretation of the phenomena under study.

Using this approach, I constructed theory inductively, based on the data collected, in my fieldwork, which included interviews, field notes, interpretive portraits of my participants, and memos. Beginning in the earlier stages of data gathering, I started exploring data looking for initial codes and analytic ideas that could direct subsequent data collection and analysis. I read my data closely because initial codes could emerge from a single word or phrase. Within this process, I named segments of data, defining initial codes and identifying key issues mentioned by my participants during the interviews.

Data analysis was a recursive process, in which I moved back and forth while collecting and analyzing data, while also writing about initial findings. When possible, in vivo coding was used to define categories and codes from the actual words that participants themselves repeated and used to describe their practices and experiences (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Drawing on the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I defined similarities and differences and established some analytic directions. Then, focused coding

was used to select the most relevant earlier codes and to begin developing emergent categories.

Data analysis did not follow a linear process from initial to focused coding. Rather, codes and categories as well as their definitions were part of an iterative and ongoing process of change while the fieldwork continued and added new data, which altered and produced new categories and codes from participants' descriptions, their interpersonal interactions, and the mobile communicative practices I was observing. Before code reduction, I counted 57 categories and subcategories; these were later regrouped according to the ways they related and the similarities found among them. In order to facilitate this entire process of coding, coding reduction, and linking of categories, I used a software program for qualitative analysis, Atlas.ti. This software facilitated the process of discovering the themes that connected different categories and subcategories.

The data, broken apart during initial coding, were brought back together when I reexamined and interpreted my coded data. Through the reexamination of coded data and identified categories, it was possible to find relations and thematic similarities between multiple categories, which allowed me to define the three themes that are addressed in chapters four, five and six respectively. These three themes are 1) Social affordances and assemblages of distributed attention, 2) Mobile social-media practices and relationship management in everyday life, and 3) Assembling mobile social spaces in diverse geographies of technical development.

*Social affordances and assemblages of distributed attention:* This theme delves into the ways mobile social-media practices are integrated into individuals' everyday life. It includes three

categories: 1) *social affordances*, which accounts for the relevance that social contexts have within this assemblages and in individuals' decisions to use one medium or another, depending on the specific, unfolding circumstances; 2) *assemblages of distributed attention*, which refers to the idea that individuals move in a continuum of distributed attention across media, social ties, and activities; and 3) *social pressure* as part of social contexts, which describes how social pressures exerted by others influence access to and use of specific technologies, and therefore of specific practices.

*Mobile social media and relationship management in everyday life*: This theme refers to the ways mobile social-media interactions are woven into the management of relationships, which can be now managed through a wide variety of mobile and networked media, within mobile and situated contexts of everyday life. Two main categories were linked together within this theme: 1) *mobile social-media practices and daily interactions*, which outlines mobile social-media practices as they are performed in a daily basis as a way to manage personal relationships; and 2) *mobile social-media practices as multi-activity involvements in everyday life*, which describe the ways mobile social-media practices intersect with and are performed amidst other everyday activities.

*Assembling mobile social spaces in diverse geographies of technical development*: This theme is focused on the comparative approach made between Chilean and American contexts in relation to individuals' mobile practices of social media use. This theme linked together two categories: 1) *new practices as control-cost strategies*, and 2) *the relevance of social contexts*. The first category describes those strategies individuals adopt in order to reduce

telecommunication costs, and the second category highlights the advantages to look at specific practices in specific contexts.

To sum up, using Grounded Theory, I worked inductively to develop a theoretical framework to (micro)describe and elucidate how and why my participants integrated mobile communicative practices into their daily interpersonal interactions to manage their relationships. Those tentative explanations, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, emerged from an ongoing process of interaction with the research participants.

### **SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT DATA-GATHERING DECISIONS**

Shadowing my participants throughout the morning or afternoon of their everyday routines allowed me to see the ways they engage in everyday interactions and manage their personal relationships in different contexts and using different media. Nonetheless, this was not an easy process. The intrusive nature of shadowing was at times an uncomfortable experience for my participants and for me as well. I could sometimes see the tension of my participants during the shadowing observation, and I myself sometimes felt I was unsettling my informants' everyday routines with my presence.

While I was carrying out a pilot-test of the following method, I was concerned about how this data-gathering technique could impact participants' behaviors and modify their routines; I wondered how I myself intervened my participants' regular activities and physical contexts. As the pilot period advanced, I soon realized I needed to look for a kind of solution that would allow me to reduce the tensions produced by the intrusive exercise of shadowing people. And the solution emerged almost by itself. While I was observing one of my

volunteers during the testing period, I found myself asking him questions about what was happening in the situation and asking for more information about his specific regular contexts, activities, and motivations. Thus, I supplemented the shadowing method with situational conversations that gradually turned into mobile interviews, since I was asking questions as my participants were on the move and experiencing different circumstances. That experience was very productive and made me realize that those situational conversations had a positive impact on the process of following people, reducing the tensions produced by the observation.

As a result, I decided to include a mobile interview in all the subsequent shadowing encounters. Two reasons directed my decision. First, as a situational conversation, the mobile interview helped relax the interaction between my informant and me, attenuating the intrusive nature of the shadowing. This made the process of shadowing easier and more complete because it allowed me to observe my participants, but also interact with them, as Jirón (2011) recommends: “Getting closer to experiences requires moving with people both physically and in interaction (in dialogue and embodied interaction)” (p. 36). Therefore, I had the opportunity to hear from my participants about different issues as they emerged within the particular circumstances and activities of a given moment.

Secondly, I continued using the mobile interview because it gave me the opportunity to capture some contextual details to which I did not have access in the single observation. By using these situational conversations, I was able to ask questions when something relevant happened with my participants, which allowed me to discover some of the meanings involved in specific situations, in my participants’ own voices. For example, the morning I

followed Mark (32, Raleigh), one of my volunteers for the pilot shadowing, I accompanied him to his workplace. At the time of my fieldwork, he worked at a huge software company, whose privacy policies prevented him from receiving any guests at his office. So, to be nice, he decided to work in one of the company cafeterias that morning, so I could be with him while he was working there. That place was a very quiet environment with very few people around. There was a lot of physical space available and very soft classic music sounded on the background. It was almost 9:20 and Mark was already looking at his laptop screen and working. He had to finish a task before noon, so he was very concentrated on the information that appeared on his laptop.

Although he seemed comfortable and was working with great concentration, it bothered me that we were not in his actual office. That led me to consider whether that morning was really a typical one for Mark. It was indeed his place of work, but we were not in his actual office. Therefore, I felt I was missing a lot of contextual details, such as the interactions with his officemates or other colleagues. This concern moved me to pose some questions about the context I was not able to observe directly, so I asked Mark about his actual office, his officemates, and the interactions he regularly had with other people within those contexts.

Mark's case illustrates how the researcher's position and the methods of inquiry need to be reflexively adapted. The adaptation of my data-gathering method was precisely what allowed me to gain a richer access to my participants' experiences and practices. Participant observation or the shadowing process becomes easier when a situational conversation is established. The mobile interview reduced the stress of the situation and allowed my

participants to reflect on their own activities and the reasons that motivated them. My informants were able to relax and continue with their routines while commenting them.

As new mobile communicative practices emerged around the convergent use of social media and mobile communication technologies, the selection of methods of gathering and analyzing data has been complicated. Precisely in this chapter, I first detailed those methodological decisions I made in order to better capture those mobile practices of communication and their implications in the ways my participants manage their relationships. Then, I described data collection and analysis processes, to finish with some reflections about the innovative techniques I used to gather data. In the following chapters, I address my research questions by (micro)describing and interpreting my participants' mobile social-media practices as they are performed as part of their management of relationships.

## CHAPTER 4

### SOCIAL AFFORDANCES AND ASSEMBLAGES OF DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION

This chapter addresses my first and second research questions, regarding two related aspects of individuals' mobile social-media practices. First, it describes the modes through which mobile communication technologies and social media practices converge within individuals' everyday interactions. Second, it examines the participants' motivations for the management of relationships in different ways and through different media. Particularly, this chapter employs micro-analysis to describe the ways individuals' involvement in a social context determines his or her decision to use specific technologies and media while discarding others, especially when managing personal relationships on the move or in pauses of movement.

Traditional, more technologically determinist analyses of media use have highlighted technological affordances as the main motivators for using one technology or another (Baym, 2010; Jung, Qiu & Kim, 2001). No doubt the capabilities and constraints of a technology influence its use, but this cannot be a complete picture, especially when considering the variety of social situations individuals get involved in and the variety of media they can use for the same or similar capabilities (Baym, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). As Kim et al. (2007) put it, "Different media may be used in similar, overlapping, and different ways, depending on their technical features, users' communication purposes, user and partner characteristics, and social contexts." (p. 1187-1188). My ethnographic fieldwork showed how important the combination of these elements is for the ways in which specific situations unfold, as participants make decisions to use one means of communication or another

depending on the specific social dynamics. In this sense, “Not only must people choose which parts of their networks to access, the proliferation of communication devices means they must also choose how to connect with others: meet in person, phone, email, text, tweet, or post on Facebook” (Rainie & Wellman, 2012, Kindle location 602-603). As a result, within increasingly complex media ecologies, individuals choose one medium or another depending on their specific social contexts and circumstances.

Within the context of a wide variety of media, I found necessary to take a more holistic perspective and recognize that there are different forces intervening in an individual’s decision to use a specific technology or medium. Individuals choose to use one medium or another based on social situations they engage in, rather than only considering specific technological affordances. This fact supported my methodological decision to look at individuals’ mobile practices of social media use instead of focusing on the use of specific mobile communication technologies and/or specific social media.

Taking such an approach requires seeing technology as just one component of a wider collection of forces intervening in a process; technologies are part of *assemblages* (*agencements*) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Wiley, Moreno, & Sutko, 2012; Wiley, Sutko & Moreno, 2010; Wise, 2012) that are depicted as a “a dynamic, contingent, and expressive articulation of objects, affects, properties and meanings” (Wise, 2012, p. 159). These assemblages posit distributed agency across individual bodies, devices, networks, and spaces in a continuous process of rearticulating their components’ capacity to act. From the concept of “assemblages”, my analysis examines the articulation between micro-assemblages of individuals, such as their mobile technologies and immediate context, and macro-

assemblages like technology infrastructures, telecommunication policy and mobile telephony market, and how those assemblages define different media ecologies and, therefore, become a terrain for different mobile communicative practices and relationship management.

For the purpose of this study, *immediate context* is understood as the individuals' immediate physical, social, and technical surroundings, starting with the individual's geographical locations and mobility, his or her closest social and socio-economic ties, and his or her media connections through mobile devices and other media technologies (see Wiley, Moreno, & Sutko, 2012; Wiley, Sutko, & Moreno, 2010). This immediate context or micro perspective is articulated to a secondary tier of assemblages including weak social ties, labor assemblages, social institutions (church, universities, etc.) and to a tertiary tier that would include nation-based assemblages such as telecommunication policies, mobile telephony markets, and others. Nevertheless, these "tiers" are a somewhat arbitrary distinction because the scope and reach of networks and assemblages is something that must be determined empirically, by following the connections that link one assemblage to another. That more complex analytical challenge has not been fully resolved in this study, and it must be noted as a focus for future research.

Drawing on the concept of assemblage, I defined the first theme that emerged from the analysis and organization of my data: **Social affordances and assemblages of distributed attention**. As noted earlier, this theme includes three categories that capture the ways that mobile social-media practices are integrated into an individual's everyday life: 1) *social affordances*, which accounts for the relevance of social contexts within an assemblages and within an individual's decision to use one medium or another depending on

their specific unfolding circumstances; 2) *assemblages of distributed attention*, which refers to the idea that individuals move in a continuum of distributed attention across media, social ties, and activities; and 3) *social pressure* as an element of social contexts, a category that describes how social pressures exerted by others influence access to and use of specific technologies, and therefore specific practices. I advance throughout the chapter comparing Chilean and American cases starting from a micro perspective centered on each participant and relating this to the multiplicity of connections that compose different assemblages (secondary and tertiary) that contribute to conform a particular configuration of mobile-technology practices.

#### **SOCIAL AFFORDANCES**

Social affordances is a concept that has been used in ecological psychology to refer to the perceptual cues that, in a given context, guide individuals' reactions, activities, or interactions (Loveland, 1991; Valenti & Gold, 1991). Drawing from this understanding, I use the concept of social affordances to describe the ways social contexts give individuals cues that influence their decisions to use one or another medium to interact with others and, thus, the modes in which they perform specific mobile social-media practices to manage personal relationships. Social-context characteristics, technological affordances, interactants' features, and communicative purposes are all aspects that influence the selection of a specific means of communication; those are all constitutive parts of different assemblages within which individuals' mobile practices of social media use differ depending on how those aspects intersect in a given situation.

As descriptive statistics have established, both in Chile and in the United States Facebook is the most highly used social medium (Daie, 2013, 2014; Duggan et al., 2015). But beyond the numbers that count for any Facebook account open, my analysis reflects on how specific assemblages define mobile practices of social media use in ways that do not necessarily follow this trend. In this regard, Mattie's case is a good example of how social affordances are at play in the conformation of specific assemblages, and therefore particular mobile social-media practices. Mattie (30, Raleigh) is a mother of a two-year boy with whom she stays home full-time. While she takes care of her son and does house chores, she always keeps her smart phone in close reach in case she receives a message or phone call. Through her mobile phone she keeps connected while moving through different spaces of her home. Mattie uses different social media on her mobile phone, but the one she uses most frequently is focused on church management: a social media site called "The City." The City is similar to Facebook, but it is distinctively oriented to people who belong to church-related communities. A church can have its own organization on The City, and within that organization, users can establish their profile page and identify their affiliation with the church. Users of The City are able to upload a profile picture, update their "About Me" page, subscribe to groups that they want to be a part of and keep up with, and befriend and interact with those who are also on The City from the same church.

As Mattie described, she is probably on The City more than she is on Facebook because all of her friends attend the church and are part of that social-media site.

Accordingly, Mattie's domestic assemblage, which involves her home contexts, her social ties and the desire to be connected, as well as her belonging to a local religious community,

intervenes in the ways she uses and prefers a specific social medium over others. Within this assemblage, Mattie's ability to act or to stay connected to her church community is improved because of her mobile social-media interactions have been incorporated into the private spaces of her home, where she must spend most of her time as she cares for her child. Through the mobile phone, Mattie stays permanently connected to The City social-media site while moving around her house. This example illustrates how cultural differences influence Mattie's mediated interactions: "they affect how people communicate and how their messages are perceived. The ways people communicate in these media have in turn shaped the media themselves" (Baym, 2010, p. 71). Thus, Mattie's social contexts shape and are shaped by her mediated communication.

In this particular case, Mattie's assemblages linked to her religious practices shape her social-media preferences and, consequently, her technology-enabled interactions. Furthermore, Mattie's example shows the role that offline socio-cultural relations and identities play for online connections. As a religious person, Mattie looks for opportunities to participate in her church community and to stay connected as much as she can. With time constraints because of her role as a stay-at-home mother, her mobile access to The City becomes a means to stay connected to her social groups and her religious community.

Taking care of her child and the household chores requires Mattie to move around the different spaces of her house continually. Within this domestic mobility, in which Mattie hardly stands still for a moment, it would be very difficult for her to stay connected with her church community using a desktop computer or even a laptop. Indeed, connecting from a personal computer would require her to stay in a fixed point within the house, and she cannot

do that because she needs to keep moving to be attentive to her son's own movements around different spaces of the house. In this scenario, the portability and connectivity provided by her mobile phone and availability of The City through social media allow Mattie to connect and interact with others, managing at a distance her social bonds with the local church community to which she belongs.

Like Mattie, Allison (29, Chapel Hill) does not use Facebook much either, but she does have a Facebook account. She also has Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn and Google+ accounts, although she uses none of them regularly. She just keeps these accounts so she can be "found" by others. As she says, "I don't really use them. I mean I made them just as a means for people to find me, but I don't use them." However, the situation is different with location-aware social media, such as Yelp, which she uses very frequently. In fact, she highly values the location-aware affordances of her phone in combination with Yelp because she is part of a musical group, so she often travels outside the city. In these cases, she searches on Yelp for information about places she has not visited before and also about her routine surroundings, searching for specific locations and services.

Yelp is a location-based social network (LBSN), founded in 2004 to allow users to search for local businesses like restaurants, coffee shops, gas stations, mechanics, and many others. It also allows users to find events and thematic lists of services and to talk with other Yelp users. This LBSN works as a recommendation service based on user-generated reviews that rate different businesses within their physical surroundings. By the end of 2014, it had approximately 135 million monthly unique visitors, and it counted over 71 million local reviews ("About Yelp," 2015).

