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This book presents a major contribution to the theoretical understanding of the mediatization of culture and society. This is supplemented by in-depth studies of:

• the mediatization of politics: from party press to opinion industry
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• the mediatization of play: from bricks to bytes
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Mediatization represents a new social condition in which the media have emerged as an important institution in society at the same time as they have become integrated into the very fabric of social and cultural life. Making use of a broad conception of the media as technologies, institutions, and aesthetic forms, Stig Hjarvard considers how characteristics of both old and new media come to influence human interaction, social institutions, and cultural imaginations.

Stig Hjarvard, Ph.D., is Professor and Vice-Chair at the Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He has published books and articles on journalism, media and globalization, media and religion, media history and mediatization theory. He is editor of the journal Northern Lights and of the English language books News in a Globalized Society (2001) and Media in a Globalized Society (2003).
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THE MEDIATIZATION OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Stig Hjarvard
# CONTENTS

| List of figures | vi |
| List of tables | vii |
| Acknowledgments | viii |

1. Introduction: From mediation to mediatization 1
2. Mediatization: A new theoretical perspective 8
3. The mediatization of politics: From party press to opinion industry 41
4. The mediatization of religion: From the faith of the Church to the enchantment of the media 78
5. The mediatization of play: From bricks to bytes 103
6. The mediatization of habitus: The social character of a new individualism 137
7. Epilog: Consequences and policies of mediatization 153

Bibliography 157
Index 170
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The media facilitate and structure virtual spaces for communication and action</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The dual circuit of political mass communication</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The agenda-setting process</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>The extended network of political communication in a new media environment</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Overview of Meyrowitz’s (1986) revision of Goffman’s theater model of social interaction</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>The hybrid role of the political commentator</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Picture from LEGO brochure, 1960</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>LEGO catalog from 1984: presentation of a truck in a provincial town</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>LEGO catalog from 1996: presentation of a truck in an American metropolis</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>The website <a href="http://www.bioniclestory.com">www.bioniclestory.com</a> contributes to the narrativization of the action figures from the LEGO Bionicle series</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

2.1 The institutional development of the media ................................. 26
3.1 The historical development of mediatized politics in the Nordic countries ................................................. 51
4.1 Key characteristics of three different forms of mediatized religion ................................................................. 84
4.2 Ways of engaging in spiritual issues .................................................. 97
4.3 Media stories about the fight between good and evil .............................. 98
4.4 The influence of different media stories on an interest in magic and fantasy ................................................................. 99
4.5 The influence of different media stories on an interest in spiritual issues ................................................................. 99
4.6 The influence of different media stories on an interest in religious issues ................................................................. 100
4.7 Readers’ and viewers’ evaluation of Dan Brown’s critique of the Christian Church ................................................................. 101
5.1 Internet use in minutes by European children and young people on an average day in 2010 ................................................................. 113
5.2 Location of Internet use by European children and young people in 2010 ................................................................. 114
5.3 Various types of media that children and young people have in their own rooms in Denmark in 2011 ................................................................. 116
5.4 Time spent playing computer games on PCs by children and young people in Denmark in 2011 ................................................................. 117
5.5 Time spent playing online computer games by children and young people in Denmark in 2011 ................................................................. 117
7.1 Key characteristics and outcomes of mediatization as regards various social and cultural institutions and phenomena ................................................................. 154
This book is partly based on a Danish publication “En verden af medier, medialiseringen af politik, sprog, religion og leg,” published by the Danish Academic publisher Samfundslitteratur in 2008. Some of the chapters have also been published in English:


We thank the publishers and journals for their kind permission to reproduce the articles in this book. In all cases the chapters have been thoroughly revised, updated, and expanded.

The pictures in Chapter 5 from the LEGO 1960 brochure, LEGO 1984 and 1996 catalogs, and LEGO website www.bioniclestory.com are reproduced with the kind permission of the LEGO Group.

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INTRODUCTION

From mediation to mediatization

Introduction

Mediatization has emerged as a new research agenda to reconsider old, yet fundamental, questions concerning the role and influence of the media in culture and society. In particular, the concept of mediatization has proved useful to the understanding of how the media spread to, become intertwined with, and influence other fields or social institutions, such as politics (Strömbäck 2008), war (Horten 2011), and religion (Hjarvard 2011). This book presents the core elements of mediatization theory and puts the theoretical framework to work in analyses of various social phenomena: politics, religion, play, and habitus formation. Chapter 2 provides a lengthy theoretical discussion of mediatization theory, while Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are concerned with empirical analyses of separate social and cultural domains. Chapter 6 provides a theoretical discussion of the relations between mediatization and a particular general process of modernity: individualization. Chapter 7 summarizes the complex outcomes of mediatization processes and discusses various forms of media policies for the “big” and “small” society. In this introductory chapter we will provide a brief context for the relevance and theoretical underpinnings of mediatization theory as it is developed in this book.

