Online communication is a new phenomenon. However, the ubiquity of online communication is new. Furthermore, the rapid development of ubiquitous online environments caught Internet observers off guard. There was no way to anticipate how the advent of smart cellular telephones and computer tablets would lead to users living online 24/7. Today, individuals and organizations maintain an ongoing online presence as a matter of practice and a lived reality of modern life. Virtual life as a parallel and omnipresent reality has captured the interest of users in both developed and developing countries, of men and women, adults and children, the educated and the learning, the wealthy and the poor. Food, clothing, shelter, and cell phones have become the necessities of modern life.

Indeed, checking online messages (email, Websites, blogs, social media, and so forth) has become ubiquitous in every way. Almost every person on the planet who can financially afford one (and many people who cannot) possess a smart telephone. Users carry their devices with them at all times and sleep with them at their bedsides. These devices are omnipresent; they are out and in use in business meetings, government hearings, courtrooms, classrooms, restaurants, and family dinners. The propensity of users to simultaneously live online and off-line raises a number of questions concerning user behavior that simply could not be observed or studied until the manifestation of the phenomenon itself—in other words until now. The book you hold in your hand is among the first to address questions relevant to this new ubiquity.

The purpose of this book is to examine how ubiquity (a) influences user behavior and, as a result, ultimately (b) influences the mechanisms designed to facilitate user behavior. As with any first effort, the book covers a wide range of relevant topics. Examined issues of ubiquity range from users’ motivations to engage with Facebook to the evolution of workers’ online practices, from managing mobile employee databases to texting practices on cell phones. By carefully curating examinations of such diverse contexts and issues, the editors allow the reader’s focus to remain on the overriding concern of discerning patterns in user behavior in ubiquitous online environments.

The chapter authors appear to achieve the impossible: They provide appropriate theoretical perspectives, employ sound analytic and research methodologies, as well as translate their results into practical advice. Therefore, the book will prove useful for scholars, users, and practitioners who desire to understand the influence of ubiquity on user behavior in private and commercial ventures.

The most impressive feature of this book is its scope. Chapter authors employed multiple sound methodologies (i.e., historical analysis, interviews, online surveys, freeform responses to scenarios, and experimental platforms) to collect data in multiple countries (i.e., China, France, Japan, South Africa, Tunisia, United States of America). The researchers examined many important objects of study:
• Evolution of the Internet.
• Websites including commercial Websites and retailer Websites.
• Web management tools such as corporate knowledge management systems, university Web portals, and collaborative research tools.
• Trends in user behavior such as adoption of mobile information, brand engagement, and the timing of texts.

The book’s most impressive scholarly achievement, however, is the examination of a long list of variables containing some classic concerns in studies of online behavior (i.e., telepresence, usability, relational trust, privacy, user-friendliness, uncertainty avoidance) as well as some relative newcomers (e.g., flow, motivations for posting, frequency of posting, sender versus receiver perspectives) in studies that yielded interesting results in the new worldwide ubiquity of online behavior.

Taking the book’s body of work as a whole, researchers appear to be moving from assessing individual users’ perspectives and behaviors to assessing the interactions (a) between users as well as (b) between users and platforms—an appropriate evolution in assessment, given the tendency in ubiquitous online environments for users to conduct both personal and professional business online. It is important to note that such an observation (the above-described shift in the focus of assessment) could only be achieved by examining a collection such as this—a well selected, edited, and curated collection of original research on user behavior in ubiquitous online environments.

The book contained herein is necessarily limited, given that user behavior in ubiquitous online environments is a relatively new phenomenon and given that the research examining the phenomenon is in its infancy. Nonetheless, this book fills an important scholarly niche by beginning conversations about how to study and adapt to user behavior in ubiquitous online environments. All explorations must begin somewhere, and this book provides a particularly good beginning.

I laud the book editors for beginning the exploration of user behavior in ubiquitous online environments on a multi-national level and with such an impressive collection of research reports. The book captures the current state of knowledge on user behavior in ubiquitous online environments, as each chapter begins with a review of past and relevant research. Equally important, the book “pushes the envelope” of our knowledge and research methods by featuring new and exciting studies of previously unexplored phenomena—research at the heart of this bedeviling, new ubiquity.

In short, this wonderful collection makes an important contribution to both research and practice on the new, exciting subject of user behavior in ubiquitous online environments. This book represents a necessary and appropriate beginning to the scholarly conversation on user behavior in ubiquitous online environments. The editors did a masterful job of beginning to answer important questions about the phenomenon. They did so by collecting, editing, and curating multiple perspectives from multiple countries that speak eloquently to the innovations in user behavior in ubiquitous online environments. Congratulations to Jean-Eric Pelet and Peggy Papadopoulou on an important collection.

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