Allison's use of mobile social media is influenced by her micro-assemblages of specific physical contexts while moving through different physical locations. As she tells it:

I went to a tour with the band in 2010, and it was difficult because we had a GPS [Global Positioning System], but the GPS was like not that great, and then you have to try to figure out where we can eat, where was gas station we can sleep at, and all that kind of stuff like at the library or somewhere else with Wi-Fi. We had to get parked and get out and do the Wi-Fi and figure it out. Then, I went on tour again in 2011 and we used Yelp on the go, and plug-in for directions like on the go.

Right now, I mean I'm not travelling so much, but I still use Yelp, I mean I used it this morning because I needed to buy some spray paint and I was at Target, and they didn't have any, and so I put in art supply store, and I found out there is a Michael's like in the same parking lot, so I went over to Michael's and got the spray paint. [...] I still use Yelp and I still use like everything I have. I mean, I got more used to it and more dependent on it that was at first. I mean, if I'm gonna go run an errand, I use Yelp; and I have left Yelp reviews for few places, which is kind of a social media, but it is a social media with strangers, but I've had a few really good experiences in restaurants and like one auto-parts was really awesome test, so I've left positive messages on Yelp. It's not a daily thing, but I do use Yelp pretty regularly.

As I discussed in chapter two, the use of location-aware technologies, like Yelp, gives users different access and ways of experiencing places (de Souza & Frith, 2012; Dourish & Bell, 2007; Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011; Sutko & de Souza, 2011). As the above quote demonstrates, Allison's use of Yelp allows her to cope the complexity of unknown places through the possibility of accessing remote information and, therefore, selectively visualize her surroundings according to what she needs to find.

Allison's access to these "net localities" (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011), these socially constituted physical spaces linked to networks of information, positions her in a physical space, but at the same time, it places her in association with digital information and physically distant people. This in turn gives her a different experience of the places she is visiting for the first time and even of those places near her house where she regularly moves.

At the beginning, Allison used Yelp to navigate unknown places and to become more familiar with those places by identifying nearby locations. However, she now continues using these location-aware technologies even for navigating known places while she is moving through her routine activity of running errands. As she described, her use of Yelp is even more intense now within Raleigh-Triangle area each time she needs to buy something or search for a specific service, which reflects the ways mobile social-media use is highly embedded in her regular activities.

Allison regularly checks Yelp maps and business reviews, which suggests that she makes qualitative judgments about businesses and makes buying decisions based on her ability to associate those physical locations with digital information available through this LBSN. When Allison is planning a trip or travelling to unknown places, her movements on those new places are, in some ways, defined by the reviews she finds on Yelp. And the same happens within known places. As previous research has stated, LBSN (Yelp in this case) influence the ways individuals explore their surroundings and decide where to go in a given moment and within unknown and known places (de Souza e Silva, 2006b; de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012). Therefore, Yelp, as a location-aware interface, facilitates different forms of fragmented perceptions of public spaces: by attaching information to places, it produces a variety of locations of consumption that are differently experienced by users of location-aware social media (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011). As the mobilities paradigm makes apparent, places and experiences are dynamically constructed, and in this case, the construction comes from the intersection of physical (specific locations), digital (remote information) and social (other people's comments and reviews) elements.

In addition, when Allison is satisfied with a service, she is likely to leave a review of on this recommendation-based social medium. Allison's decision to write a review about a service, and to tell others about the features of that specific service, is triggered by the quality she perceives. While the mobile phone facilitate the writing of the review, the quality perceived is what motivated her to leave her comments and tell others about her experience. Through her association to remote information, Allison's access to those businesses and services is completely different from the experience of those people who do not use location-based social networks. This supports de Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) arguments about how location-aware interfaces produce differential spaces because their users are able to selectively visualize their surroundings, so they have a radically different and more individualized experience of public spaces from those who do not.

Like Mattie and Allison in the U.S., Jaime (32, Concepción) in Chile does not use Facebook so much. However, he is a frequent user of Waze, a location-based social network that allows its users to track city traffic conditions, services available throughout the highways, and the presence of police on the streets. In Chile in general location-aware social media are not highly used, and Waze is an exception, especially amongst male drivers, who like to use it to keep informed about the whereabouts of policemen and police roadside checks as a way to avoid being fined for driving over the speed limit. These specific assemblages define the use of Waze by drivers, who want to exceed the speed limit and not be caught by the police.

Another example of social affordances is the preference of using laptop computers instead of the mobile phone during business meetings or classes. Again, the reasons why

individuals prefer to use their computers instead of their phones is more related to social exigencies because being on the phone during a meeting is more likely to be interpreted as a non- work-related activity, and a more personal communication activity. These interpretations are related to historical associations regarding the mobile phone, which has been identified as a personal device and, therefore, linked to more personal interactions and activities (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2001; Ling, 2004; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Ito, Okabe & Matsuda, 2005). Additionally, mobile-phone involvements demand greater levels of attention, which could distract or interrupt the proper conduct of a meeting.

By contrast, using a laptop allows users to maintain, or at least simulate, attention to the meeting. Moreover, computers have traditionally been associated with work-related activities. Using a computer is therefore interpreted as being occupied with work-related tasks, instead of using that time for more personal activities like checking social media accounts, even though the use of laptops does not guarantee a focus on work instead of more personal issues.

Choosing one medium or another according to social contexts is also mentioned by Ash (27, Chapel Hill), who uses public transportation to daily commute. This daily activity motivated her to get a smart phone as a way to have the bus schedule at hand, to read while on the bus, and to check her social-media accounts. Certainly, technological capabilities are important in this type of decisions, but what triggered Ash's decision was her routine dynamics and how she moved through the city where she lives:

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): The Chapel Hill train has online count down, so you can see like how soon the next bus is going to come; and I take the bus to work, and actually I took the bus when I was at school, so it was the easier way to check and see when the next bus is coming wherever I was.

Ash's case does not fit with the standard in relation to the modes of transportation in the U.S., a country characterized by a "car culture" (Miller, 2001), which entails specific patterns of mobility and communication marked by the use of car. Instead, Ash's practices of mobility and communication are marked by her modes of moving through the city using public transportation assemblages. In this regard, the case of Ash is similar to Tatiana's (28, Concepción) case in Chile, with the difference that in Chile the use of public transportation prevails over car ownership. Tatiana uses public transportation on a daily basis. The day I accompanied her, while she was on the bus she used that time to check her email and Facebook accounts, though she did not reply any message through them. But she did reply a message she got on WhatsApp. She told me she was participating in a WhatsApp group with some classmates for a course she was taking. One of her classmates created that group mostly to talk about class topics and organize their study-related activities. The morning I shadowed her, she continue participating in that WhatsApp conversation during the entire period of observation, even in her work place. Reflecting on Ash and Tatiana's individual assemblages, it is possible to see some similarities in their micro- assemblages even though each one of them moves within very different macro-assemblages as defined by their physical location within their respective countries.

The existence of similarities between users across countries demonstrates the relevance of approaching the study of mobile-communication practices by beginning the analysis "with a person and follow[ing] the flows and connections that articulate him or her to all the assemblages to which he or she is linked" (Wiley et al., 2012, p. 346). Those flows and connections allow us to distinguish similarities that might go unnoticed with a different

approach based on a national focus or based on the Global North / Global South dichotomy. Those approaches have frequently characterized certain practices as distinctive of (for example) “the developing world” (e.g., beeping, mobile sharing) when in fact similar practices are also found in the U.S., a “developed” country. A micro perspective based on the observation of individuals’ actual practices shows that mobile communication practices and the management of relationships are embedded in individuals’ specific assemblages, which in turn are connected to more macro levels of socio-technical assemblages, including, in this case, particular systems of transportation and Wi-Fi infrastructure within the participants’ respective cities of residence.

Somewhat similar is the case of Allison (29, Chapel Hill), whose use of the mobile phone is highly ingrained in her daily routines and particular micro assemblages:

Allison (29, Chapel Hill): I don’t check Facebook in the morning, but I like reading emails that somebody sent me; I record my weight in my Livestrong app, ahhh and then, I mean, I do also use the calendar function, so I look at my calendar and like today I saw ‘oh, yeah, I have an interview at 2 o’clock, I can’t forget that’, you know; and then, I look at tomorrow and be like ‘Okay, I have to work at 9, so today is an early bed night’, you know, it’s just to check the calendar.

These kinds of statements illustrate how the decision to use a media technology is not just the result of technological affordances but also of the articulation of different assemblages in which social context characteristics play a key role. Assemblages and their articulations situate an individual “as a subject within a complex web of geographical, social, and technological connections and spatial representations” (Wiley et al., 2012, p. 343). Within this web, subjects are linked “via networks and activities, to particular arrangements of bodies, technologies, and materials in order to do something” (p. 344). As a result, those

arrangements condition the ways subjects engage in different practices, in the case of this study, practices of mobile communication. For instance, Ash and Tatiana's case exemplifies how the use of social media through mobile devices is integrated into individuals' daily experiences of mobility, and at the time it underlines how "both features of technology and the practices that influence and emerge around technology" (Baym, 2010, p. 48) are significant for individuals' decisions about what mobile media and social networks they use at a given moment.

#### **ASSEMBLAGES OF DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION**

These collections of elements and factors within which individuals perform communicative practices, choose media, and engage in multiple activities constitute what Wise (2012) calls "assemblages of attention". These assemblages of attention allow us to understand that the distribution and formation of attention involves individuals' body and brain, but also diverse tools and the characteristics of social contexts. "It is a plane of attention not centered around just the perceptual field of an individual, but in devices scattered across our bodies and environments which note, recognize, and attend" (p. 169). Micro-level assemblages of each individual, such as their immediate contexts, are linked to macro-level assemblages of technology infrastructures, mobile-telephony markets, socio-economic structures, telecommunication policy and even the macro division between developed and developing countries. Within these constellations of assemblages, attention is a continuum; "attention is cognitive, habitual, and machinic, undergirded by affect" (p. 170). Drawing from this

understanding of attention, the following examples allow us to explore how the economy of attention works within different assemblages.

Thomas's (31, Raleigh) case represents a good example of assemblages of attention. His mobile social-media practices show how multiple factors combine in the dynamics of attention between communicative practices and the work-related activities he performs on a daily basis. He is one of the American informants, who explained to me why he prefers to use his phone to access social media while working even though he could access them through his desktop computer. His reasons are based on the desire to avoid leaving traces of social media use on the company's computer because he does not want to be tracked by his employer while he checks his social media accounts during work time. The case of Thomas shows how individuals are more aware and more strategic about their mobile social media uses as the newness of these technologies wears off. And those strategies are facilitated by the variety of means for communication individuals have available:

Thomas (31, Raleigh): I always use my phone to check my social media profiles at work. I do not like to use my office's computer because it is a company's computer and as such it keeps all the information of our Internet activities.

This was evident the day I accompanied Thomas during a regular morning, including some hours of his working morning. On that occasion, he interacted with his girlfriend several times, mainly through Facebook Messenger. Every time he connected to Facebook or sent a message through Facebook Messenger to his girlfriend, he preferred to use his mobile phone instead of the desktop computer on which he was working.

Licoppe and Figeac's (2015) concept of *multi-activity* sheds light on Thomas's practices. This concept refers to "the practical accomplishment of multiple streams of activity

with different temporal organizations, that alternate phases of engagement and disengagement in embodied performances” (p. 49). In this sense, Thomas’s activities are oriented toward the managing of “multiple and temporally heterogeneous involvements” (p. 60). Pauses in a given sequence of activities are oriented to a different involvement and then returned to the original activity in a process in which individuals manage their focus of attention changing from one domain of interest to another. While Licoppe and Figeac’s example of multi-activity focuses on mobile communication and transportation, Thomas’s case of multi-activity goes back and forth between mobile communication and work-related activities. Beyond the multi-activity approach that entails the separation of activities, looking at Thomas’s performance through the lens of assemblages of attention allows us to see his involvements in different activities as a continuum. His attention is a continuum that is dynamically distributed according to “objects, affects, properties and meanings” (Wise, 2012, p. 159). Thomas’s attention is distributed to one or another activity within a continuous process, depending on multiple factors. Those factors do not just include technology affordances and specific contexts, but also his personal affects or feelings. According to this, “the stratum of attention is not a plane of distraction, but that of inattention. Inattention is not simply the absence of attention but has its own gravitational points.” (Wise, 2012, p. 170) Those points of attraction, of intensity and valuation, emerge from the experience, chance, and desire that promote individuals’ actions. “It is a plane of attention not centered around just the perceptual field of an individual, but in devices scattered across our bodies and environments which note, recognize, and attend.” (p. 169)

To easily move between one activity and another, Thomas kept his smartphone on the desktop, in front of him, all the time I accompanied him. To some extent, he is always prepared to distribute the focus of his attention. As Thomas said, at any moment or when he finishes an activity and does not want to start another one because lunchtime is too close or because he is waiting for a response about earlier tasks, he often accesses social media sites and/or communicates with his girlfriend through Facebook Messenger, and always using his phone.

Like Thomas in Raleigh, Carlos (31) in Concepción also keeps connected to and interacts with his girlfriend throughout the day. But unlike Thomas, Carlos uses his company's computer to stay connected. Carlos is not worried about leaving traces of his use of social media during working hours because "everybody does the same" and therefore he perceives no potential negative consequences. Unlike Thomas's fear of the possibility of being fired for using social media while working, Carlos knows his job position is not in danger because of his social media use during working hours. From an economic difference, he takes advantage of the free Internet connection at work because that way he does not need to use his available data on his mobile phone plan. Thus, he reserves the mobile data for moments when he does not have a Wi-Fi connection to the Internet. As a result, he keeps Skype running in the background of his work computer, and through it he keeps in touch continuously with his girlfriend, who in turn is also connected from the place she works.

This comparison is relevant because even when Carlos and Thomas experience similar contexts, there are some differences in their respective micro-assemblages. One of these differences is related to their socioeconomic status, which is lower in the case of

Carlos, which leads him to avoid spending his available data because that would involve spending money. As he expressed, “It is a regular activity amongst my colleagues to stay connected and participate in social media conversations while we are at work”. As a result, Thomas’s and Carlos’s uses of mobile technologies and social media also differ due to their cultural differences. While Thomas is concerned about being fired for using social media at work, Carlos is not worried about it because his experience has shown him this is a regular practice among other Chilean workers. As a result, cultural differences exert some influences on the ways Thomas and Carlos use mobile social media, and, by extension, on their mobile practices of communication. This difference, enacted by specific assemblages derives from a macro-assemblage of labor. While Thomas contacts his girlfriend mostly for specific exchanges (questions, activities coordination), Carlos and his girlfriend engage in a continuous conversation during the entire day of work.

The case of Thomas does suggest that the other American participants also worry about connecting to social media on their workplaces and through their work computers. Thomas’s situation reflects his specific work-related assemblage, defined by the characteristics of the large and important technology company where he works. By contrast, many participants, both Americans and Chileans, reported connecting to social media while they are in their workplaces; they use those services during working hours to manage personal relationships and to take a break from their work routines. When I shadowed Rachel (29, Raleigh) in Raleigh, at her workplace, she kept chatting with her next-door office colleague through Facebook Messenger. Even though they talked face-to-face for a while, after that brief conversation they remained engaged through mediated interactions that were

not work-related conversations. As Rachel declared, this was a regular practice: they prefer to interact through social media because this kind of interaction allows them to keep talking without interrupting their respective work-related tasks.

Within these assemblages of attention between work and personal chatting, Rachel is continually moving back and forth. Thus, she manages her “attention, locally, on a moment-by-moment basis, as situations unfold” (Licoppe & Figeac, 2015, p. 48). While face-to-face interaction would require interrupting her work-related tasks, mediated exchanges allow her to continue working and to use any brief pause to shift her attention and digitally interact with her colleague one door down from her office. As a result, these interactions are performed against the background of their everyday work routines and, as such, they are not seen as interrupting work-related duties.

David (28, Raleigh) is engaged in these multi-activity assemblages of attention as well. The morning I shadowed him, he repeatedly checked his Facebook account during the almost four-hour period of observation. I met him at 10:00 am, and nine minutes later, he checked Facebook on his laptop, scrolling over his newsfeed, for around 2 minutes. He had made a post earlier that morning containing a quote, and was looking to see if anyone had liked the post or commented on it. Later, at 10:34 am, he checked Facebook again, scrolling over his newsfeed, stopping every few seconds to view specific posts and comments. He also accessed Twitter at 10:36 am, doing much the same thing, scrolling quickly to view updates. At 10:41, David took out his smartphone and sent a text message before returning to his work. He looked at a specific post on Facebook on his laptop, before returning to his newsfeed, and subsequently returning to his work. He continued doing this for the rest of the

morning, changing from his laptop to his mobile phone and looking over it momentarily while continuing to work. David's performance goes through a continuum of attention that is systematically distributed among the activities he was involved in that morning. According to those activities, and the specificities of the context, he used his mobile phone or his laptop to engage in social-media interactions.