Media in culture and society

Our inquiry takes its point of departure in a classical question in the sociology of the media, namely, how the media come to influence the wider culture and society. Answers to the question, however, are sought in a new social condition, which we will label the mediatization of culture and society. Traditionally, media and communication studies have tended to look for the influence of the media by studying the communication process itself. The media have been conceived as separate from
culture and society, and either as something that exerted influence on culture and society, or that could be used by individuals and organizations to serve various purposes and ends. Two different traditions of media and communication studies may exemplify this. The “effect-paradigm” (Preiss et al. 2007) has tended to focus on what the “media do to people”, i.e., the effects certain mediated messages have on individuals or groups in society. For example, the news coverage during an election campaign might be thought to exert influence on people’s political opinions; advertisements to affect consumers’ shopping preferences; and film content to affect the viewers’ morals or distract attention from matters of greater urgency or significance. Within this paradigm, the media are considered to be the independent variable that affects the dependent variable: the individual.

Within a very different research tradition, audience research with a cultural studies orientation, the primary interest has, in a sense, been the opposite, namely, to study what “people do with the media.” According to this research paradigm, the people using the media are active and competent, if not powerful, and they are able to make use of the media in their own everyday practices, in order to satisfy their own needs. As active and competent media users they do not succumb to the hegemonic discourses of media texts, but may interpret them critically, in accordance with their own cultural and social backgrounds (Liebes and Katz 1990; Lull 1990), and as “textual poachers” they may even challenge the dominant ideologies in society (Jenkins 1992a). Within the uses-and-gratification tradition of media research, the focus has similarly been on what “people do with the media,” rather than the opposite (Blumler and Katz 1974). Here, active audiences and users are the primary variable, while the media are the secondary variable.

Mediatization theory differs from both of these traditions. Contemporary culture and society are permeated by the media, to the extent that the media may no longer be conceived as being separate from cultural and social institutions. Under these circumstances, the task before us is instead to seek to gain an understanding of how social institutions and cultural processes have changed character, function, and structure in response to the omnipresence of the media. As the two aforementioned research traditions exemplify, the majority of existing research has been preoccupied with the study of “mediation,” i.e., the use of the media for the communication of meaning. The cultural and social influences of the media have accordingly been sought within the communication circuit itself, as the effect of mediated messages on audiences; or the opposite, i.e., the use of mediated messages by active audiences. Mediatization studies move the focus of interest from the particular instances of mediated communication to the structural transformations of the media in contemporary culture and society. The influences of the media are not only to be found within the communication sequence of senders, messages, and receivers, but also in the changing relationship between the media and other cultural and social spheres. While the study of mediation pays attention to specific instances of communication situated in time and space (e.g., the communication of politics in blogs during a presidential campaign), mediatization studies are concerned with the long-term structural change in the role of the media in culture and society, in which
the media acquire greater authority to define social reality and condition patterns of social interaction. This altered understanding of the media’s importance does not imply that traditional questions regarding aspects such as the effects of mediated messages on public opinion, or the purposes to which people use the media, are no longer relevant. But it does mean that an understanding of the importance of the media in modern culture and society can no longer rely on models that conceive of the media as being separate from culture and society, or that solely consider the process of mediation.

The media are not simply technologies that organizations, parties, or individuals can choose to use – or not use – as they see fit. The presence of the media has become a structural condition for social and cultural practices, both within particular cultural spheres and in society as a whole (Livingstone 2009). A significant proportion of the influence that the media exert arises out of the double-sided development in which they have become an integral part of other institutions’ operations, while also achieving a degree of self-determination and authority that forces other institutions, to greater or lesser degrees, to submit to their logic. The media are at once part of the very fabric of particular social and cultural spheres (the family, politics, etc.) and a semi-independent institution that provides a nexus between other cultural and social institutions, as well as interpretative frameworks for our understanding of society as a whole, and that constitutes a common arena for public discussion. The duality of this structural relationship – being both inside other institutions and a provider of a common perspective on society – sets a number of preconditions for how the media, in given situations, are used and perceived by senders and receivers, thereby affecting relations between people. Thus, traditional questions about media use and media effects need to take account of the circumstance that culture and society have become mediatized.

