

Mediatization studies: causalities, centralities, interdisciplinarity*

Estudos em mediatização: causalidades, centralidades, interdisciplinaridades

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ABSTRACT

Aiming to take part in the debate regarding the mediatization concept, this article analyzes its contributions to communication and media studies. We set off in this path by analyzing the media as an environment in contemporary life, and then discuss core issues in this study field: the relationships among the media and their causality and centrality in the theories that conceptualize their relationship with society, as well as its interdisciplinary relevance.

Keywords: Mediatization, mediation, meta-process

RESUMO

Com o objetivo de participar no debate em torno do conceito de mediatização, este artigo analisa seus contributos para os estudos de comunicação e *media*. Iniciamos esse percurso com a análise dos *media*-como-meio-ambiente na vida contemporânea, para debatermos em seguida questões centrais para essa área de estudos: a relação entre os *media* e causalidade e a centralidade dos *media* nas teorias que conceptualizam sua relação com a sociedade, bem como sua relevância interdisciplinar.

Palavras-chave: Mediatização, mediação, metaproceto

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INTRODUCTION

THE CONCEPT OF MEDIATIZATION theorizes the meta-process through which everyday practices and social relationships are increasingly shaped by the mediation of technologies and media organizations (McQuail, 2010; Livingstone, 2010). This concept proposes a new multidisciplinary theoretical framework to reconsider old, albeit fundamental issues, in the interrelationship between communication, the media¹, culture, and society (Hepp; Hjarvard; Lundby, 2015).

The increasing importance of the media in people's lives in general, the development of the digital media, and the progressive diversification of the studies conducted on the media promoted the search for new perspectives that could allow learning the process through which society increasingly intertwines itself on the media and their logics. Such view does not imply that classic questions, such as the effects and influence of the messages mediated on public opinion or the purposes for which people use the media stopped being relevant, as, according to Katz et al. (2003: 5), "there is no originality without tradition." It rather means that understanding the importance of the media in culture and society is not beneficial if it is only based on models that consider these elements separately.

Aiming to take part in the debate regarding the mediatization concept, this article analyzes the contributions mediatization theses bring to media studies and to the remaining social and human sciences. We set off in this path by analyzing the media as an environment in contemporary life, which is characterized by the increasing intertwining in the media, and then we discuss core issues in media studies: the relationships among the media and causality and centrality, which, in turn, allow reflecting on the centrality of the media in the theories that conceptualize their relationship with society, as well as its interdisciplinary relevance.

LIFE IN THE MEDIA

"Media are to us as water is to fish." This is the simple and unexpected way Mark Deuze, in the first pages of *Media Life*, chose to sum up (2012: 10) the relevance of the media in people's lives. Such as water is the ecosystem of fish, media are also increasingly merged with all aspects of everyday life, and this is why they cannot, or should not, only be viewed as external agents that influence people's lives. In contemporary society, the media have become ubiquitous (media and technology are everywhere), invasive (they cannot be fully ignored or avoided), and invisible (they are merged with all aspects

¹ By media we refer to the technologies that expand communication in time, space, and modality; but also the social and aesthetic forms which structure socially-constructed signifieds and the way the media are used in different individual, institutional, and social contexts (McQuail, 2010; Couldry, 2012). The media are neither uniform nor homogeneous, because the use of the plural form intends to reflect the diversity of media and highlight their specific characteristics, which range as organizations, texts, contents, uses, and meanings.

of life). The media are intertwined in our everyday experiences to the point they cannot be distinguished from the latter, which led the already mentioned Dutch author to suggest we live our lives *in the media*, rather than only *with the media*.

Technological development leads to an increasing merging of human beings and technology. On the one hand, the media are increasingly human in their performance; on the other hand, people appropriate the media in such a way that these are already part of the environment that surrounds them. This way, the media must not only be faced as electronic devices or isolated practices, but rather as part of our everyday lives which influence the meaning we give to the world in its complexity (Gitlin, 1996; Bird, 2003).

In an environment with unlimited media, such as Todd Gitlin (1996) characterizes contemporary society, we all “*become media*” (Deuze, 2012: 5). In this sense, Marshall McLuhan’s theory that media are extensions of human faculties (either psychic or physical) is renewed. The Canadian author had already concluded back in 1964 that the impact of the media (media/technology) went much further than its content, and that they did not differ from life. As extensions of life – or its constitutional elements – the media are able to amplify, accelerate, overload, enlarge, attract, repel, or help to focus on life itself.