Ash (27) and Dan (30) also connect to social media at work, but they do so as a way to take breaks:

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): Sometimes in a while, when there's like a slow period or probably working on something and I just need like a 5 minute break to like reset, you know, I can go to see, you know, what's happening and anything, kind of keep up.

Dan (30, Durham): Sometimes I'm working, and I hear the alert of a message. So, it is logical, I want to know who sent it, and so I check it on work hours.

As has been established, "mobile platforms offer the benefits of being personal, portable and always on and to hand" (Stald & Ólafsson, 2012, p. 2), Precisely due to the portability and connectivity affordances of mobile devices, Claudia (31, Concepción) also prefers to use her mobile phone to access social media, both at home and at her work-place, despite having a computer and a broadband Internet connection at both locations:

Claudia (31, Concepción): Although I have a computer at home, I always access [social media] from my cell phone because it is small and I can carry it to any place. When I was at my workplace, on lunchtime for example, I had to wait till I got home to use my own computer. Now, with my cell phone, I can easily access it [social media] when I want.

Since Claudia got her smart phone, she increased the frequency of mediated interactions that previously were in some ways fixed in place and time, from her personal computer and at night, when she returned home after working hours. Now, due to the

mobility and connectivity of her smart phone, she engages in mobile mediated interactions that alter her exchanges with others. These interactions now are more recurrent and are embedded in the rhythms and social-spatial contexts of her everyday activities. Clearly, this is possible because Claudia's mobile phone is a smartphone, whose capabilities facilitate diverse forms of communication due to its portability and connectivity to Internet services. In fact, Claudia herself remembers what she sometimes did to stay connected to social media before having a smartphone:

Claudia (31, Concepción): Before having a smart phone, I remember I went to the countryside on vacations. I brought my laptop with a modem for mobile Internet access to keep connecting to Facebook, and being able to post and upload pictures. Yeah, it is like part of me using it [Facebook]. Unbelievable!

This Claudia's quote shows how her desire to stay connected to the social media she uses most frequently is as important as the mobile device used. Her desire for potentially continuous connectivity appears as a key factor motivating her use of the most convenient and available mobile device according to her own particular circumstances. And this reflects the close link between social and technological affordances in deciding what media better fit within particular circumstances.

In a context in which people manage their relationships within a more and more diverse landscape of communication technologies, mobile social-network practices like postings, "liking," commenting, and sharing messages or pictures allow individuals to broadcast to many on a publicly viewable space, which blends public and private or interpersonal and mass communication, altering the private nature of relationship management behaviors (Bryant et al., 2011). Certainly, this does not always happen through individuals' mobile phones, because within increasingly complex media ecology, individuals

can choose a medium according to specific circumstances. Nevertheless, it is almost undeniable the mobile phone and social media play a critical role within individuals' everyday activities because they have been integrated into physical and social contexts of people's everyday lives. Within these assemblages, mobile communication technologies and social media "disappear" into the surroundings because their use has become habit (Wise, 2012, p. 161).

### **SOCIAL PRESSURE AS PART OF SOCIAL CONTEXTS**

As part of social contexts, social pressure appears as a critical factor when my participants have decided to use any specific social medium or even when they decided to change their feature phone for a smartphone. Among my interviewees from both the U.S. and Chile, it was quite common to hear that they had changed their feature phones for a smartphone because of social pressures, regardless of specific technological affordances. For instance, Paul (34, Raleigh), from Raleigh, was the only participant who did not have a smartphone, and he felt peer pressure to get one. As he expressed, when most people have a type of technology like smartphones, they inevitably expect everybody to have one and with those expectations, "a little bit surprised they look at you and ask, 'Why don't you have a smart phone?'," assuming that everyone should have one.

On some occasions, the acquisition of a smartphone is triggered by the desire to access and use social media on the move and to stay continually connected to social ties. This is the case of Claudia (31, Concepción), who declared, "I wanted to change my old cell phone because of social media. I keep accessing Facebook; that is the truth."

Social pressure is also produced by the need to belong to specific groups and be part of and participate in what is going on within those groups of people. In fact, several of my participants recognized that they created a Facebook account just because their friends had one and they did not want to be left out:

Sarah (30, Cary): I was using Orkut, -do you remember that?- And then all my friends migrated to Facebook [...] At the beginning, I created a Facebook [account] just because all my friends were over there. And, last year, I tried, you know, to shut down Facebook; I didn't want this anymore, but then I gave up because it is a way to keep in touch with some people that I just have contacted through Facebook.

Jorge (27, Concepción): People say, "Did you see what I published on Facebook? Did you see the picture I shared?" And one says, "No, I don't have Facebook", but at the end I think that I am not hearing about anything is happening because I'm not on Facebook, so I better get an account. My social circle is so used to using social media that they take for granted that everybody has an account and is going to be checking on it all the time.

More and more relationships are being managed through multiple mobile social media that converge with face-to-face interactions, reconfiguring the modes in which people actualize their social ties, which are now nurtured potentially at any moment and from any geographical location. In such a context, the described "mobile logic" (Ling & Donner, 2009), the way in which the expectation of continuous availability determines individuals' daily interactions, is extended by the incorporation of social media. Practices of social-media use such as posting, commenting, or even simply "liking" others' post, is considered a way to be connected, to be together and to belong to a social group. When technologies like the mobile phone and social media become so embedded into the fabric of everyday life, they become what Ling (2012, 2015) has called technologies of social mediation, those "legitimated artifacts and systems governed by group-based reciprocal expectations that enable but also set conditions for the maintenance of our social sphere" (p. 7). As Ling

establishes, access to of these social mediation technologies is taken for granted and therefore its use is critical for social interaction, to the point that people who do not use technologies of social mediation become a problem for those who do.

Individuals engage in assemblages of communication that vary according their social contexts, their interactants, the nature of the message they want to share, the media they have available, the technology infrastructures, the telecommunication policy, the mobile-telephony market, and others. Within these assemblages, one of the striking facts while shadowing my participants was the permanent visibility and availability of the mobile phone. Most of my informants always had their phones visible and easy to reach in case they needed it to interact with somebody, consult some information, or access social-media accounts. When they were in transit, driving or taking public transportation, the smartphone was either in their hands or in their pockets, but always within easy reach. While at work, the mobile phone was always left on the desk; it was left next to the computer or next to the documents my informants were consulting at a given moment. Whatever the case, the mobile phone was never out of my participants' sight, and this is because they wanted to be ready to use it whenever they needed it or wanted it. As Ash (27, Chapel Hill) described her mobile phone, "It is like a third arm. That's really bad, but yeah". Or Allison (29, Chapel Hill), who continually checked her mobile-phone screen:

Allison (29, Chapel Hill): I pretty much check my cell phone any time [...] I mean, it's one of those things that I probably check twice an hour, I probably check my phone like about 40 times a day.

The main reason for doing that is the participants' desire to stay in touch with their social ties or at least the potential of diverse forms of interactions within their arms' reach

regardless of physical distances. What is clear is the fact that “the social ties people enjoy today are more abundant and more easily nourished by contact through new technologies” (Rainie & Wellman, 2012, Kindle loc. 400) that allow individuals to manage their relationships through multiple media (Baym et al., 2011).

To sum up, this chapter has addressed how mobile practices of social media use happen within the articulation of diverse assemblages (micro to macro) that define different modes of interaction and communication through mobile social media. Those mobile-communicative practices are influenced by social affordances that corresponds to the contextual cues that impact individuals’ decisions in relation to the modes and means of interacting with others. These contextual cues emerge from the intersections of social context specificities, technological affordances, interactants’ characteristics, and the purposes of communication. All of these elements are part of assemblages within which mobile communication technologies and social media use have become habit, and in consequence “disappear” in the surroundings (Wise, 2012). Within these assemblages, individuals engage in specific practices of mobile communication in a continuum of distributed attention between different involvements that in some ways impact users’ preferences for some mobile technologies over others to engage in social-media interactions. Due to fact that these technologies are highly embedded into the fabric of everyday life, expectations of continuous availability become part of social pressure exerted by each individual’s social contexts.

While this chapter has focused on the ways mobile social-media practices are embedded into individuals’ everyday interactions and how different assemblages determine their motivations to use different media, the next chapter delves into micro-descriptions of

individuals' mobile practices of communication and the ways these practices unfold in everyday life.

**CHAPTER 5**

**MOBILE SOCIAL-MEDIA PRACTICES AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT**

**IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

The combination of different methods, including innovative mobile methods, to gather data contributed to a better understanding of social processes and a more complete picture of the richness of individuals' communicative practices as they take place on the move as well as in contexts of temporal pauses of movement. The different methods complemented each other, allowing me to describe a social phenomenon and also to track the flows of that phenomenon as it unfolds in everyday life and within an increasingly diverse media ecology.

This study was focused neither on any specific mobile communication technology nor on any specific social medium, so it was possible to appreciate changes in participants' preferences for different social media over time. I observed changes in what the participants themselves highlighted as the most frequently used media, and also in relation to their preferences for face-to-face interactions, with or without media included, at different times. For example, because my fieldwork in Chile took place during two different periods, a little more than a year apart, the first group of Chilean participants reported a higher use of Facebook in relation to other social media. This changed with the second group of participants, who showed a prevalence of WhatsApp as the most frequently used social medium. In this regard, Sofía (28, San Pedro de la Paz) explained how she reduced her use of other mobile social media because of WhatsApp: "Now that I have WhatsApp, I replaced

everything. WhatsApp is my core means of communication”. In the same way, in the first group, several participants included Foursquare among the social media they used everyday, but within the second group this changed, and Foursquare was no longer used, although these participants had not de-activated their old accounts.

Individual relationships can be managed through multiple media (Baym, Zhang & Lin, 2004), and social-media interactions are woven into the daily management of relationships in complex ways. For this reason, as noted above, it was important, methodologically, to focus on individuals’ communicative practices and their everyday social contexts, instead of centering my attention on specific means of communication, which could change over time, favored one day but then left behind the next.

To present my results, I offer descriptions of activities based on my field observations, as well as direct quotations and participants’ own stories to illustrate the themes and categories discovered in my grounded-theory approach to data-gathering and analysis. The second major theme developed in my analysis is **Mobile social-media practices and relationship management in everyday life**. This theme describes mobile practices of social media use and the ways that those practices have been integrated into personal interactions and the management of relationships, entwined with mobile and situated contexts of everyday life. Two main categories were linked together within this theme: 1) *Mobile social-media practices and daily interactions* and 2) *Mobile social-media practices as multi-activity involvements in everyday life*.

## **MOBILE SOCIAL-MEDIA PRACTICES AND DAILY INTERACTIONS**

Although they are involved in different assemblages, both Chilean and American participants have incorporated mobile social-networking practices into their everyday lives as a way to be available at any moment and in any location, on the move and during pauses in movement. Through their mobile-communication practices, they keep in touch with their social relationships and organize their social life in a constant flux of personal interchanges that combines mediated and unmediated interactions. Even though most of the participants I interviewed do not update their social media profiles everyday, they all check their social-media accounts several times a day, and most of the time they interact with their contacts by “liking” or commenting others’ updates or chatting through social-media private messaging tools.

Mobile devices offer users the opportunity to engage in these activities at any moment, so constant connectivity, potentially at anytime and from anywhere, becomes a regular feature of their lives. As a result, practices of looking at others’ social-media profiles, “liking” and/or commenting on others’ posts, as well as posting and sharing content, become ways for participants to manage their relationships. As Baym (2010) has established, “We show others that we are approachable, and that we are interested in them, through immediacy cues” (Baym, 2010, p. 61). Liking or commenting on others’ social-media updates are such immediacy cues and are therefore “resources for building friendly conversationality” (p. 61). From passive practices of communication (checking social-media accounts) to active ones (posting, “liking,” commenting, and chatting), individuals actualize their social ties through mobile social-media interactions. These practices are woven into the embodied and social

contexts of individuals' everyday lives and into the face-to-face communicative repertoires through which they interact with others.

On a typical day, Chilean and American participants perform—in different levels of engagement and within different assemblages—a series of diverse mobile social-media practices as a way to stay in touch with others, coordinate activities, and ultimately manage their personal and social interactions. In doing so, individuals move from passive to active levels of engagement and make use of a variety of tools and practices. In addition to the diversity in individuals' levels of engagement, these practices differ in the role and functions they fulfill in the particular contexts of participants' personal and social interactions.

#### *Checking social-media accounts*

Checking social-media accounts is a passive means of maintaining interactions and the most repeated mobile social-media practice throughout a participant's day. Just as email checking involves looking through the inbox folder to see any new messages, checking social media accounts entails regularly looking through social-media feeds in order to see what a user's contacts have shared on their profiles as soon as they have posted something. By *checking*, individuals scan their social media feeds, but they do not engage in conversations or direct interactions with their social-media contacts. This is especially common on Facebook, which displays, in its feeds, the updates made by an individual's friends (or those with whom she most frequently interacts). In the case of Twitter, for example, participants look through information about the interests, news, videos, and personal updates published by the people they follow. In any case, whatever social media are used, the practice of checking others' updates is reinforced by the use of mobile devices, which allow participants to check their

social-media accounts potentially at any free moment (and even not necessarily free moments), no matter their physical location.

By checking social media accounts, participants try to stay informed about what is going on, about what their friends are sharing, and about new information their friends publish, without necessarily interchanging messages with those contacts. This practice of checking social media accounts has become highly ingrained in participants' daily lives, which has promoted the adoption of new daily routines. Because checking social-media accounts through mobile devices is a quick and effortless activity, this practice is frequently performed throughout the day, more frequently than other social-media practices, especially in comparison to practices of posting content or commenting on others' social-media updates.

Sarah (30, Cary): I use Facebook, you know, to see the pictures they are updating, so they are not putting those pictures to me on Facebook, but I can go over there and see what they are doing, so it is a way to keep, you know, knowing what is happening with them.

As a result, participants describe how checking their social-media accounts through their mobile phones is the first thing they do in the morning, as well as the last thing they do before going to sleep at night. In this sense, mobile connectivity has become a practice that actually *structures* their everyday routines; it organizes and regulates other offline activities like getting up or starting a new working day. Previous research has also examined the ways in which mobile communication technologies, particularly mobile phones, enable users to structure and organize their social life, softening the boundaries of time and space (Ling, 2004; Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

In fact, some of the interviewees reported that they check their social-media accounts immediately after the alarm clock—which is also part of their phone-goes off in the morning. For example, on a morning when I met one of my participants in Raleigh for the shadowing observation, he told me that the first thing he did before our encounter was to check his Facebook account because that helped him wake up:

Thomas (31, Raleigh): I woke up and since I usually have to wake up early like today that I had to be at work at 8 a.m., I checked my social media accounts to activate my brain a little bit and start thinking. Otherwise, it is very difficult for me to get up. So, I quickly checked what my Facebook was showing.

Two other participants in the Triangle area shared stories similar to Thomas's:

Dan (30, Durham): This morning when I woke up, the first thing I did was checking my phone and Facebook. First, I entered Facebook, I saw everything I had to see and then I got up... After, I don't know, 15-20 minutes of that first time, I checked it out, I checked it out again. If I have my phone close, I do that very frequently.

Allison (29, Chapel Hill): Sooooo, the cell phone is pretty much the first thing I look at because it is also my alarm, so my phone makes me up, and it usually plays Cold Play or something like that to make me up; and then, I mean I guess when I'm using the restroom in the morning I do tend to go out because people e-mail me over night.

These accounts show how mobile social-media practices shape daily routines and the affective organization of everyday life. The sensation of being connected to others beginning with the first minute one is awake plays a key role in structuring such an individual's life because it is the first step to start the day, placing one, regardless of the presence of collocated others, in connection with physically distant others.

Within mobile telephony studies, sending and receiving calls and text messages has been understood as a symbol of belonging to specific social groups (Stald, 2008); similarly, social-media research has shown that young adults use these services to have “selective,

efficient, and immediate reach for their (mediated) interpersonal communication with others and as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of the other people” (Urista et al., 2008, p. 2). So, like mobile telephony, mobile social-media connectivity is also a way of belonging to a group, defined by the list of contacts people keep on their social-media accounts. Even the most passive interaction, such as checking others’ social-media posts, is a way to seek company and experience social support.

