

# Semiotic Overflow across Boundaries: Performativity of ‘Monstrous’ Mobile Apps

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**Abstract.** Algorithms and databases running mobile and web-based applications (apps) capture large volumes of user data and use it to not only personalize their services, but also to publicly convey what is ‘hot’ and trending. While personalization leads to individual level implications, disseminating what is ‘hot’ can have wider public ramifications. However, it is not apparent how the implications of these apps flow beyond their sociomaterial boundaries to wider social context. This research surmises that once installed on the devices of the users, mobile apps are abandoned by their creators to be appropriated in unforeseen ways, ascribing a ‘monstrous’ character to the apps. Using app-based cab services and the traditional yellow taxis in the Indian city of Kolkata as case exemplars, and borrowing empirical and conceptual categories from Actor-Network-Theory, this research shows that material intermediaries can flow across the boundaries of the interactional frame of the mobile app world to the yellow taxi world, through unanticipated material enactments associated with the mobile apps owing to their ‘monstrous’ nature. This overflow, in turn, causes the performative semiotic construction of what is ‘hot’ and trending to also be transported, *without distortion in meaning*, across the boundaries of the app world.

**Keywords:** Semiotic Overflow, Intermediation, Performativity.