The media are part of social practices, which are understood as “mental and bodily routines that are internalized and replicated in a thoughtless manner by individuals and are strongly connected to contexts that give them meaning” (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). People also use media to try and maintain a feeling of ontological safety in the modern world, in which biological death and the passage of time are among the only certainties in life. The media are thus viewed as elements that help to build everyday normalcy (Christensen; Røpke, 2010), which is organized in clusters of collective actions, in which their place emerges from people’s needs.

The media are present in people’s lives in distinct ways. Roughly speaking, communicative practices include practices that are *oriented* for the media (Couldry, 2010) (i.e., by seeing media practices as organizers of other everyday routines) and practices that are *related to* the media (Hobart, 2010) This second type of practices views them in connection to others, by also admitting the radical attitude towards the exclusion of media from life. This absence contemplates its irrelevance in the everyday lives of people or the refusal to include them in the everyday experience.

Nonetheless, the world population is increasingly living in urban areas, where the media exist in abundance, which means people are constantly exposed to them, and successfully escaping them is impossible. This media proliferation

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led authors such as Roger Silverstone (2008) to describe our current society as a mediapolis, where the city became a place for the media and the media became the space of life. Cities have transformed into “technological structures” (Jansson, 2013), where people go around while using private media (such as cell phones, cameras, or portable music devices), at the same time they are surrounded by a whole exterior environment that is wrapped around media. Thus, a constant interaction is provided in three levels: among the people themselves (a Whatsapp chat, for example); between people and electronic devices (using a tablet on the subway, for example); and also between people and the city itself (through augmented reality, for example). Thus, the city is experienced in real time through media – simultaneously physically and virtually.

Because of the rising presence of media in all levels of social life and also because its increasing virtualization, the institutional contexts are not exclusively defined by their locus anymore. This means the increasing virtualization of social institutions walks hand in hand with its “domestication” and “appropriation” (Silverstone; Hirsch, 1992; Morley, 1986; Hjarvard, 2004). In a process that was started by newspapers and resumed by the radio, and later, by the television, these media brought politics and cultural expression inside the households. More recently, the Internet has introduced work in family life, and the social media made it possible to interact with government players from private environments. This increasing permeability between levels that had once been clearly outlined has produced consequences in family practices, once its members may be physically inside their households, but mentally in contact with other institutions or people. That is, virtualization has led homes to lose their ability to regulate the behavior of the family members. Thus, home and family are increasingly becoming a network intersection point between public, private, and intimate levels, in a continuous process to reconfigure life.

This disintegration of the limits between public and private life has become more intense in the globalized society that is structured on the network and composed of traditional and social media, in which a myriad of contents are produced that circulate across the different media, by reinforcing the already established culture of convergence, which was introduced by Henry Jenkins in 2006. In the contemporary digital environment with an intense communicative flow of multiple platforms and channels, and in which notions of center and dominant media have diluted, people have gained a preponderant role in defining the relevance of the contents produced by themselves and by the media industry itself.

This possibility reflects much more than technological feasibility: it translates a new cultural environment that is structured by a more horizontal

communication that is dialogic and dynamic. In the digital context, in which information is able to travel across media, its relevance is based on the set of decisions that are made by people, and as the value that is attributed to the content defines its adoption, dissemination, and amplification (Jenkins; Ford; Green, 2013). The circulation of contents shapes the flow of information in a culture, by constantly increasing potential signifieds and opening unanticipated meanings. The paradigm established in the productivity of users, such as John Hartley (2012) characterizes the digital communication model, by even admitting the reclassification and transformation of media contents is a signal that their relevance was recognized and they were granted importance, inasmuch as this intervention reveals that the digital content had an importance to whom decided to intervene in it by simply sharing, by adding an opinion or comment, or, also, by a more interventive process of remixing (Lessing, 2008).

In the complex environment of contemporary digital communication, people then play what Jenkins, Ford, and Green defined as “curatorial role” (2013: 61), once the transmedia circulation of the most varied type of content by the digital media depends on their decisions and choices and on the importance that is attributed by those who share them with others within their communities and/or between distinct communities.

By taking on this role, people rival one of the key and classic attributes of journalism: the “gatekeeper” role (McCombs; Shaw, 1972). This means technological development also granted individuals a leading role that suggests the revision of the “agenda-setting hypothesis” (Ibid.) and the “cascading activation model” (Entman, 2004), in which political and media elites were granted a central role in activating the attention of and forming public opinion, in a process that combines mechanisms of agenda-setting (definition of the public agenda), priming (how highlighted topics are), framing (classification and interpretation of the topics), and feedback (reaction to the topics from society). Political and media elites were part of the set of privileged players who, in a hierarchy of distinct influences and relationships, determined the portraying of topics in the public space and contributed to shaping the perception people had of several topics in society.