Connecting to social media in the morning, even just checking for new posts or direct messages, gives individuals a sense of being part of a social network. This is not only a way to stay connected and to interact with others, but also a way of organizing activities and physical encounters based on what one learns on social media the first thing in the morning. In some cases, mobile social-media practices become the foundations of individuals’ everyday life because those connections start structuring their day as soon as they wake up.

As part of participants’ daily routines, this practice of checking social media profiles is also performed at the end of the day, becoming the last activity participants do before going to bed (or before sleeping while already lying on the bed). The checking practice, as depicted by participants, is a mechanism for being in contact and belonging to a group. As Baym (2010) points out, “Simply having access to one another’s updates on a SNS [social network site] may facilitate a sense of connection” (p. 135). Therefore, the mere fact of looking through others’ posts makes some participants feel connected with their social-media friends and that they are a part of that social circle. As my participants’ practices reflect, social media are more than a tool; social media are a “social lifeline” that allow individuals to stay connected to people across physical distances (boyd, 2014).

Both in Concepción and in Triangle area, participants value the possibility of interacting with others in their social circles at any moment, even though they do not always take the opportunity to do so:

Claudia (31, Concepción): For me, it is kind of sacred to check my Facebook before sleeping, and I do that every single day, every single day.

Sarah (30, Cary): Then, when I moved here, it was a way to keep in touch with my friends from my home country. They keep posting pictures, so it is a way to, you know, see what is happening with them and over time.

Paul (34, Raleigh): The fact I have my friends on the list, although we do not talk so much, I am reassured to know they are there. We do not talk so much, but I know they are there.

These quotes show that what matters is the *potential* to connect anytime-anywhere, not the actual connection. Individuals value the ability to reach their social ties whenever and wherever they want, and they value the ways this is facilitated by social media and mobile devices. These potential interactions allow individuals to maintain a sense of being connected even when they are just checking social media without actively engaging in actual exchanges. The assumption might be that relationship management required individuals to interact with others; however, checking others' updates can be understood as a relationship-management tool even though it apparently does not involve any interaction. This is possible because most of the work of relationship management occurs in an individual's mind, so imagined interactions happen before concrete exchanges do.

At a more micro-level, within the practice of checking social-media accounts, it appears another practice that participants themselves called "facebucear" (fays-boo-say-AR). Through in vivo coding, this emic subcategory is based on a word used by several of my

Chilean participants to describe one of their practices specifically related to their use of Facebook. “Facebucear” is a neologism created by combining the terms *Facebook* and *bucear* (Spanish for the verb *to dive*). Participants use “facebucear” to describe, from a critical perspective, the practice of checking others’ social-media accounts.

Even though it is a term coined by Chileans, it is used interchangeably among Chilean interviewees and Spanish-speaking interviewees in the Raleigh area. In addition, the sentiment expressed by the concept is also found among my U.S. informants. Unlike the verb “to dive,” which denotes quick submergence into water, the main meaning of the Spanish verb *bucear* is to swim with the entire body submerged (as in scuba diving). Additionally, the verb denotes closely looking into a material or moral subject (RAE). This last meaning is precisely what my participants want to convey when they use the word to describe the action of scrutinizing the information of others, which their social-media contacts have published on their profiles.

Unlike the expression “surfing the web,” which alludes to the idea of floating or gliding over the information, the concept *Facebucear* connotes an action of deeply submerging and looking into the information of others, as a way to stay informed about what is going on with them. *Facebucear* is not equivalent to the term “facebooking” used by English speakers. “Facebooking” refers to the action of *using* Facebook, no matter what activities individuals perform on this social medium. Rather, *Facebucear* specifically refers to the use of Facebook to look into other people’s information. Thus, *Facebucear* emerges as a concept to describe how lateral social surveillance occurs on social media, a practice that is just as evident in the U.S.-based participants:

Dan (30, Durham): I wanna know what others are publishing, what they are doing, and what they are not doing. This is Facebucear. I know this is not good, and I try to avoid it because I should not mind those kinds of things. Everybody wanna know what the neighbor is doing; everybody wanna know what the ex-girlfriend or the ex-boyfriend is doing.

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): Sometimes it's just because I'm in downtown somewhere, and I'm bored and it's a really good thing to do just, you know, kind of looking at whatever people are doing. It's kind of a little creepy when I say it aloud!

These statements show how individuals are focused on looking at others' information more than they are focused on the production of their own content. In this mostly passive role, the participants become mere receptors, preferring to look at others' updates rather than sharing some content or updating their own profiles. It is also clear that the participants give a negative connotation to this practice. Indeed, the interviewees see this practice as something they should try to avoid because it is seen as meddling in other people's lives:

Carlos (31, Talcahuano): I don't like Facebook because it is too much gossip. I can search for a person, and there it is, his or her entire history.

Dan (28, Durham): Everyone wants to know what their neighbors are doing, the gossip. Everyone wants to know what ex-girlfriends or ex-boyfriends are doing. So, I don't know, this is even with bad intentions.

Claudia (31, Concepción): I found that somehow, Facebook is used a lot for gossiping too. There are a lot of people who don't feel anything for their friends on Facebook. They just want to be able to know what is happening in their lives.

### *"Liking" friends' updates*

Liking others' updates is another mode of staying connected. As participants describe it, clicking on the "like" button of friends' social-media posts is a way of showing interest in their friends' status and, therefore, a way to show some care about their friends themselves. Sometimes they do not want to comment, but they want to show they care, so they just "like" their contacts' updates. Most of my participants saw this as a way to show that they are

present and that they are concerned about how their friends are and what they are doing at any moment. Therefore, it is another mechanism individuals use to permanently keep in touch with others by showing care. This becomes so important that sometimes informants “like” somebody’s status just to show care, even when they do not actually *like* what that person has published:

Emily (26, Raleigh) I like others’ stuff even when I don’t really find it interesting or something. I just want to show that person I’m seeing that post, and I care.

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): I definitely like or comment on other people things much more often, probably that I do it everyday like I go and like somebody status or, you know, I do that everyday.

### *Commenting on friends’ posts*

By commenting on friends’ posts, participants engage in more active and continuous conversations. Sometimes those interactions last several hours during a day, and they are even extended into embodied contexts, allowing individuals to go back and forth between online and offline settings. Recalling a case I described in the introduction, the day I was accompanied Rachel (29, Raleigh) during her routine afternoon activities, she was hardly ever disconnected from a discussion that had been taking place over Facebook that day. The discussion, which had started online early in the morning, involved several of Rachel’s Facebook friends and also some people who were not on Rachel’s Facebook list of friends, but with whom she keeps offline connections. As noted earlier, that afternoon, the still-active Facebook conversation emerged among the topics she and a friend were talking about face-to-face. Later, while walking to the gym, she continued checking the online updates of

that discussion. This example shows how individuals' mobile social-media practices are highly embedded in the dynamic, embodied, social contexts of everyday life.

Another example of this embeddedness is from one of my field observations, which took place in a coffee shop in Raleigh. It was almost 10:00 a.m. on a still-cold Spring morning when I arrived at a coffee shop where I would meet one of my interviewees. The interview was scheduled for 10:30, so I had some time alone before Paul (34, Raleigh) arrived. I bought a coffee and sat at a table to wait. The coffee shop had a big table (a kind of library desk) at which 8 people could easily sit. I took one of the seats and put my laptop on the table to start working. As I had time before the interview, I used the opportunity to observe the people around me. Two chairs down from me, a middle-aged man was focused on his laptop screen while apparently listening to something on his headphones. A little bit further, at another table, a couple was talking about something they were looking at on the screen of one person's laptop.

After some minutes, two around-their-forties women entered to the coffee shop and occupied the two chairs just in front of me, around the big table. Each of them went to the cashier for a coffee and returned to their seats. Once there, they left their phones and drinks on the table and began an animated conversation. After a couple of minutes, the conversation was interrupted by the vibration of one of the phones. This took the attention of one of the women, who smiled while looking at the screen. In the meantime, the other woman used the interruption to check her own mobile phone as well. Thus, both of them were momentarily immersed in their respective mobile-phone screens. After a couple of minutes, both women left their phones over the table again and continued with the conversation as it had never

been interrupted, as animated as before. The same circumstance happened several times more while the women were at the coffee shop. It was always the same situation, except when, in some cases, one of them showed the other something on her phone, in which case the mediated interaction became a shared experience with a physically co-located other. These kinds of practices have also been analyzed in prior studies that considered how these interruptions might remove individuals from their immediate physical surroundings (Rheingold, 2012; Turkle, 2011) or, by contrast, how they might actually connect them to co-present others by sharing the experience of looking at their mobile devices or even collectively composing a message (Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002).

The two cases described above illustrate the imbrication of mediated interactions within social and physical contexts and show how such interactions play a changing role when they are embedded in an embodied context. They illuminate the complex game of negotiating attention to media (or to people through media) and attention to the people sitting in front of us. In this regard, deterministic interpretations of new-media use have focused on the ways in which mobile technologies disrupt users' attention and separate them from their physical contexts (Rheingold, 2012; Turkle, 2011), in what Gergen (2002) has named as "absent presence." Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate the high degree of integration of online and offline interactions (boyd & Ellison, 2007). In these contexts, when people experience occurs within both digital and physical spaces, individuals are involved in connections performed in the context of in-between sites, where online and offline interactions are interwoven, and where online life "has a broader context in everyday offline lives and practices" (Taylor, 2006, Kindle location 299). In this context, individuals actually

interact within “hybrid spaces” (de Souza e Silva, 2006a), which are defined as those connected, mobile, and social spaces that blur the boundaries between physical and digital environments.

These examples also show process of negotiation of new rules of interaction that emerge because of mobile social-media practices. New rules and expectations emerge in the flux of face-to-face conversations that converge with mediated interactions. “Mediatized communicative repertoires” (Linke, 2011, p. 102) intersect and fluid with unmediated communicative repertoires in people interactions. In the coffee-shop example, neither of the women seemed to be upset by the fact that the other person was checking her mobile phone during their embodied encounter. In fact, they both seemed to enjoy the hybrid spaces that formed when they contacted physically distant others through their respective mobile phones.

Individuals’ communicative practices include different repertoires, and the form of interpersonal communication “is not only characterized by different forms of media and the mixture of a media ensemble, but much more it can be understood as the collection of communicative dealings that partners use in the context of their everyday structures” (Linke, 2011, p. 101). For this reason, it is important that research on interpersonal communication and mobile social media focus on communicative actions rather than considering only the use of particular media or devices.

As noted in chapter 2, interactions and the relationship management cannot be understood or explained based on a “metaphysics of presence”—the assumptions that physical presence is the only real or authentic basis of social experience (Büscher et al., 2011). Mediated interactions and, consequently, “mediatized communicative repertoires”

(Linke, 2011, p. 102) are an integral part of present-day interpersonal and social interactions and the ways people manage their relationships. Online and offline interactions are highly intertwined, and co-located encounters are not the only meaningful form of social connections (Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Mediated interactions, such as commenting on others' posts on social media, function as uninterrupted conversations that flow between online and offline contexts, involving people who are physically co-located but also those who are at physical distance.

David (28, Raleigh): I'm everyday commenting my friends' posts, and I do that to support an idea or cause I am participating in, to give that post more diffusion or to debate about some topics I am interested in.

Javiera (30, Chiguayante): If a friend shares a happy moment in her life, I comment that because knowing what is happening with her makes me happy, and so I want to share her happiness even we are not together at this moment.

### *Posting on social media*

Posting on social media is an active mode of interacting with others. Even though participants do not post every time they access social-media accounts, they do like to update their social media profiles. Posting is motivated by the desire to share experiences and/or feelings with friends as a way of creating a shared experience. Mobile social-media users broadcast from their most intimate contexts, such as their bedrooms or the dinner table. Whatever information they consider interesting—pictures of places they are visiting or even their personal emotions—is considered suitable content for being published on social media.

Most of the time, posts are triggered by something in the immediate embodied context, so individuals comment what they see happening around them in a particular place and time. Posting is an attempt to extend individuals' own experience to their list of contacts.

This illustrates two relevant issues. First, it highlights the social dimension of mobile social-media practices. Individuals post what they are doing because they want to make their individual experience into a shared experience with their social-media contacts. This shared experience activates social connections and generate more interactions through, for example, “likes” or comments on the original post. “Through the creation of content and discourse that is formulated online” (Urista et al., 2008, 22), mobile social-media users foster and manage their relationships with others.

Secondly, as participants become involved in specific embodied contexts, they augment their experience by broadcasting that information. After posting, active mediated exchanges develop with their online contacts. Thus, individuals’ experiences are digitally connected to their social contacts, as they move through physical locations or through time in the same locations. Such is the core of the “hybrid spaces” discussed by de Souza e Silva (2006a). According to the definition of hybrid spaces, mobile social-media users engage in hybrid experiences, in which “users do not perceive physical and digital spaces as separate entities” (de Souza e Silva, 2006a, p. 262). This intersection of embodied, social, and digital contexts shapes the ways individuals manage their relationships in a continuous flow of exchanges that occurs simultaneously across different physical locations.

Within the general practice of posting on social media there is also a more specific practice of sharing: sharing updates, sharing news, and sharing general information that others have posted. Whatever the shared content, this practice becomes a way of communicating and actualizing relationships with the person who originally posted the information and with those who comment on it or “like” what was shared. Individuals share

the content they agree with or information that makes them feel identified with some particular interests or ideas. This in turn becomes a form of belonging to the groups that share those interests: For instance, Carlos (31, Talcahuano), likes to take pictures of what he sees on the street and even the results of his PlayStation games—physical contexts that are enriched and hybridized through the social interactions triggered by his social-media posts. He posts with more frequency during his leisure time, but whenever he sees something that gets his attention, he always shares it with his contacts:

Carlos (31, Talcahuano): It is like ehh, if I can take a picture of something, I will take it and publish it, so other people can also see and feel what I am seeing and feeling.

While reasons for posting can be diverse, the person who posts always expects a response that could be a “like” or a comment. Indeed, and participants reported, posting on social-media profiles is a way to looking for interactions; it is a way to start conversations with the contacts who are available to respond to one’s posts. When they post on their profiles, participants expect to get a response; they expect to hear something in return from their social-media contacts. This represents what Turkle (2008) refers as the interactive constitution of selves through perpetual connection with others. New subjectivities are constituted from these mediated interactions, fostered by the affordances of mobile communication technologies and social media.

One example of this can be seen in Paul’s (32, Raleigh) mobile social-media exchanges. The day I interviewed him, we looked at his Facebook profile to read and talk about his most recent posts. He was reminded of the day he had posted the content we were looking at:

Paul (34, Raleigh): I was on Facebook between 5 and 10 minutes and then I disconnected. Later, I checked it again to see if somebody had commented what I posted [...] In fact, I hope to get some answers and usually there are.

These interchanges might function as a way of finding companionship. Participants expect a response, even the slightest interaction, to feel accompanied by their social-media contacts.

Though interactants might be physically separated, any response to the content that has been posted is perceived as a form of company. As Claudia describes, she shares her mood and emotions waiting for responses and comments about it:

Claudia (31, Concepción): Well, I do that [posting on her Facebook profile] because it is my people who are in my list of contacts: my family, my friends. And I know they will write to me something sweet. It is nice to feel that someone writes something lovely for you.

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): “Probably attention. It’s really nice to have so many people getting excited about something, you know, that is related to you. So, a lot of my posting recently has been wedding related, you know, but every time I post, you know, I count down time, you know, there is a lot of people that I wasn’t able to invite or they are unable to come, but who can still get excited in participating. It is kind of that a stretcher of the word, but whatever, ahmmmm who can follow, kind of follow what’s happening even though, you know, they are far away or they can’t come; ahhhmmmm and I think that’s probably mostly why. It is just really good to, you know, have people, to see people care. It’s kind of, I can say that’s kind of sad, but [...] a little, a little bit is that.

Within different assemblages and with different motivations to post or share information on their profiles, Paul and Ash in Raleigh area and Claudia in Concepción share a common expectation of receiving a response to their respective posts. They do expect a response and the beginnings of an interaction with their social-media contacts. In some cases, participants are so aware they are going to get some responses that they use postings as a way to get specific information they need on the move, but they do not want to search for themselves on the web or in other apps available on their mobile devices. Thus, posting on

social-media profiles is also used as a quick way to find out information or services that the participants require at any given moment and place. Whenever participants need to get an offline service, they just ask their online contacts even though they could find the same information themselves by consulting a mobile application or social-media services like

Yelp:

Allison (29, Chapel Hill): I also post things like ahhh, sometimes, I post questions, I would say like, “Hey, does anybody know a good mechanic in the area?” or “Hey, I’m looking for a housemate. Does anybody know somebody is looking for a housemate?”