A theory of the middle-range

As a concept “mediation” is too narrowly focused on the communication process itself, so we need another term, “mediatization”, to denote the long-term, large-scale structural transformation of relationships between media, culture, and society. Via a combination of empirically founded studies and theoretical reflections, mediatization studies seek to generalize findings beyond the particular communicative situation. The aim is to consider whether and how structural changes between the media and various social institutions or cultural phenomena come to influence human imaginations, relationships, and interactions. A key question here concerns the appropriate level of generalization for building a theoretical framework. The ambition is not to build “grand theory” in order to establish universal or definitive answers to the influence of media in every culture at all times, but rather to stipulate general patterns of development within particular social institutions or cultural phenomena, and within specific historical periods in particular social and cultural contexts. Nor is our theoretical ambition satisfied merely with accumulating insights into the endless minor variations of situated interaction. In order to steer
free of both of these pitfalls, i.e., over-generalization as well as under-theorization, mediatization studies seek to develop a theory of the middle-range (Merton 1957). As Boudon (1991) observes, the notion of a middle-range theory is not clearly defined and from it we therefore cannot derive a clear specification of the required level of generality, or other conceptual requirements of such a theory. Nevertheless, the notion of a “middle-range theory” reflects an ambition to develop theories that combine theoretical ambition with an empirical cautiousness, recognizing that “it is hopeless and quixotic to try to determine the overarching independent variable that would operate in all social processes, or to determine the essential feature of the social structure” (Boudon 1991: 519, emphasis in original). Accordingly, the analysis of mediatization processes will predominantly focus on the meso level of social and cultural arrangements, i.e., at the level of specific social institutions (politics and religion) and cultural phenomena (play) within a given historical and socio-geographical context. Similar to other major sociological concepts like globalization and urbanization, mediatization may be considered a macro-social process, because its influences are visible in society as a whole, but in order to study mediatization processes and systematize findings we will generally apply a meso-level perspective. In this book we develop a meso-level perspective through an institutional approach that allows us to make generalizations across individual micro-social encounters within a particular domain of culture and society, but prevents us from making totalizing accounts of universal media influence at the macro level.

Since we think of it as a middle-range theory, mediatization theory is not meant to replace existing theories of media and communication, or sociological theories in general. The aim is not to build another closed theoretical castle in which all hitherto known concepts or processes must be relabeled in order to pass through the gate into a new conceptual kingdom. On the contrary, the study of mediatization is an invitation to make heuristic use of existing theories and methodologies in order to make sense of the changing role of the media in contemporary culture and society. In particular, it is an invitation to undertake cross-disciplinary work in which we must seek to make use of theories and methodologies from a variety of disciplines. Precisely because mediatization as a process involves the influence and changing role of the media in a variety of social and cultural spheres, we should work across disciplines (Hjarvard 2012b). To study the mediatization of politics, we need to draw on analyses and concepts from both media studies and political science; and to study the mediatization of religion we must engage with concepts and research from the sociology of religion, media studies, and cognitive anthropology, etc. The contribution from mediatization theory to this interdisciplinary venture is to provide a framework for analyzing and building a theoretical understanding of how the media may interact with other social and cultural processes, and a set of assumptions about the possible outcomes of the growing presence of various media in culture and society.

At the present stage, mediatization may be considered what Blumer (1954) labeled a “sensitizing concept” due to its heuristic value of rephrasing key questions concerning the influence of the media in culture and society, and because it provides a new framework and set of questions for the empirical study of various social
and cultural domains. “Sensitizing concepts” are more loosely defined as exploratory tools to guide theoretical and empirical enquiry, whereas “definitive concepts” are carefully defined and made operational via a particular set of attributes whereby they may serve as technical instruments for empirical research. Like other broad concepts of sociology (e.g., institutions, social structures, individualization, etc.), mediatization is not a “definitive concept,” since it does not refer “precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks” (Blumer 1954: 7).