The digital communication model thus granted individuals autonomy in regards to their condition of least important in a value chain, and provided an open and dialogic communication instead. In this new relationship, technology has democratized its expression and ensured representation for ordinary people. However, as referred to by Natalie Fenton (2012), even though any individual can produce and disseminate information, not all contents can have the same

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degree of visibility or reach the same levels of attention. On the other hand, this media environment that is increasingly complex, whose choices are multiple, has been paradoxically translated into a significant number of people who are less and less concerned about public issues (Patterson, 2010). Submerged in a media environment, many individuals are increasingly involved with different media at the same time, in that all them work as back channels of each other. Television sets are on at the same time their users are browsing the web, tweeting, posting on Facebook, sending e-mails, or playing on their tablets. Consequently, this scattering of attention leads concentration levels to decrease as disinformation rises (Ibid.). On the other hand, also, several studies report that digital social networks tend to be more used in the “promotion of the self” (Papacharissi, 2002a, 2002b) and of individualism than in the discussion of political issues or to demand social rights.

Contemporary society is thus characterized by an accelerated presence and importance of communications and media in increasing components of everyday life, which has consequently produced changes in the most varied areas of society. The process of mediatization in progress implies quantitative and qualitative aspects in terms of time (the social media are increasingly connected and available in a permanent way), space (increasing everywhere), and contexts (mediated communication has penetrated in virtually every dimension of life). The use of media is seldom confined to a place or to a particular situation, and, in an also increasing trend, transcends the borders between public and private/intimate spaces or between work and leisure. Viewed together, these developments have resulted in significant changes in general society, and understanding these process becomes easier if we analyze them in light of a theoretical framework that is oriented towards the intervention from the media in social change processes, which also includes how these changes structure the ways we communicate as individuals, institutions, and society.

In this perspective, the concept of mediatization helps us understand and think about the dynamics that are put forth in a simultaneously integrated and decentralized way. The process of mediatization privileges a “wide-angle” approach (Bird, 2003: 3), i.e. that is integrated in the widened context of the social change process which results from the rising mediatization of individual, institutional, and cultural practices. Nonetheless, David Deacon and James Stayner (2014) suggest that we also look at the possibility for no changes, once the social dynamics that resist change are as important in order to understand the mediatization process as are the social dynamics that lead to transformations.

THE MEDIATIZATION STUDIES

The concept of mediatization is not a new term in media studies (Krotz, 2014a; Hepp, 2014). Its academic use dates back to the initial decades of the 20th century, and it initially arose in Ernst Manheim's work (1933)², with this author using this term to describe the changes in social relationships in modern times, changes that are marked by the emergence of the so-called "mass communication media." However, only after the 2000s can we find the first attempts at developing the concept in a systematic way. The discussion about the mediatization concept was firstly entered into by researchers from media and communication fields from northern Europe, namely Germany and Scandinavia. Closer to the decade's end, the theoretical debate was enriched with contributions from English authors who sought to overcome the stalemate regarding the concepts of mediation and mediatization³.

At the start of the new millennium, the concept of mediatization was again included in the investigation agenda of media in a systematic way, as it was shown to be productive to understand a set of exogenous and endogenous changes to the scientific field of media and communication studies (Couldry; Hepp, 2013).

As exogenous factors, it is important to consider the rising importance of the media in people's lives, with the generalized access to the Internet, the dissemination of portable communication devices, and the expansion of social media, which transformed the lives of people and societies.

Another factor exogenous to the scientific field that is however one of the core aspects in the knowledge area refers to the traditional communication media. The changes that were felt in the context of everyday life that digital communication introduced were equally reflected in what we may call "digitization of media." The development of the digital media was followed by a change in the traditional media, in a continuous process of "remediation" (Bolter; Grusin, 2000). The Internet also helped reconfigure the information business, news production, the rhythm of headlines and their consumptions.

The two exogenous factors mentioned struck a chord within the academic community which, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, started opening up new paths for scientific investigations, with the progressive diversification of the studies conducted in the field, and not only related to the traditional triad *production-text-audience*, which found no framing in the classic way to address research topics in this knowledge field (Livingstone, 2009; Couldry; Hepp, 2013). These changes drove the search for new perspectives that could allow apprehending the process through which society is increasingly interwoven in the media and their logics.

² This thesis was written in German, and only exists in stenciled copies. It is often referred to by several authors who work the concept of mediatization in northern Europe, namely by Hepp and Krotz (2014).