Although this kind of comment asks for a response to a specific question, the main and somewhat hidden purpose of such postings is to start a conversation and to keep interacting with others. Posting is an easy way to update others about what one is doing or needing in a determined moment, and at the same time it allows one to actualize social connections that are reachable through one’s social-media contacts.

This mode of relationship management may imply that mobile social-media users choose not to post something because they seek to avoid upsetting someone with the content they might be posting. In some cases, informants decide not to post, especially not to broadcast pictures, because their contacts could get upset about not being included in the offline activities those pictures show. This demonstrates how people decide whether or not to share digital content that contains information about embodied activities—pictures in this case—based on what their contacts may think or the ways they may react. This also demonstrates another way in which offline and online activities are interwoven: contextual

elements and offline circumstances condition participants' decisions about what to post (or not) on social media.

### *Chatting with friends*

Chatting also refers to continuous conversations that flow uninterrupted across diverse contexts, including online and offline settings. These conversations are often unfinished conversations that last an entire day, continue to the next one and so on, without marking starting and ending points with markers such as greetings. Through these interactions, participants try to overcome the limitations of physical distances and time to stay in touch with whomever they want at any moment and from any place, whenever and wherever it is possible.

The Chilean participants, for example, frequently mentioned continuous interactions and conversations through WhatsApp. One of the interviewees, for instance, described how she stays connected and engaged on all-day conversations with her closer friends through a WhatsApp group. Such is the case of Sofía (28, San Pedro de la Paz), who has a group of close friends from high school with whom she keeps in touch. She and her friends lived in Concepción area, so they frequently met in different locations in Concepción. By the end of college, this group had grown, adding some new members from college classmates.

Nonetheless, co-present encounters became less regular because some members of this group left Concepción to work in different cities of Chile after finishing college. Although they cannot meet face-to-face very often, they do stay connected continuously and daily through a WhatsApp group:

Sofia (28, San Pedro de la Paz): I wake up with my cell phone. My clock alarm is the phone and the first thing I do is check WhatsApp and my email account. After getting up, I continue on WhatsApp with my friends while I am having breakfast. Once I am in my office, I am sending and answering WhatsApp messages the entire day [...]. At night, I check Instagram, and I check everything I have seen in the day, but I use WhatsApp during the entire day, continuously. To me, WhatsApp is much more instantaneous and shorter messages. It is like a constant conversation. It is not like we have not spoken all day and then we say, 'Hi, how are you', when we get a call phone.

Sofía describes how she and her friends stay engaged in unfinished conversations.

Those interactions allow them to maintain a “connected presence” (Licoppe, 2004) throughout the day. Due to the sensation of being permanently together, they do not feel the need to say “hello” or “goodbye” when they exchange messages because they are talking throughout the day and from one day to the next.

Other participants describe how chatting through social media until late at nights is an everyday activity to stay connected to friends. For example, Claudia (31, Concepción) describes the ways she uses her smartphone to stay connected, by chatting while in bed:

Claudia (31, Concepción): When I go to bed, there I chat until, until 1am, I don't know. The other day I was chatting through Facebook until 2 a.m. but from my cell phone because I use my cell phone more and chat through Facebook. [...] It was actually one of the reasons I bought this cell phone: to be able to chat.

Sarah (30, Cary): I use the Facebook chat to talk to them because it is an easy way, they are online, the Gmail chat, that is an easy one, e-mail as well.

As Claudia describes, the mobile phone is a technology that is easy to take with her everywhere. Ergonomics and the affordances of the smartphone as a technology that is small enough to take to bed make users prefer these devices. People cannot go to bed with a desktop computer, and even a laptop is not as comfortable to use in bed, as is a mobile phone. Mobile devices like smartphones or tablets are much easier to use in traditionally

private spaces. For instance, mobile phone users can curl up with a smartphone (or tablet) under the covers, but that is harder to do with a laptop. As a result, these affordances lead to the incorporation of mediated social interactions into the more intimate contexts of everyday (or everynight) activity.

### **MOBILE SOCIAL-MEDIA PRACTICES AND MULTI-ACTIVITY INVOLVEMENTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

All these practices—checking social-media accounts, posting on social-media profiles, “liking” or commenting others’ updates, chatting and sharing information through social media—are part of participants’ everyday activities both in Chile and in the United States. As part of their daily routines, the use of social media is performed at different moments throughout the day, even during both working hours and lunch breaks. As Rainie and Wellman (2012) assert, “Mobile devices can now fill these heretofore useless waiting times with all manner of activity enabled by mobile devices— and the sanctity and separateness of different times of day can easily be interrupted” (locations 2705-2706). In fact, my participants, especially in Chile, often connect to social media while they are in their workplaces. In Raleigh area, they sometimes prefer to use their mobile phones to do that in order to avoid using their work computers to access their social-media accounts.

For example, Carlos (31, Talcahuano) is a Programmer Analyst who works full-time in a university in Concepción. He is the only Chilean participant who does not use Facebook because he deactivated his account after Facebook started gaining more popularity in Chile, beginning in 2008. However, he is actually an enthusiastic social-media user who uses other

services like YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter, among others. He also likes to try every new social media service that appears on the market and just leaves them once tested if he does not like some specific features of those services. As a result, he has also created accounts on Pinterest and Google+, even though he does not use them much. What Carlos uses a lot is Skype. Through it, he stays connected with his girlfriend during the entire day while they both are at their respective places of work. They use Skype to chat any time they want to say something, so they keep a continuous conversation throughout their working hours. These ambient conversations constitute a form of mediated co-presence not focused on conversation but on ambient awareness of the other's presence and activities.

Hyperconnectivity fostered by these unfinished mediated interactions implies that “people never walk— or sit— alone” (Rainie & Wellman, 2012, Kindle Locations 3054-3055). As such, people could be physically alone, but not socially because they remain perpetually connected to others.

On a typical day, when Carlos arrives at his office and turns on his desktop computer, he immediately opens his Skype account. His girlfriend uses this program and keeps it always activated, and he likes to stay connected with her during working hours. He also launches specific software for managing social-media, especially in order to monitor his Twitter account. He also regularly checks his Twitter account on his office computer, except when he is doing other activities, especially on the move. In that case, Carlos uses his mobile phone to access his social-media accounts. As a smoker, it is common for him leave his office in the middle of the morning or the afternoon to go outside to smoke. In those moments, he accesses to his social-media profiles, especially Twitter, to check notifications

and publish content. After a few minutes of smoking and checking his social-media profile, he returns to his office and continues working, but he always keeps Twitter notifications activated so he does not miss anything new.

As we have seen, both static and mobile uses of social media have been integrated into Carlos's everyday activities during working hours as a way to keep in touch with his social ties regardless of their physical distance and particular activities. This is also the case of Thomas (31, Raleigh), who reported taking a break each time he needed to rest from his routine work. When he is working on something that demands a great deal of concentration, he forces himself to take such breaks, which are always used to access his social-media accounts and to interact with others, mainly with his girlfriend. Similarly, other Chilean and American participants do the same; one of them described how she accesses her Facebook account several times during working hours, and another interviewee recognized that she does the same each time she needs a break or a moment to relax and stop thinking about work-related issues:

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): On a normal day I definitely will check it [Facebook], you know, probably 2 or 3 times, you know, during work; and then definitely on like a lunch break, I'll check it.

Carlos (31, Talcahuano): Ehhhh I go out [from his office] to smoke and if I'm alone, I will check Twitter or other social media. After that, I return to my work and I can see them [social media] again because notifications appear on the [computer] screen.

Claudia (31, Concepción): At lunchtime, I check my Facebook account. In general, I only check my Facebook, not email or anything else; and if there is someone connected, we chat for a little bit; and after that, I continue working until 4 p.m.

Social media are also used as a way to pass time in the interstices of everyday life—in those little spaces that people have available in the middle of other daily activities such as waiting in a doctor’s office or while riding on public transportation. Mobile-communication technologies facilitate the use of those time/spaces available among routines, especially when other fixed media are not available or are not appropriate for using social media. Thus, mobile social-network users take advantage of that formerly useless or “dead” time (Perry, O’Hara, Sellen, Brown, & Harper, 2001) to make it a more “productive one”—a time dedicated to connecting to social media and nurturing their social bonds through continuous interactions via mobile social networks. These kind of activities correspond to what Licoppe & Figeac (2015) has called “multi-activity,” those situations in which individuals “manage multiple and temporally heterogeneous involvements” (p. 60), such as mobile social-media use while riding on public transportation or driving. In such a context, individuals manage their attention from one activity to another, from the mobile physical environment to the phone screen and back. Such is the case of Paul (34, Raleigh), who states that sometimes he uses social media just to pass time when he does not have too many things to do at home, or Carlos (31, Talcahuano), who engages in mobile-phone use while he is having a meal, smoking, or even working:

Carlos (31, Talcahuano): At home I use them [social media] more frequently while I have some food, I smoke a cigarette, or I lay on my bed with a laptop at any time. Sometimes when I go to my girlfriend’s house, if she is doing anything else, I take my cell phone and check social media.

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): I use it like checking email, Facebook, mmm I use Twitter a little bit, Instagram. Just, you know, yeah I do it a lot when I am kind of waiting for something and I am really bored anywhere.

As these examples illustrate, mobile practices of social-media use occur potentially at any moment or location: at moments of rest, when disconnecting from daily activities, and even during working hours. Participants express their desire to stay connected to others; they want to actualize and manage their social bonds continuously, and mobile social-media practices are frequently the modes through which they achieve those aims. Mediated interactions are recognized as “a form of contact through which social bonds can be nurtured,” and they facilitate several forms of rituals that foster social cohesion (Ling, 2008, 118). These daily mediated practices are a critical component of many individuals’ interactions and a means through which they stay in touch and manage their relationships.

While I accompanied people as they moved through their daily routines, I was able to observe their mobile practices and social-media uses and confirm that my participants’ actions actually coincided with what they had reported in interviews. For example, during observation periods I saw how frequently informants accessed social media like Facebook, within contexts of intermittent mobility but also on the move. Most of the time, they told me they wanted to see whether or not they had gotten any new messages, comments or “likes,” but even if there was nothing new, they remained connected for a while, checking others’ updates and information, looking through others’ pictures, and sometimes posting new content or sharing their contacts’ posts.

The microanalyses presented in this chapter and based on an assemblage approach illuminate the similarities between participants who inhabit geographical locations in the traditional dichotomy between the Global North and the Global South. Even though my Chilean and American participants engage in mobile social-media practices within different

micro and macro assemblages, they do share some ways of experiencing the use of social media on the move and within temporal emplacements. Even though Chileans and Americans used different terms to describe some practices, the characteristics of those practices are quite similar. This is the case, for instance, of the *facebucear* term used by Chilean and Spanish-speaking participants in the U.S. to describe a practice that everybody mentions in the interviews or performed while I shadowed them—the practice of looking into others’ information, a practice of social surveillance as has been depicted in existent literature (de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012).

To sum up, this chapter examined the ways mobile social media have been highly integrated into the fabric of individuals’ daily interactions. By discussing the ways my participants engage in mobile social-media practices in a daily basis, this chapter discussed how my participants currently manage their relationship within convergent and complex media ecology. From passive mobile communicative practices like checking social media accounts to more active practices like posting and updating social-media profiles, individuals engage in an interrupted flux of technologically mediated exchanges that are entwined with mobile and situated contexts.

## CHAPTER 6

### ASSEMBLING MOBILE SOCIAL SPACES IN DIVERSE GEOGRAPHIES OF TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

As I detailed in my methodological chapter, I structured my research as a comparative study developed in two contexts—Raleigh, North Carolina (USA) and Concepción (Chile). However, as I described in the introduction, I developed this comparison using an approach that deconstructs the Global North/Global South dichotomy and the exclusive focus on the national level to describe, instead, the assemblages, from micro to macro, within which individuals' mobile practices of social media use occur. It is in this context that this chapter addresses my fourth research question, which accounts for differences and/or similarities in the ways Chilean and American participants engage in mobile practices of social-media use as part of their everyday interactions and their management of personal relationships.

Drawing from this comparative analysis, the third major theme was constructed:

**“Assembling mobile social spaces in diverse geographies of technical development”.**

This theme includes the two following categories: 1) *new practices as control-cost strategies*, and 2) *the relevance of social contexts*.

Extending the assemblage approach that I have utilized throughout the preceding chapters, I am proposing here that these differences and similarities should not be understood as being defined by the traditional Global North/Global South divisions that research on mobile communication has accounted for (de Souza e Silva et al., 2011; Donner, 2007, 2008; Donner & Gitau, 2009; Donner & Tellez, 2008). Instead, differences exist between and within both contexts due to several social and cultural factors that produce different

assemblages, which are more complex than simple geographical definitions can capture. These assemblages go from micro-individual levels, such as the mobile devices each participant uses and his or her specific economic situation, to macro-context levels, which involve differences in the ways in which mobile data access is structured and marketed in the two national contexts, differences in telecommunication policies, and differences in technological infrastructures. Before examining the differences my analysis uncovered, I outline some relevant research on mobile communication and social media in the Global South in order to contextualize my comparative approach and to highlight the significance of the findings I uncovered.

Analysis related to both mobile communication and the use of social media has been focused predominantly on the Global North (Awan & Gountlett, 2013; boyd, 2008, 2010, 2014; Chistofieds, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009; Livingstone, 2008; Turkle, 2011), while within the Global South studies in mobile communication “have appeared in relative isolation from each other, separated by regions, and by disciplines” (Donner, 2008, p. 3). Within the developing world, research on social media has focused on descriptive statistics about the diffusion and use of social network sites and on political participation through SNSs. Meanwhile, mobile-communication research has centered on access to technology, appropriation and uses of the mobile phone, income generation and economic topics, long-distance communication, and the impact of the mobile telephone on mobility, the digital divide, social mobility, and inclusion (Madianou and Miller, 2011; Wallis, 2011; de Souza e Silva et al., 2011; Donner, 2008; Ureta, 2008, 2011; Srivastava, 2008; Law & Peng, 2008). All this research on mobile communication within the Global South has responded to the

boom of mobile communication in these areas, which has extended access to information and communication in developing countries.

Mobile telephony has been characterized by rapid and sustained growth, to the point that developing countries have 75% of world's mobile subscriptions (Pearce, 2013). In fact, "mobile [technology] use in the developing world is more widespread than any other ICT, that is, personal computers or fixed-line telephones" (Srivastava, 2008, p. 22). This is explained, in part, by the fact that mobile devices and their related services are more affordable than other technologies, such as fixed Internet connections or computers. Also, many people in developing countries "leap-frogged" the old landline technology because of the inadequacy of landline infrastructure and the multi-year wait times to get a phone (Castells et al., 2007; Donner, 2007). Additionally, in some cases the mobile telephone has been the way people have accessed the Internet for the first time, and even their primary way of connecting to the Internet in the developing world (Donner & Gitau, 2009).

The importance of affordability of mobile communication in the Global South has led to some specific social practices of mobile phone use that serve as strategies to reduce costs associated to mobile telephony services. Specifically, practices of "beeping" and sharing have contributed to the rapid growth of mobile communication within developing countries (Donner, 2007, 2008; Ureta, 2008). Beeping is the practice of calling a person and hanging up before that person answers the phone, then waiting for a return call from that person, who is generally someone who is better able to afford the costs of the connection.

Along with beeping, the practice of sharing the mobile phone has become an important way to reduce mobile telephony costs and to provide connectivity to rural and poor

communities, even though that connectivity falls far short of the “anytime/anywhere” connectivity that characterizes the wealthier regions of the world (Donner, 2008, p. 33), and the wealthier areas within a same country, which is the case in Chile. Both beeping and sharing have been stimulated, to some extent, by a telecommunication market that relies heavily on prepaid calling and calling-party-pays business models (Donner, 2007). Prepaid and calling-party-pays structures have reduced the cost of ownership and have lowered the entry barrier to service (without necessarily reducing the overall cost of service), which in turn has encouraged new users to adopt mobile telephony, especially voice-based and SMS services.