As Jensen (forthcoming) argues, the distinction between “sensitizing concepts” and “definitive concepts” does not represent a dichotomy, but rather a continuum, and as Blumer (1954: 8) himself suggests “sensitizing concepts can be tested, improved and refined” and thereby move towards the definitive end of the spectrum. The ambition of this book is precisely to test, improve, and refine the concept of mediatization, but not necessarily with the aim of ending up with – in Blumer’s sense – a definitive concept. The two types of concept serve different purposes in research, and at the present phase of the research into processes of mediatization we find the sensitizing aspect of the concept more useful, for the same reasons that Blumer (1954: 10) also generally preferred it: “it has the virtue of remaining in close and continuing relations with the natural social world.” Precisely because mediatization may entail different outcomes in various cultural and social institutions, there is a limit to how far the concept “mediatization” can move towards the definitive end of the spectrum. Consequently, in order to study actual processes of mediatization in particular domains of culture and society we also need other more definitive and context-sensitive concepts.

Mediatization studies are concerned with the role of the media in the transformation of social and cultural affairs. The conceptual emphasis on how the media may influence social and cultural change should not, however, lead us to suggest that the most important outcome of media developments is always change. As Fischer’s (1992) historical study of the introduction and social uses of the telephone in the United States demonstrates, the telephone was not always an instrument of the modernization and restructuring of social ties. For many people, the telephone made it easier to maintain and reinforce existing social relations, allowing some aspects of life to continue against a backdrop of modernization in other parts of life. We should, therefore, be careful not to confuse the perpetual and highly visible “newness” of media developments with a continuous transformation of all social and cultural arrangements. In the end, the question of transformation versus stability is not a theoretical question, but an empirical one that needs to be substantiated analytically.

**A process of high modernity**

Mediatization is an important concept in modern sociology, as it relates to the overriding process of modernization of society and culture. The discipline of sociology was founded in conjunction with the study of the breakthrough of modern society. Pioneers in the field such as Max Weber, Karl Marx, Emile
Durkheim, and Georg Simmel were not particularly interested in the role or importance of the mass media, but instead focused on such phenomena as industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and individualization. Later sociologists did not show very much interest in the media either. Only late in his career did Pierre Bourdieu, for example, write about the media, and his critique of television journalism (Bourdieu 1998b) appears rather shallow compared to his earlier published work. Viewed in a historical perspective, the lack of interest in the media among classical sociologists should perhaps not surprise us. Throughout the nineteenth century the “media” were not visible in their own right; they were specific technologies and separate cultural phenomena – books, journals, newspapers, the telegraph, etc. – each of which were instruments in the hands of other institutions, such as literature, science, politics, commerce, etc.

Only with the expansion of the mass media in the twentieth century did the media begin to be perceived as media in their own right, i.e., as forms of communication that shared certain constitutive characteristics and were of some consequence. North American sociology flourished in the 1930s and onwards, and the study of the mass media – film, radio, and newspapers – played a central role for some brief decades. Prominent figures such as Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Robert Merton applied sociological perspectives to the media, but then abandoned the media in favor of other objects of study. In post-war Europe critical theory, e.g., The Frankfurt School and structuralism, inspired critical thinking about the role of mass media in society, but it was predominantly a one-way street going from critical theory to media studies. Instead, in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, specialized disciplines arose – communication research, mass communication research, or media studies – that focused exclusively on the media. As a consequence of this specialization, the study of the media lost contact with broader sociological perspectives, and vice-versa. This should not be taken to imply that media research has been completely isolated from sociology and other core disciplines. On the contrary, media scholars have frequently drawn upon other disciplines in their studies of one phenomenon or the other. For example, political theory has been applied to the study of opinion formation, and anthropological theory to the study of media use. But when it comes to more fundamental sociological issues, such as modernization processes, there has been limited cross-fertilization, so that in sociology, the media has remained a marginal topic. In recent years, and in view of the expansion of various forms of digital media, we have seen certain new steps towards a rapprochement between the two disciplines. Manuel Castells’ (2001, 2009) discussion of the Internet and the network society is an attempt to integrate a media perspective into sociological theory. Likewise, from a media studies point of view, studies of globalization have aroused interest in sociological and cultural analysis (Silverstone 2007). The theory of mediatization is an attempt to bring this rapprochement a step further. Mediatization is both an empirical process that calls for mutual research efforts by media scholars, sociologists, and researchers from other disciplines; and a theoretical concept that needs to be developed via interdisciplinary dialog.
Mediatization should be viewed as a modernization process on a par with globalization, urbanization, and individualization, whereby the media, in a similar way, contribute to both disembedding social relations from existing contexts and re-embedding them in new social contexts (Giddens 1984, 1990). Compared to these other processes, mediatization only became prominent in a later phase of modernity, high modernity, when the media have both become more differentiated from other institutions (what we label the emergence of a semi-independent media institution) and re-embedded into culture and society (what we label the integration of the media in a variety of social institutions). Mediatization is thus a distinct late-modern process that is, to quote John B. Thompson (1990: 15), “partially constitutive of modern societies, and … partially constitutive of what is ‘modern’ about the societies in which we live in today.” When classical sociology was in its formative years, the media did not receive much attention because they had not become distinct enough from other institutions, nor were they by any means as pervasive and influential as they are today. For contemporary sociological inquiry into late-modern society, a theory of the importance of the media to culture and society is no longer an interesting possibility, but an absolute necessity.
MEDIATIZATION
A new theoretical perspective