³ The first works of these authors revealed doubts regarding the relevance of using the term mediatization, due to issues that were strictly related to the English language; that is, with the use of the word "mediatization." This topic is well illustrated in article "On the mediation of everything: ICA presidential address 2008," by Sonia Livingstone (2009).



The media are simultaneously part of the fabric of society and culture and an independent institution that navigates through other cultural and social institutions, while coordinating many of these interactions. The duality of this structural relationship – *media-as-an-institution* and *media-as-an-environment* – establishes a series of prerequisites that are related to the way the communication media are used and perceived in certain situations, thus affecting the relationships between people.

It is important, nonetheless, to take into account that, despite the contemporary societies being the stage where the mediatization process has been intensified, this does not mean the concept only allows viewing the present. Such as mentioned by Eliseu Verón (2014: 15-16):

Mediatization is merely the name for the long historic sequence of media phenomena being institutionalized in human societies and their multiple consequences. The conceptual advantage of a long-term perspective is to remind us that what is happening in post-modern societies has actually started a long time ago.

Putting the concept of mediatization forth in the international investigation agenda of the media gave rise to a scientific debate around the differences, assumptions, and adjacencies between this concept and mediation. On one hand, we have those who consider that the concept of mediatization better explains the constant interweaving between the media and society. This school of thought emerged from northern Europe, namely Germany, in Denmark, and Norway. On the other side of the intellectual debate, in Latin America, we have the perspective that considers that the concept of mediations is the one that best serves media and communication studies, as stated by Maria Immacolata Vassalo Lopes (2014). This school of thought is deeply marked by the seminal work of Jesús Martín-Barbero em *De los medios a las mediaciones*, published for the first time in 1987, and by the two updates the author wrote in is methodological map of mediations, in 2003 and 2010.

In turn, mediation regards to something that works as a connection medium among different entities. That is, mediation describes the concrete act of communication through a medium in a specific social context, whereas mediatization centers around changes in social and cultural institutions (politics, justice, school, work, among many others) and in the interaction paths resulting from the mediatization process. These changes may have a transformational nature if they produce changes in the direction, shape, or in the characteristics of social and cultural activities, namely the symbolic ways of communication. When we articulate the concepts, we realize that, while mediatization reflects

on how the mediation process changed with the emergence of different media, mediation describes a fundamental moment of communication as a symbolic interaction (Fornäs, 1995; Hepp, 2013; Hjarvard, 2014; Lundby, 2014).

The concept of mediatization is a construct that theoretically describes and explains dimensions and levels of economic, social and cultural change resulting from the mediatization process of society. The mediatization theory thus points towards a further important development, more specifically towards the media as structures; that is, institutionalized practices that increasingly influence other social levels, which transcends the theorization of mediations.

In the seminal work “Esquema para el análisis de la mediatización,” which was published in 1997, based on the analysis of its conceptual scheme of mediatization, it is possible to understand how Elisey Verón explains how institutions work, how their practices are directly affected by the presence of communication media and how the logic of the media is imposed on society as a whole, becoming a part of the social fabric. As the author points out: “The relevance of the concept of mediatization is that it allows thinking, in an articulate way, about multiple aspects of social change in industrial societies that so far have been analyzed and discussed in a rather disconnected way”⁴ (Verón, 1997: 14, our translation).

The Argentinian author’s proposal is in line with the contemporary studies of mediatization, namely with those from Stig Hjarvard (2008). Such as Verón, the Danish author proposes an institutional approach of the media influence on society and in culture, and puts the concept of logic of the media (of presentation, formatting, programming, aesthetics, rhythm, highlight, frequency, etc) on the center of its theory.

From an institutional standpoint, mediatization points towards a bilateral development of the media that corresponds to a social process in which these, at the same time they acquire the statute of social institutions in themselves, they have also increasingly contaminated the other social institutions. Here, we center around the logic of the media to recognize that different communication media have characteristics and *modi operandi* that influence other institutions and society as a whole. *Logic*, as a conceptual characteristics, relates to the specific rules and discourses that govern a particular domain – in this case, the media.

This concept was proposed for the first time by David Altheide and Robert Snow, in 1979, and later developed by the first author:

Media logic refers to the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium. This includes rhythm, grammar, and format. Format, while a feature of media logic, is singularly important because it refers to the rules or

⁴ In the original Spanish text: “El interés del concepto de mediatización es que permite pensar juntos múltiples aspectos del cambio social de las sociedades industriales que hasta ahora se han analizado y discutido en forma relativamente dispersa.”