In the particular case of Chile, the majority of Chilean mobile-phone users (70%) rely on prepaid systems, and the calling-party-pays business model is the method of payment that governs the country mobile-telephony market (Subtel, 2013). This has been true since mobile telephony became massively available in Chile in the early 2000s. In the middle of the 1990s, the only mobile telephones available in Chile were in the hands of the wealthy. At the beginning of the 2000s, explosive growth of mobile telephone use began, and users became more diverse, coming from different social contexts (García et al., 2002). Prepaid plans were an important influencer in this growth, and from that time forward, the prepaid model has prevailed within the Chilean market, which developed this way in order to make mobile communication available to a larger, less wealthy sector of the population.

At the same time, social media are the most widely used online services by Chileans, and like the mobile phone, social media are low-cost substitutes for other means of communication (Donner & Gitau, 2009), such as computers and bandwidth Internet

connection. Among my Chilean participants, one of the key motivations for smartphone acquisition was the possibility of connecting to social media on the move. Chilean mobile-telephone service providers have noticed this phenomenon, and some of them have adopted commercial strategies to offer social-media connectivity for free within prepaid plans. In 2014, for instance, the *Claro* Company launched a campaign to recruit new customers and induce the customers of other companies to switch their prepaid plans to *Claro*. In doing so, *Claro* offered no-cost access to the social-media services that Chilean people use most frequently: Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Web banner of Claro Chile Company of <http://www.claro.cl><sup>4</sup>

This company's commercial strategy responds to the Chilean national telecommunication policy requiring mobile telephone number portability, which allows users to retain their mobile numbers when changing from one mobile network operator to another.

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<sup>4</sup> “Prepaid CLARO does not stop sharing. ¡Switch to Claro! Recharge now and use Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp without discounting from your credit” (translated by the author).

This policy was applied in Chilean market beginning in 2012, and by 2014 more than 2 million people had changed their mobile network provider in search of a better alternative in terms of quality of service and cost (SUBTEL, 2014).

Like the Claro Company, Virgin Mobile also developed its own strategy to attract customers. This company entered the Chilean mobile-telephony market in 2013, offering, among other services, an option they called “the anti-plan.” This service was specifically offered to attract customers who used prepaid calling cards, because it functioned as a plan but with no contract. With this alternative, if an anti-plan customer does not have money on a specific month, she can suspend the service by not paying until she has money again. Like a regular plan, each anti-plan includes different options in terms of available minutes and data (“Virgin Mobile Antiplanes”, 2015) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Web banner of Virgin Mobile Company of <http://www.virginmobile.cl><sup>5</sup>

In this way, the complexities of the context, which is defined by the intersection of national telecommunication policies and the market strategies of mobile network service providers, shape the terrain on which people act and, by extension, the diversity of their

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<sup>5</sup> “Having enough credit to buy the anti-plan you want” (translated by the author).

mobile-communication practices. As a result, new mobile-communication practices have emerged among Chilean mobile-phone users, who look for some strategies that help them to reduce the costs associated to telephony and data services. Those new mobile-communication practices are detailed below.

#### **NEW PRACTICES AS COST-CONTROL STRATEGIES**

All of my Chilean participants were smartphone owners, and most of them (13) actually rely on a mobile voice and data plan. Nevertheless, seven of my Chilean informants rely on prepaid systems for voice services, text-messaging functions, and Internet-based services. Although the proportion of different types of access within my participant group does not reflect the percentages of data-plan users vs. prepaid-service users in Chile, an analysis of these participants does allow me to identify some important characteristics of the mobile social-media practices of this sector of the population, to compare these practices to those of my U.S. participants, and to compare the practices of the Chilean participants across the two types of mobile access.

First of all, the practice of beeping has been traditionally linked to voice-based services. For this reason, this practices does not appear among my Chilean participants, who now privilege other mobile-phone uses beyond voice-based services. In fact, all of my Chilean participants use their mobile phones for a variety of other functions and have relegated voice-based services to a minor option, which is a general trend in different contexts—not just in Chile. Social-media use, including Internet-based texting services like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or Google chat, prevail among these participants. But while

all of my Chilean participants favored these services, their practices were dissimilar, depending on whether they had a contract-based data plan or relied on the prepaid system.

Innovative uses of mobile-communication technologies emerge when resources are constrained (de Souza e Silva et al., 2011; Donner, 2008), and Chilean mobile-phone users who rely on prepaid systems are those with lower monthly incomes; as such, they have developed strategies to use mobile phones while controlling their spending on mobile telephony and data services as much as they can. Beeping practices was not evident among my participants and only one participant performed the practice of sharing the mobile phone. However, other innovate forms of controlling costs appeared among those who were prepaid mobile telephony users. Having more than one mobile phone, looking for free Wi-Fi connection hotspots throughout the city, and mobile data sharing are the practices I registered among my informants.

#### *Having more than one mobile phone*

At least three of my Chilean participants had more than one mobile phone as a strategy to access different services at the lowest cost. Most of the time, the devices are acquired with different mobile network providers, so individuals use one phone or another depending on whom they are calling. This is because calls between numbers of the same company have lower costs. Sometimes, mobile-telephony companies offer prepaid services that allow the user to designate a specific frequently called number, which can be called with no extra charges. Such is the case for Juan Pablo (27, Concepción), who, in addition to his smartphone, had a “two-lines cell phone pack”, which consists of two mobile phones enabled

to make and receive unlimited calls from one to the other. Juan Pablo shared the second phone in the pack with his girlfriend, so each of them could talk to each other at no cost:

Juan Pablo (27, Concepción): I have two cell phones because one of them is a simple phone [feature phone] with a two-lines cell phone pack. So, I only use it to talk with my girlfriend. The other one is a smartphone, and I use it for everything else.

Carlos (29, Talcahuano): I have two phones. One phone is Entel, and the other is Movistar<sup>6</sup>, and I use them according to whom I need to call.

There is no prior research on this phenomenon in Chile, but this might be one of the reasons why, in a country of 17 million people, there are more than 23 million active mobile phones (SUBTEL, 2014). In addition to having more than one mobile telephone, participants mostly used their mobile phones to connect to Internet-based social media, and if they did not have a contracted voice and data plan, they used other people's data plans or connected to Wi-Fi hotspots as they move through the city, based on the availability of free hotspots. Therefore, technological infrastructure, particularly the availability of Wi-Fi connections, influences participants' movements through the city and individuals' practices of mobile communication.

#### *Searching for Wi-Fi hotspots*

The desire to be connected, while spending as little of one's prepaid credit as possible, leads prepaid subscribers to search for free Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the city. Claudia, a 31-year-old single mother in Concepción, exemplifies this practice. She has a high-school diploma but no college education, and she worked as a cashier in a bill-payment company. At the time

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<sup>6</sup> Entel and Movistar are two of the biggest mobile network providers in Chile, with 37,5% and 38,5% of the mobile telephony market respectively (SUBTEL, 2014).

of the fieldwork, her monthly salary was the minimum wage (210.000 Chilean pesos, equivalent to approximately US \$340). She had been using a smartphone for at least two years, and she had always relied on prepaid systems to access telephony and data services. Her monthly expenditure on mobile telephony was under 10,000 Chilean pesos (a little less than US\$20 dollars) per month, which is a monthly cost quite lower than what plan subscribers spend on mobile telephony and data plans. Due to her limited mobile-communication budget, Claudia was very careful about how she spent her mobile-telephony credits, so she rationed her use of 3G mobile connections, looking for free Wi-Fi hotspots instead. This was easier when she was at home because she had a broadband Internet connection there, and she used her home Wi-Fi connection to keep her phone connected to the Internet. However, while she was away from home, as she moved around Concepción, she was always looking for free Wi-Fi so she could check her social media accounts, especially Facebook:

Claudia (31, Concepción): I drive my niece to her daycare, and I connect to Facebook outside of there because they have free Wi-Fi. So, I take a few minutes to check my Facebook account after dropping off my niece. Sometimes I post something, but in general I just check what is happening with my friends. Then I continue to my work place. [...] If I go out with some of my friends, we always choose a club with a Wi-Fi connection because that way we are posting that we are in a club and what we are doing.

- Does connecting to Wi-Fi through your mobile phone consume your prepaid credit?

No, that connection does not consume the prepaid minutes. That's why I have a Wi-Fi connection [for my broadband Internet connection] at home because this way I do not spend the credit of my phone. So, at home I use it [the mobile phone] with Wi-Fi and outside I use it just when I have Wi-Fi connection.

Because Claudia wanted to avoid using her mobile-telephony credit, she moved through the city according to the availability of Wi-Fi connections. This practice of travelling the city according to the availability of wireless connection points modified her routine movements through public spaces, because her mobility was in some ways defined by those locations where she could get Internet connection without spending her minutes of mobile-telephony credit. Thus, the technological infrastructure of connectivity influences the ways she experienced the city. When she was unable to connect to the Internet through a Wi-Fi hotspot, her mediated interactions were limited to the use of voice calls and text-message services.

### *Mobile data sharing*

Economic constraints also motivate another practice I detected among my Chilean participants, which I have termed *mobile data sharing*. This practice involves individuals who do not have a data plan or rely on a prepaid model who ask others to share their Internet connection from their smartphones. In these cases, prepaid mobile-phone users turn to their family members, friends, or even acquaintances who are plan subscribers and supposedly have the economic means to afford those services and the sharing of their available data.

The practice of mobile data sharing has its predecessor in the practice of mobile phone sharing, which has been extensively documented within the literature on mobile communication in the Global South (de Souza e Silva, et al., 2011; Donner, 2007; Steenson & Donner, 2009; Ureta, 2008). Different forms of mobile-phone sharing (conspicuous, stealthy, person-seeking, and place-seeking) are structured by, and help to restructure, social space. Mobile sharing occurs in different contexts and through different social practices,

reaffirming roles among social groups and reinforcing community ties. As past research has shown, informal sharing occurs extensively, and its occurrence is defined by proximity, between friends or even neighbors; sharing is structured by different constraints, such as economic, family or literacy (Stenson & Donner, 2009).

*Mobile data sharing* responds to some of the same factors that have been identified as contributors to the growth of “beeping” in the developing world. The first of these factors is the fact that users share a need for lower telecommunications expenses in the face of economic constraints, especially when many low-income individuals are buying mobiles. Second, technology characteristics and billing structures offered by mobile providers (the pre-paid card system and calling-party-pays system) have contributed to the “beeping” explosion. Third, preexisting social and cultural factors such as the “rich guy pays” idea have also helped to increase the practice of “beeping” (Donner, 2007). Therefore, the attempts to reduce telecommunication costs, mobile providers’ billing structures, and social and cultural factors have intervened in the growing of the practice of “beeping” within the developing world.

Although it is not the mobile device itself that is shared, these same three factors identified in the research on “beeping” appear in *mobile data sharing*. This is evident among the participants in my study. First, in general, participants who ask for a shared connection have a limited ability to pay for a data plan or even for more available minutes on their prepaid subscription. Second, all the participants who use others’ data plans said they rely on the prepaid system. And third, the idea that “the rich guy pays” just because they can afford it was also evident. Therefore, individuals who do not have a mobile plan or who run out of

their prepaid data quota rely on others who are plan subscribers, asking them to share their unused data from their own 3G or 4G mobile Internet. This is case of Juan Pablo (27, Concepción), who asks friends or older family members to share their own connections whenever he can't find a free Wi-Fi hotspot and needs to connect for specific purposes:

Juan Pablo (27, Concepción): When I am in a place where there is no Wi-Fi connection, sometimes I need to send a WhatsApp message or I just want to check Facebook, I ask some of my friends for a connection. I usually get along with my older brother, and I often use his mobile data. He keeps his Wi-Fi hotspot open when we are together because he knows I am going to ask for it.

This practice is even more common among younger users (adolescents and college students), who even ask for a connection from strangers in public spaces in order to accomplish specific and quick tasks like sending a message or just checking one. In some ways, the macro-assemblage of Chilean mobile-communication market facilitates the practice of mobile data sharing because plan subscribers can share their Internet connection or data with no extra charges to their specific plans; they just use their available data. By contrast, this service must be contracted separately in the United States, which entails an additional charge to the monthly payments. These differences in market structure thus create the conditions for different kinds of mobile-communication practices.

While Claudia moves through the city looking for free Wi-Fi connectivity and Juan Pablo asks friends or strangers to share their mobile data, other Chilean participants, by contrast, have voice and data plans and have the luxury of constant connectivity without worrying about the cost of each connection. They can access their social-media accounts, interact, and connect with others whenever and wherever they want. They can afford continuous connectivity and therefore embody concepts such as “connected presence”

(Licoppe, 2004) or “perpetual contact” (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). Such is the case of Sofia, who is continually talking with her close friends through a WhatsApp group. She and her friends talk to each other every day in a continuous flow of interactions that has no need for starting or ending points such as greetings or farewells.

Another case, which is similar in the continuity of interaction but different in terms of motives and duration, was one that I observed in 2014. Rodrigo, 45 years old, is the father of a classmate of my youngest son. When he was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident, his family and the school community were expecting the worst. As soon as word of the accident got out, one of the other parents from the school created a WhatsApp group (“Everybody for Rodrigo”) for the parents closest to his family. The idea of the group was to stay informed about Rodrigo’s health status and to coordinate some aid for him and his family. This WhatsApp group, which included almost 25 people who were exchanging Rodrigo-related messages, lasted for about three months, from the time of the accident until he was discharged from the hospital.

Interactions among all these parents were very fluid, and they were used to organize important events and actions such as economic support, transportation for Rodrigo’s children to the hospital to visit him, and even prayers for his recovery. It was a group of continuous interaction like Sofia’s WhatsApp group; the support group for Rodrigo operated continuously, but unlike Sofia’s group, this community was temporary and responded to one specific event, which was Rodrigo’s accident. Both Sofia’s and Rodrigo’s cases are examples of “perpetual contact” (Katz & Aakhus, 2002), but they illustrate how the intersection of different assemblages—composed of differing socio-economic levels, motives, activities, and

other factors—shape the ways in which practices of perpetual contact occurred within these groups. Both Sofia’s and Rodrigo’s cases illustrate the uninterrupted connectivity that wealthier people enjoy in Chile. This allows us to see the variety of mediated interactions and possibilities that unfold depending on the combination of different assemblages.

As past research has shown, mobile communication technologies are embedded in preexisting social practices and reflect complex power relationships (de Souza e Silva et al., 2011; Donner, 2007, 2008; Ureta, 2008; Steenson & Donner, 2009). While the mobile communication practices of Rodrigo’s friends and Sofia were influenced by their ability to afford mobile telephony and a data plan, Claudia’s and Juan Pablo’s cases show how economic constraints define their connectivity, which in turn shapes mobile practices of social-media use and the kinds of social interactions that are possible with limited Internet availability. Claudia’s and Juan Pablo’s experiences, in contrast to those of the participants who have mobile-data plans, illustrate the reality that has prevailed, historically, within Chilean society—the reality of differential access to, *and use of*, communication and information technologies due to income inequality (Avilés et al., 2009; Godoy, 2007; Godoy & Gálvez, 2012; Godoy & Herrera, 2004, 2008; Godoy & Helsper, 2011; Helsper & Godoy, 2011). These quantitative inequalities produce qualitative differences in the modes individuals use mobile communication technologies, particularly the mobile phone.

Although Chile leads the use of smart phones and tablets in Latin America in terms of technology access per capita, there is a *qualitative digital divide* (Halpern, 2013). It is not about who has a mobile phone but instead what people can do with their phones in terms of connectivity, data transfer, and Internet access. This qualitative digital divide is related to the

fact that Chile faces a problem that many developing countries present: a highly uneven income distribution combined with sustained economic growth and deepening interdependence on transnational economic networks. As a result, the top 20% of Chilean households have an average income 13 times higher than the poorest 20% households (OECD, 2013), which is similar to other Latin American countries such as Mexico, whose average income difference between the two poles is even higher (15 times higher for richer people). But the situation is different in economically wealthy regions like the United States, where the difference between the richest 20% and poorest 20% is only a factor of eight. In short, the economic disparities prevalent in Chile entail differential *forms* of access to, and therefore different *uses* of, the Internet and computing technologies. This in turn leads to different practices and experiences around these new media.

These differential practices have been noted within the research on mobile communication in Chile. Research conducted by Ureta (2008) reveals two dissimilar and opposite realities that are linked to socio-economic differences. One of the studies addressed the question of whether the use of the mobile phone increases the physical mobility of low-income families in Santiago, Chile. In this study, Ureta (2008) discovered that “the use of the mobile phone by the members of these families clearly shows a new aspect of their still-incomplete integration into contemporary Santiago society.” (p. 90) In addition to more limited use of the mobile phone in general, these families rarely took their phones beyond the home, as they were essentially used as a family device—a shared tool that cannot move if the family does not move with it. In this sense, the possession of a mobile phone had not allowed these families to increase their physical mobility. Actually, they had not changed their

routines of limited physical movements. Indeed, mobile phones were not used in a mobile way because the mobile phone had simply been used to replace a fixed landline telephone. Therefore, the influences and effects of mobile phones on physical mobility must be studied in relation to the actual user practices and a wide range of other social and economic factors.