Introduction

The term “mediatization” has been used in numerous contexts to characterize the influence that the media exert on a variety of phenomena, but not much work has been done to define the term and develop it into a theoretical concept. Only very recently have media researchers sought to develop the concept towards a more coherent and precise understanding of mediatization as a social and cultural process (Hepp 2012; Hjarvard 2008a; Krotz 2009; Schulz 2004). Therefore, let us start by examining the various meanings the concept has been given in earlier works (for overviews of mediatization research see Lundby [2009a] and Kaun [2011]).

At an early stage, mediatization was applied to the media’s impact on political communication and other effects on politics. Swedish media researcher Kent Asp was the first to speak of the mediatization of political life, by which he meant a process whereby “a political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics” (Asp 1986: 359). One form taken by this adjustment is when politicians phrase their public statements in terms that personalize and polarize the issues, so that the messages have a better chance of gaining media coverage. Asp sees the media’s growing independence of political sources as yet another sign of mediatization, in that the media thereby gain even more control over media content. Asp acknowledges a debt to the Norwegian sociologist Gudmund Hernes’ expression of the “media-twisted society” (Hernes 1978), although Hernes’ perspective is broader. Hernes argued that the media had a fundamental impact on all social institutions and their relations with each another. Although Hernes did not actually use the term mediatization, his concept of a “media-twisted society” and the holistic view of society he applies, is consonant in many respects with the concept of mediatization put forward here. Hernes urges us:
to ask what consequences media have for institutions as well as for individuals: the ways public administration, organizations, parties, schools and business function and how they relate to one another. In what ways do media redistribute power in society? [...] In short, from an institutional point of view the key question is, how media change both the inner workings of other social entities and their mutual relationships.

(Hernes 1978: 181; my translation from Norwegian)

We find a contemporary and fairly parallel notion in the work of Altheide and Snow (1979, 1988), who call for an “analysis of social institutions-transformed-through-media” (Altheide and Snow 1979: 7). While traditional sociological approaches to the media seek to isolate certain “variables” for media influence, ignoring how the media affect the overall premises for cultural life, Altheide and Snow wish to show how the logic of the media forms the fund of knowledge that is generated and circulated in society. Although they time and again make reference to “media logic,” form and format are their principal concepts, drawing on one of the “classics” of sociology, Georg Simmel. Thus they posit the “primacy of form over content” (Altheide and Snow 1988: 206), whereby media logic for the most part appears to consist of a formatting logic that determines how material is categorized, the choice of mode of presentation, and the selection and portrayal of social experience in the media. In their analyses, they mention other aspects of media logic, including technological and organizational aspects, more or less incidentally, and because Altheide and Snow (1979, 1988) are working with North American material, the logic at play is essentially a commercial one. Their prime interest with regard to these “other aspects” is a desire to explore the extent to which, and how, technology affects communication formats, in particular the format of political communication, so that broader institutional change remains little more than an incidental interest. As Lundby (2009b) has pointed out in a critical examination of Altheide and Snow’s argument, they tend to reduce Georg Simmel’s notion of social form to a communication format and, therefore, are not able to link media change to a wider theory of social change. Following Simmel, Lundby (ibid.) argues that social form is constituted through continuous patterns of social interaction and, therefore, “mediatization research should put an emphasis on how social and communicative forms are developed when media are taken into use in social interaction” (ibid.: 117).

Like Asp (1986, 1990), Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) apply the concept of mediatization to the media’s influence on politics. Considering the cases of Fernando Collar de Mello’s use of television in the Brazilian election campaign of 1989, Silvio Berlusconi’s use of the media on his way to power in Italy, and Tony Blair’s use of “spin” in the UK, they demonstrate the increasing influence of the mass media on how political power is exercised. They characterize mediatization as “the problematic concomitants or consequences of the development of modern mass media.” As to its effects, they comment that “mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media” (Mazzoleni