The second study, which examined how teens use the mobile phone (Ureta et al., 2011), was carried out within a wealthier social context, in Santiago. It demonstrated the similarity between the mobile-phone practices of wealthy Chilean teens and the practices mentioned by other research on mobile-phone use in the developed world: a youth culture in which teens use their phone for hyper-coordination or self-expression and fulfill their desires to be always on (Castells et al., 2007; Goggin, 2013; Ito et al., 2005; Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002; Ling, 2008; Stald, 2008). As these examples show, some Chilean individuals experience connectivity in ways similar to people within the developed world; however, there is a significant number of people who want to enjoy that same connectivity but cannot, for a range of reasons of which the lack of economic resources play a critical role.

#### **THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL CONTEXTS**

Claudia and Juan Pablo's cases illustrate how mobile social-media practices are different among my Chilean participants, but the inequalities are much deeper, and differential access to, and use of, mobile technologies is not necessarily distinctive or unique to the Global South. In fact, while the creative invention of cost-effective mobile-communication practices have often been associated with the developing world, U.S. users also look for more

economic alternatives to get access to mobile services. Even though all of my U.S. participants were plan subscribers, five of them relied on a family plan, a phenomenon that does not occur in Chile. Although the U.S. participants were all over 26 years old and lived on their own far away from their parents, they recognized that they continue to be on their parents' mobile telephony plan as a way to pay less for mobile data access. For instance, Ash (27, Chapel Hill) works and lives by herself, but her mobile phone is still on her parents' plan. The same situation holds with at least five other Triangle-Area participants:

Ash (27, Chapel Hill): It is [the plan] that my family has and I'm still actually on my family's plan and I just pay my parents because it is cheaper. I have younger brothers, so they're still paying for theirs, so it's easy to add another phone to theirs until I go on my own, so I just took whatever they had.

Allison (29, Chapel Hill): Because my mom let me be part of her cell phone plan. I think I pay like 50 or 60 dollars a month because I'm part of the family plan. It is cheaper.

Sarah (30, Cary): It is a family plan. I mean a plan with my father, my mother. It is very cheap for us to talk because we have a family plan, so it is an easy way to communicate with my parents. It is very cheap to talk to them and text them, yeah! So, that's the plan I have, it is a family plan.

Therefore, differences exist within both contexts due to the economic constraints that compose specific assemblages and specific mobile social-media practices. For example, within both my Chilean and U.S. participants, Paul (34, Raleigh) was the only interviewee who owned a feature phone instead of a smartphone. Although he wanted to change his old basic mobile phone for a smartphone, his economic situation prevented him from buying a smart device, so he changed his current voice and text plan for one that included data. For that reason, when he wants Internet access, he uses his wife's smart phone. So, I did not find cases of mobile phone sharing among Chilean participants, but I did find this case among the

U.S. participants, within a developed-world context. Whenever Paul is on the move and wants to access the Internet, he uses his wife's smartphone, and so he can check social media or the sport news. However, when he is not with his wife, he has no way to connect to the Internet while on the move:

Paul (34, Raleigh): In fact, my wife has [a smartphone], and I use that one, but I do that for economic reasons. I mean, I have an old phone because voice and text services are cheaper.

- Why do you use your wife's smart phone?

Because of its apps. The fact of not having my computer at hand when we are traveling or away from home, of being able to check my Facebook account or look up match results. That is what motivates me to use the smartphone: having the phone when I don't have access to a computer. That is the main motive.

Therefore, beyond the dichotomized perspective between wealthy countries and relatively poor ones, individuals respond to specific social context conditions with their own strategies, which in turn leads to different practices. As discussed cases have illustrated, the inequalities are much deeper, and differential access to, and use of, mobile technologies is not necessarily distinctive or unique to the Global South. Instead, inequalities exist within both Chilean and American contexts depending on assemblages specificities that are produced by the intersection of multiple factors, such as economic constraints, telecommunication policies (telephone number portability, calling-party-pay model), commercial strategies adopted by mobile network service providers (free access to specific social media through mobile Internet connection), and economic disparities between rich and poor people. These complexities of the context shape the terrain on which people act and, by extension, the diversity of their mobile-communication practices.

Looking at the complexities of the context means to understand that the macro-scale comparison between the Global North and the Global South is not useful, primarily because it treats national populations as homogenous groups, ignoring sharp inequalities of technology ownership and access within national contexts. This, for instance, means that some wealthy Chileans have technologies and data access that is similar to middle-class and wealthy families in the U.S., while there are some Americans whose use of mobile communication technologies resemble practices of people within developing countries like mobile phone sharing. On the other hand, the economic, political, and infrastructural contexts are different in significant ways, which means there are different assemblages that structure a variety of media ecologies and therefore different strategies and practices of mobile communication.

The articulation between the micro-assemblages of individuals and the macro-assemblages of technology infrastructures and telecommunication policy define different media ecologies and different terrains for mobile communicative practices and relationship management. There is a multiplicity of connections (secondary and tertiary) composing these assemblages, and the articulation of these connections composes a particular configuration of mobile-technology practices. These technology practices in turn, constitute a particular configuration of mobile communication practices and relationship-management strategies in everyday social contexts.

Starting from the specific characteristics of individuals' micro-assemblages, it was possible to see differences and similarities between these two Chilean and American contexts. Mobile-communication practices and the management of relationships are

embedded into an individual's specific assemblages, which in turn are connected to more macro levels of socio-technical assemblages that define different media ecologies. And these media ecologies are also shaped by the macro division between developed and developing countries. For example, Claudia moved through the city according to the availability of free Wi-Fi hotspots in Concepción. She was trying to stay connected despite the limitations of her paid mobile data access. So her practices of communication were linked to a specific media ecology, the technological infrastructure available in Concepción, and the characteristics of the mobile services economy in Chile.

This demonstrates the importance of a comparative approach that accounts for those specificities that support, for instance, these alternative strategies I have discussed in the dissertation in relation to Chilean participants. These strategies may be distinctive in comparison to the U.S. context, but it is not just the fact that people are poor. It is also due to the ways in which the media ecology (and technology economy) shapes the terrain on which people operate.

After addressing my comparative approach through this the above analysis, next and final chapter summarizes and details the major findings of my research.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS: MOBILE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN A CONTINUUM OF DISTRIBUTED ATTENTION

In this dissertation, I have analyzed individuals' mobile social-media practices in order to explore the ways they are embedded in the dynamic physical and social contexts of everyday life. Today, everyday practices of communication unfold in a context characterized by the convergence of mobile communication technologies and social media. Consequently, this research aimed to understand how individuals manage personal relationships when interactions happen in "hybrid spaces" (de Souza e Silva, 2006a), and they can choose among a wide variety of ways of connecting, depending on specific contexts and social situations defined by the articulation of micro- and macro-assemblages.

To address these issues, I embarked on a mobile and multi-sited ethnographic study, whose fieldwork involved interviewing 36 young adults (20 Chileans and 16 Americans) and conducting ethnographic observations in both Raleigh, NC, U.S.A., and Concepción, Chile. The methods included a shadowing process, which consisted in following and observing participants while they moved through their everyday activities. The aim of this exploratory study was to collect rich ethnographic data to illuminate the complex processes through which mobile-communication technologies and social media are woven into participants' everyday social interactions. Given the increasingly complex media ecology within which individuals carry out their activities and social interactions, this method made it possible to observe and analyze emerging practices naturalistically, within mobile social contexts. In this

concluding chapter, I first describe my major findings. I then highlight some contributions of my research in general, and of my methodological approach in particular. I end the chapter by discussing some limitations of this project and including some final reflections on the future directions of my research.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MOBILE SOCIAL-MEDIA PRACTICES**

Past research has indicated that social media play an important role in individuals' strategies for staying in touch with their social contacts (Baym, 2010; boyd, 2008; boyd and Ellison, 2008; Donath & boyd, 2011). Mobile communication technologies have extended social-media use to include practices on the move; so now mobile social media are used to manage social ties as people move through public spaces (Humphreys, 2007, 2013). By engaging in mobile social-media practices, individuals participate in continuous connections to others, merging online and offline interactions and blurring the boundaries between interpersonal and mass communication. Building on the analysis reported in the previous chapters, here I discuss some of the major findings of my study. These findings illuminate some of the complex ways in which mobile communication technologies and social media converge in individuals' mobile communicative practices, allowing them to manage social relations almost uninterruptedly and regardless of physical location.

From a micro-description of my participants' mobile practices of mediated communication, my study contributes to develop a deeper understanding of what "perpetual contact" (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) and "connected presence" (Licoppe, 2004) concepts actually mean, and how they are experienced by individuals in their everyday lives. Moreover, this

analysis reveals how the articulations of different assemblages allow some subjects to experience these kinds of continuous connectivity while constraining others' ability to be connected.

First, social contexts are a key factor shaping the ways in which mobile communicative practices are integrated into everyday life. Within an increasingly complex media ecology and considering multiple factors that intervene in the ways individuals manage their relationships, my findings highlight the need to focus the analysis on individuals' actual practices and experiences, rather than defining research in terms of a specific mobile communication technology or social-media service. This point is critical because mobile practices of social-media use differ depending on the specific social contexts and on the ways in which technological affordances, interactants' features, and individuals' communicative purposes are combined in a given situation. Approaching technologies as components of *assemblages (agencements)* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Wiley, Moreno, & Sutko, 2012; Wiley, Sutko & Moreno, 2010; Wise, 2012) foregrounds the ways in which social contexts play a key role in determining individuals' decision of how to connect with others.

My data revealed that social contexts give individuals significant cues that influence their decisions about how to communicate with others. Depending on the social context, my participants choose to use some media and not others, thus deciding on the modes in which they would perform specific mobile social-media practices. Certainly technological affordances are relevant in the decision to use some specific medium in a specific situation, but the factors that trigger individuals' decisions are more related to social context and

physical dynamics. Therefore, the decision to use a media technology is not just the result of technological affordances, but also of social-context characteristics. In this regard, Baym (2010) has established that, when media are used to manage relationships, the selection of one medium or another is defined by individuals' ties, the stage of a relationship, the relationship type and the physical distance between interactants. Certainly this is right, but it cannot be the complete picture. As my findings show, the selection of specific media and, therefore, the different ways individuals communicate to manage their relationships, are influenced by the intersection between the micro-assemblages of individuals and the broader socio-technical assemblages within which practices of communication take place. This constellation of assemblages can be shaped a variety of factors, such as the individuals' socio-economic status, communicative expectations, technological infrastructures, income inequalities, telecommunication policy, and mobile-telephony market characteristics, to name a few. These assemblages define individuals' specific media ecologies, which in turn condition individuals' communicative strategies and the way they engage in mobile practices of communication.

In the specific case of this comparative analysis between particular urban areas in Chile and the U.S., this means that we must look beyond the traditional division of the Global North / Global South in order to capture how individuals respond to specific assemblages with their own strategies that lead them into different mobile-communicative practices. As the analysis shows, there are both differences and similarities in the populations of wealthy and relatively poor countries, so we cannot rely on macro-scale comparisons between the Global North and the Global South. By treating national populations as

homogeneous groups, such an approach fails to recognize that there are significant forms of differential technology access and ownership of *within* national contexts.

In particular, my findings show how the technology practices and data access of wealthy individuals in Chile are similar to those of middle-class and wealthy people in the U.S. Conversely, the use of mobile communication technologies by some Americans resembles some practices, such as mobile phone sharing, that have been associated traditionally with users in developing countries. Certainly these findings are related to economic differences and commonalities, but they cannot be fully explained by income or wealth. Specific strategies and, therefore, specific mobile-communicative practices respond to the articulation of different micro- and macro- assemblages that should not be reduced to economic dimensions or simply to national-level differences.

A good example of this was Claudia's case: her mobile social-media practices are no doubt linked to her economic constraints, but they are also shaped by the articulation of other macro-assemblages such as the technology infrastructure of Concepción (the public transportation system and the distribution of Wi-Fi hot spots) and the characteristics of the mobile telephony market in Chile (specific mobile technologies available and the pricing and design of specific data-services packages). By contrast, Sofia's and Rodrigo's friends can afford the continuous connectivity that a data plan offers. So, their mediated-communication experiences exemplify the "perpetual contact" described by Katz and Aakhus (2002). Attention to the specifics of these participants' practices and contexts help us to understand the ways that multiple possibilities of mediated interactions unfold because of the combination of diverse micro- and macro-assemblages. As discussed in detail in the analytic

chapters of this dissertation, mobile practices of communication cannot be adequately understood from limited perspectives that consider, for instance, the comparison of socio-economic strata or national-level boundaries. Specific situated strategies of mobile communication can be understood in a greater detail and depth if we attend to the complex intersections of different assemblages.

Second, individuals' mobile communicative practices occur within *assemblages of distributed attention* (Wise, 2012). As multiple factors intervene in media-use decisions, individuals move within assemblages of distributed attention across multiple media, through shifting social interactions, and from one activity to another. As my research showed, the management of relationships takes place within assemblages of attention across communication activities and other activities, such as working, travelling, moving around the city, and waiting. Within these assemblages of attention, individuals engage in mobile mediated interactions that are now more recurrent and more deeply embedded in the rhythms and social-spatial contexts of everyday life.

This alters the ways individuals participate in situated interactions and particularly how they negotiate activities and social interactions in an economy of attention. The imbrication of mediated interactions within my participants' social and physical contexts showed how interactions happen not just among multiple embodied contexts, but also within a complex media environment from which individuals choose one medium or another to use. This illuminated the complex game of negotiating attention to media (or to distant others *through* media), on the one hand, and attention to co-present people, on the other. In this regard, deterministic interpretations of new-media use have underlined the ways in which

mobile technologies disrupt users' attention and separate them from their physical surroundings (Rheingold, 2012; Turkle, 2011)—a phenomenon that Gergen (2002) has named “absent presence.” Nonetheless, my research empirically demonstrated how individuals become involved in different activities on a continuum: their attention is continually distributed according to contextual dynamics, technological affordances, and individual affects and feelings. Experienced as a continuum, these activities are not considered by my participants to be interrupting other actions in everyday contexts.

Third, mobile practices of social-media use have been highly integrated into interpersonal interactions and the management of relationships, entwined with the mobile and situated contexts of everyday life. My participants have incorporated mobile social-media practices into their everyday lives as a way to be available at any moment and in any location, on the move and during pauses in movement. Through mobile communicative practices, they stay in touch with their social ties and organize their social life in a constant flux of personal exchanges that combines mediated and unmediated interactions. In such a context, practices of looking at others' social-media profiles, “liking” and/or commenting on others' posts, as well as posting and sharing content, become ways for participants to manage their relationships.

From passive practices of communication (checking social-media accounts) to active ones (posting, “liking,” commenting, and chatting), individuals actualize their social ties and manage their relations through mobile social-media interactions. These practices are woven into the embodied and social contexts of individuals' everyday lives and into the face-to-face communicative repertoires through which they interact with others. As most of the work of

relationship management happens in individuals' heads, passive practices enact imagined interactions and, therefore, a mechanism for managing relationships.

On a daily basis, participants perform a series of diverse mobile social-media practices as a way to stay in touch with others, coordinate activities, and ultimately manage their personal and social interactions. In most of the cases, checking social-media accounts is the first thing they do in the morning and last thing they do at night before sleeping. As expressive uses of the mobile phone make it into a symbol of belonging to specific social groups among teenagers (Castells et al., 2007; Ling & Donner, 2009; Stald, 2008), connecting to social media in the morning, even just checking for new posts or direct messages, gives individuals a sense of being part of a social network. In addition, this is not only a way to stay connected and to interact with others, but also a way of structuring social life, organizing activities and physical encounters based on what one learns on social media the first thing in the morning. Humphreys (2012) tackles this issue by defining connecting, coordinating and cataloguing as mobile-communicative practices that are related, respectively, to the social, physical, and informational aspects of public social interaction. However, those practices have also been taken to the private intimacy of individuals' bedrooms and are being continuously performed in an unfinished connection and coordination with others.

Mobile social-media connectivity is also a way of belonging to a group, defined by the list of contacts one keeps on one's social-media accounts. Even the most passive interaction, such as checking others' social-media posts, is a way to seek company and experience social support. In these cases, what matters is the potential to connect anytime-

anywhere, not the actual connection. Individuals value the ability to reach their social ties whenever and wherever they want, and they value the ways this is facilitated by social media and mobile devices, *even though they do not use that ability all the time*. These *potential* interactions allow individuals to maintain a sense of being connected even when they are just checking social media without actively engaging in actual exchanges. These modes of being potentially connected and staying one step away from actual interactions have important implications for relationship management because they show that we should not assume that mobile social-media practices are always mobile *communication* practices. There may not be any interaction at all, but there is a sense of being connected due to the *potential* for interaction.

While checking social media gives individuals a sense of connection, the practice of “liking” friend’s social-media posts is a way to show care for one’s friends, while the practice of posting is an attempt to extend one’s own experiences by sharing them with one’s contacts. Through posting and sharing content, mobile social-media users foster and manage their relationships with others because, as my participants reported, posting on social-media profiles is a way to look for interactions; it is a way to start conversations.

Meanwhile, chatting works as a form of continuous conversation throughout the day, becoming an embodied experience of “perpetual contact” (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). In some cases, chatting is a kind of ambient conversation, a form of mediated co-presence not necessarily focused on conversation itself, but on ambient awareness of another person’s presence and activities. Hyper connectivity fostered by these unfinished mediated interactions implies that “people never walk— or sit— alone” (Rainie & Wellman, 2012,

Kindle Locations 3054-3055). As such, people could be physically alone, but not socially because they remain perpetually connected to others. My findings confirm these approaches by showing in detail how individuals actually perform those mobile social-media practices that allow them to keep a “connected presence,” from just checking and liking others’ social-media updates to posting content or chatting with others within specific contexts.

Mobile social-media practices also become a way to pass time in the interstices of everyday life. Mobile social-media users take advantage of that formerly useless or “dead” time (Perry, O’Hara, Sellen, Brown, & Harper, 2001) to make it more “productive”—a time highly devoted to connecting to social media and nurturing social bonds. The intersection of embodied, social, and digital contexts shapes the ways individuals manage their relationships in a continuous flow of exchanges that occurs simultaneously across different physical locations and digital spaces.

Fourth, my research supported the findings of earlier studies that noted a high degree of integration of online and offline interactions (boyd & Ellison, 2007). As my data illustrated, when people come and go between online and offline environments, individuals are involved in connections performed in the context of in-between sites, where online and offline interactions are interwoven, and where online life “has a broader context in everyday offline lives and practices” (Taylor, 2006, Kindle location 299). In this context, individuals actually interact within “hybrid spaces” (de Souza e Silva, 2006a), those connected, mobile, and social spaces that blur the boundaries between physical and digital environments.

Processes of negotiation of new rules of interaction emerge in this flux of face-to-face conversations that converge with mediated interactions. “Mediatized communicative

repertoires” (Linke, 2011, p. 102) intersect and flow together with unmediated communicative repertoires in people’s interactions. In such a context, social interactions and relational management cannot be understood or explained based on a “metaphysics of presence”—the assumptions that physical presence is the only real or authentic basis of social experience (Büscher et al., 2011). Mediated interactions and, consequently, “mediatized communicative repertoires” (Linke, 2011, p. 102) are an integral part of present-day interpersonal and social interactions and the ways people manage their relationships. Online and offline interactions are highly intertwined, and co-located encounters are not the only meaningful form of social connections (Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Fifth, as different practices occur in different contexts, my findings showed that it is especially relevant to examine the multiple factors that intervene in the performance of mobile social-media practices. Distinct economic, technological, and social contexts produce multiple media ecologies within which different social mobile practices and social interactions unfold. By considering the ways in which different factors produce diverse media ecologies, it was possible to see how differences exist within and between mobile social-media practices in Chilean and American contexts. The reasons of these differences vary and include several social and cultural factors. These often include economic constraints, but they also involve telecommunication policies, technological infrastructures, and the ways in which mobile data access is structured and marketed in the two contexts. The complexities of these two distinct contexts, with their differing combinations of telecommunication policies and commercial strategies from mobile-network providers, underlie the diverse practices of mobile-technology users, such as the multiple strategies to

control mobile telephony costs: having more than a mobile phone, looking for free Wi-Fi hotspots in the city, and mobile data sharing.

As past research has described how mobile communication technologies are embedded in preexisting social practices and complex power relationships (de Souza e Silva et al., 2011; Donner, 2007, 2008; Steenson & Donner, 2009; Ureta, 2008), my data illuminate ways in which new mobile-media practices illustrate a historical reality within Chilean society—the differential access to, and uses of, communication and information technologies that reflects the persistent inequality of income distribution within the country (Avilés et al., 2009; Godoy, 2007; Godoy & Gálvez, 2012; Godoy & Herrera, 2004, 2008; Godoy & Helsper, 2011; Helsper & Godoy, 2011). Although Chile leads the use of smartphones and tablets in Latin America in terms of technology access per capita, there is a qualitative digital divide (Halpern, 2013) that determine differences in the ways in which people *use* the mobile phone in terms of their connectivity, data usage, and modes of Internet access.

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS OF MY WORK**

The findings of this dissertation contribute to our understanding of relational management, to the development of new methodological strategies for investigating mobile communication practices, and to research on mobile communication in Chile.

First, this study contributes to research on relationship management in several ways. Initially, this dissertation advances that field by demonstrating the value of combining different methods, such as mobile interviews and the shadowing method, that make it possible to study relational management in naturally occurring contexts. Instead of basing

claims on individuals' self-reported perceptions, opinions, or what they say they do in specific contexts, my findings are based on the observation and subsequent description of individuals' actual practices and experiences as they unfold within the complex fabric of everyday life. Moreover, my methodological approach rejected a dichotomized perspective in which relationships are characterized as technology-driven versus face-to-face (FtF) or online versus offline. By contrast, it focused on the observation of young adults' actual practices and experiences of mobile social-media usage as a way to discover how they develop and manage their social ties on the move. By observing my participants' daily practices (what they do) and their motivations (why they do what they do), I was able to (micro) describe my participants' mobile mediated interactions as they unfolded. As a result, the use of innovative and mobile methods in an empirical study is the most important contribution of my work within relationship management research. By observing mobile communication phenomena in naturally occurring settings, I gained a first-hand understanding of the ways individuals engage in mobile mediated interactions to manage their relationships.

My dissertation also contributes to an approach to relational management research that extends beyond the dichotomy of mass communication vs. interpersonal communication, recognizing that people now communicate with dynamic and unknown groups and contexts, including the potential circulation of our "personal" communications in much broader (even global) contexts. Mobile social-media practices have become a means of conversation, but those interactions can be seen by many others who are not intended participants in those interactions. In such a context, social media function as a conversational medium, but also as a broadcasting of personal interactions.

Second, my ethnographic approach has facilitated a deeply contextual examination of mobile practices of social-media use among young adults within their everyday activities of communication and relational management. Because individual relationships can be managed through multiple media (Baym, Zhang & Lin, 2004), and social-media interactions are woven into the daily management of relationships in complex ways, it was important, methodologically, to focus on individuals' communicative practices in their everyday social contexts. I explored the embeddedness of mobile communication technologies in social and physical contexts, and the mobile methods I employed allowed me to observe the richness of individuals' communicative practices on the move and in spaces where the boundaries between online and offline realities are no longer clear. Moreover, a mobile ethnography, framed by the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006), facilitated a more integrative methodological approach that allowed me to consider different kinds of movements, material immobilities, and social interactions. As a result, the use of mobile methods to gather data contributed to a better understanding of social processes and a more complete picture of the richness of individuals' communicative practices. Multiple methods such as photo-voice interviews, mobile interviews, and mobile participant observation (shadowing) complemented each other, which allowed me to see and describe a social phenomenon from diverse perspectives and also to track the flows of that phenomenon as it unfolded in everyday life and within an increasingly diverse media ecology. Thus, my dissertation constitutes an important contribution to the methodological literature on the study of mobilities and mobile communication, while also adding to knowledge of mobile social-

media practices and the convergence of mobile communication technologies and social media in everyday interactions.

Third, my study also helps to extend the knowledge of mobile communication and social-media practices in Chile. By examining a phenomenon that has not been analyzed before in Chile, despite the pervasive use of social media through mobile devices, this dissertation addresses an important gap in research. This study is the first empirical study of mobile communicative practices in Chile that analyzes the intersections between mobile communication technologies and social media in the everyday life of young adults.

#### **FUTURE RESEARCH AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS**

Future research should extend the scope of this study with a quantitative analysis of a representative sample of young adults in Chile and the United States. Building on the findings of this dissertation, a larger-scale study with a representative sample would allow for generalizable findings in relation to mobile social-media practices. Additionally, future studies should include an analysis of the content that mobile social-media users publish on a daily basis, which could be combined with the approach to data-collection and analysis that was employed here. A detailed analysis of the type of content that individuals share through mobile social media should consider the physical locations from which individuals post content. Drawing on this kind of data, it would be possible to include visualizations of those locations in which posting and sharing took place. Future research could also register (track) the specific uses of mobile devices and the activities performed through them. By using a specific mobile data-collection application installed on participants' own mobile devices, it

could be possible to track their use for interactions at any moment of the day, any place and when using any application.

By focusing on micro descriptions of my participants' mobile social-media practices, my dissertation has shed light on the new ways in which individuals interact with others and manage personal and social relationships in a continuum of assemblages of distributed attention that blur the boundaries between traditional divisions such as online/offline or interpersonal and mass communication. As my research has shown, within these assemblages, face-to-face interactions and mediated communication are “in constant interconnection and in process” (Linke, 2013, p. 35), which impacts individuals' everyday management of relationships. Thus, this exploratory study has provided a deeper understanding of young adults' actual mobile social-media practices and their actual experiences. It has made it possible to see how these new practices and experiences unfold at the intersection of mobile technologies and social media, within new media ecologies and new communicative practices.

As a comparative ethnographic study of young adults in Concepción, Chile, and Raleigh, the United States, this study also offered new insights into the importance of studying different assemblages for understanding how diverse mobile social-media practices are performed and incorporated into everyday life. By offering a comparative study focused on individuals' mobile social-media practices framed by the articulation of different assemblages, this research illustrates how the compositions of specific assemblages shapes mobile practices of communication. This kind of information could help a national, regional, or municipal government to develop telecommunication policies that improve access to

mobile Internet services for those people who have economic constraints. This is a very relevant issue in countries like Chile, whose income distribution is highly uneven (OECD, 2013). As the first analysis of the convergence of mobile communication technologies and social-media use in Chile, this study's findings can help to define strategies that contribute to diminishing the *qualitative digital divide* (Halpern, 2013) that arises from differential access to mobile Internet connectivity.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

### Part I: Mobile social networking and communicative practices

1. Do you have a smart phone? Why/why not?
2. How long have you been using a smart phone?
3. Can you describe the reasons why you decided to replace your previous mobile phone with a smart phone?
4. What mobile phone service do you use, and what is the brand and model of your mobile telephone? Why did you choose that one?
5. Can you describe what your cell phone play on your daily routines?
6. How long have you been accessing your social-network accounts through your mobile telephone?
7. As you look back when you first started accessing your social-network accounts through your mobile telephone, can you describe why did you want to do that?
8. As time has gone by, have those reasons changed? If so, what are the current reasons?
9. Now I'd like to ask about your *experience* using mobile social media, as opposed to your motivations. Comparing your current experience of social media to your experience when you started using them, what changes do you notice? Why do you think your experience has changed, or not changed?
10. Has your smart phone use increased the amount of time you spend on Social networking sites?
11. What are the social network sites you use the most? What are the reasons you use each of them?
12. How did you decide to use one social network service instead of another? Can you give some concrete examples?
13. How often do you update your social-network profile or profiles?
14. Can you tell me what kind of content you get used to publish on your social-network profile or profiles?
15. What are the main reasons that motivate you to update your social network profiles?
16. Can you describe your use of the cell phone to access and update your social network accounts during a typical weekday?
17. Can you describe your use of the cell phone to access and update your social network accounts on a typical weekend day?
18. From what physical locations, if any, do you usually access your social network accounts through your mobile phone? Are some places better than others when you want to access or update your social network accounts? Why?
19. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your mobile social networking and your experience of your everyday mobile-phone interactions with others?

### **Mobile social networking practices and social ties**

1. Can you describe how you communicate with your friends/family members/colleagues in a daily basis?
2. How do you decide who to connect with, and who you don't want to connect with, on Facebook? How about on other social networks sites such as Twitter or Instagram?
3. With whom of those contacts do you most frequently interact through mobile social-networking technologies?
4. Can you tell me how your mobile social networking interactions are intermingled with face-to-face relationships? Can you give some concrete examples?
5. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the social ties you actualize through mobile social networking practices?

### **Mobile social networking practices and participants' notions of private and public**

In this section of the interview, I will ask some questions about your feelings about privacy in relation to your mobile social networking practices.

1. What kind of information do you share through your Facebook account and other social network services like Twitter?
2. If there is some information you only share with specific friends, what type of information is it, and with whom you share it?
3. Do you share information publicly through social networks? If so, why do you choose to make those comments public?
4. Has your online identity ever been compromised? What was the context behind it? How did it make you feel?
5. How do you feel your self-presentation online has shaped the way you view yourself?
6. Can you tell me what you understand about privacy?
7. What do you think about your privacy when you share information through mobile social-networking technologies?
8. How do you decide what information should be private when posting through your mobile social-network accounts?
9. Do you ever talk about your emotions on your social media profiles? If so, what was your motivation to do so?
10. Do you take any measures to protect the privacy of your personal information on your social network accounts? If so, what measures?
11. Have you ever modified pre-given privacy settings on your social network accounts? If so, what have you done?
12. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your privacy concerns in relation to your participation on social-network sites through mobile devices?

## Part II: Review participants' social network profile

Now I'd like to ask you to log in to Facebook and tell me about your use of that network in relations to what you post and why you do.

1. How many contacts do you have on your Facebook friends list, and what kind of social ties do you maintain on Facebook?
  - a. Family members
  - b. Work colleagues
  - c. High school friends
  - d. College friends
  - e. Others
2. Can you go through your list of friends and identify each of them as:
  - a. Very close friend
  - b. Close friend
  - c. Acquaintance
  - d. Family member
  - e. Extended family member
  - f. Other
3. Looking at your social network site profile, can you tell me why you choose this image as your profile picture?
4. Looking at the most recent posts, could you describe who you are imagining as your audience? In other words, for whom did you share those posts? Can you remember how you decided to share them?
5. Can you describe where you were and what you were doing when you posted that specific comment (the most recent one)?
  - a. Where were you?
  - b. What other people were there? Were there any distractions in that physical location?
  - c. Whom were you talking to through social media?
  - d. What were you doing before posting that message?
  - e. What did you do after posting that message?
6. How do you decide when to share pictures on your social network accounts? What kinds of pictures do you like to share? What kinds of pictures do you *not* like to share?
7. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your social network site profile?

## APPENDIX B: SHADOWING SCRIPT

| STRUCTURE CODES |            |          |          |          |
|-----------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Participant     | Start time | Location | End time | Location |
|                 |            |          |          |          |

| Time | OBSERVATIONS | MEMOS |
|------|--------------|-------|
|      |              |       |

## **APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF INTERPRETIVE PORTRAIT**

Carlos is 31 years old. He is a Programming Analyst who works full-time in a university in Concepción. He is one of the few participants (if not the only one) who do not use his Facebook account. In fact, he deactivated his account after Facebook started to gain more users in Chile. However, he uses other social media. Actually, he prefers those social media that are less used by the rest of people. Carlos also uses Youtube, Flickr, Foursquare and Twitter.

He likes to try every new social media when those appear on the market, and he leaves them if he does not like them. Therefore, he also created an account on Pinterest and Google+ though he does not use them so much. In order to take care about his privacy, Carlos prefers not to share on social media any information related to his family because he considers that kind of information is so private, so personal, that he does not want to share it with all his contacts.

Carlos keeps connected with his girlfriend during the entire day while they are on their respective places of work; and they keep chatting each time they want to say something. They keep a continuous conversation during the entire day through Skype. He has been using different social media since 2007 when he got his first smartphone. At the beginning, he used Flickr a lot because he liked photography, but he has gradually leaving that social media behind. When I interviewed him, he was also abandoning the use of Foursquare. In his opinion, Chilean businesses do not take advantage of advertising their products and offering some promotions to Foursquare users when they check-in, so that discourages its use.

Carlos is an enthusiastic social media user. On a regular day, when he arrives to his office and turns on his desktop computer, he immediately launches software to keep his Twitter account opened. He also opens his Skype account because he likes to keep connected with his girlfriend throughout the day. After work, he continues accessing social media at his home or at his girlfriend's home.