‘codes’ for defining, selecting, organizing, presenting, and recognizing information as one thing rather than another.” (Altheide, 2004: 294)

Thus, mediatization does not only center around the social change process with the media, but it also analyzes the increasing ability the media has to influence other social institutions.

Winfried Schulz (2004) theorized about the relationship between the media and social change, listing a set of change phases media produce in social institutions. According to this author, in a first phase, technologies promote the “extension” of the natural limits of human communication. In line with Marshall McLuhan’s perspective (1964), the media are like bridges between different spaces and time. In a second development stage – which is characterized by the “replacement” – the media partly or totally replace activities and social institutions, which promotes a change in both. The mediatization process of activities that are external to the media means these start assuming media forms and that the new media replace, to a certain extent, traditional forms of communication. A third social change process involving the media corresponds to the “amalgamation” phase, which is related to the dilution of borders between activities that could be previously separated in activities that involved the media and activities that did not. The merger of both makes the use of the media seamless in our everyday lives at home and at work, and helps integrating and articulating the different dimensions of life and everyday practices. The fourth phase of the media to induce social change regards to “accommodation.” Recognizing the importance of the media not only as an environment, which the previous phase reveals, but rather as a reference institution in society, causes other social institutions to accommodate to its logics. Here, Schulz’s theorization complements the concept of “media logic” developed by David Altheide and Robert Snow (1979).

These four dimensions are part of a complex process which is not mutually exclusive, but rather cumulative. In this sense, it is important to consider that the concept of mediatization transcends and simultaneously includes the effects of the media in its theorization of social change.

The reflection around the mediatization concept has allowed thinking about in relation to the effects theories – a theoretical and empirical problematics that is in the genesis of the communication theories in the 1920s and 1930s – in a way that the first concept shifted its focus to other issues that transcend the theories that founded these academic studies.

There is an extensive literature on the media effects which shows they can exercise a considerable influence on their audiences, both at the level of

reinforcement of previous convictions, and at the level of modeling people's cognition (Saperas, 1993).

The effect theories are mainly centered around messages from communication media, rather than around the format of the media (Altheide; Snow, 1979) or their impacts on institutions (Hjarvard, 2012). As a consequence, the focus of the media effects theories does not allow them to analyze the interactions, interdependencies, and transactions at system level and how the media shape and remodel politics, culture, and people's production of meaning.

There is also another gap in the effect theories. These tend to ignore the reciprocal effects of the communication media on the players who are covered by the media (Kepplinger, 2002). The influenced parties also retroact on the element of influence, in a process of continuous effects of one over the others. In summary, we may say the extensive literature on media effects is important, albeit insufficient to understand the mediatization process.

When we talk about mediatization, we talk about its causes, conditions, characteristics, and consequences from this process that transcends the effects centered around the contents of messages and at an individual level. Mediatization revolves around a social change aspect; that is, the media logic managing the production of public attention outside the media (Marcinkowski, 2014). On the other hand, the consequences from mediatization must be analyzed in terms of unintentional effects, as social change is neither determined or controllable. Additionally, mediatization collectively considers the interactions, interdependencies, and reciprocal effects among media systems, institutions, social players, culture, and the construction of meaning (Ibid.).

This also means mediatization must always be considered with simultaneous social change processes. This is therefore a multi-modal process that has effects on several levels: on a micro level, in the presence of the of the media in the everyday lives of individuals and in their communicative practices; on a meso level, in the role of the media in institutions; and on a macro level, in the historic process of mediatization in society and culture.

Each of these analysis levels is based on specific epistemological approaches that are, in turn, likely to relate with distinct basic ontological positions (Bolin, 2014), varying in its perspectives about the relationship between the communication media and society: how can we understand such relationship? What is the possible impact from the communication media on society? Or, what roles do we assign the communication media in mediatization processes? As Göran Bolin suggests, each of these perspectives opens up possibilities for different sets of investigation questions. However, taking into account that any theoretical debate is always made of controversies, oppositions, and complementary



aspects – which are at the same time epistemic and political (Lopes, 2014) – these lines of thought further condensate the theoretical dissent within the scientific community which has reflected on the mediatization concept.

CAUSALITIES, CENTRALITIES, INTERDISCIPLINARITIES

By studying the concept of mediatization, it is possible to analyze central dimensions of the broader process of paradigm reconfiguration in progress within media and communication studies (Livingstone, 2009). The transformations discussed in the previous points are producing changes in two theoretical and empirical axes that are essential in this knowledge field – mass communication or interpersonal communication (or face-to-face communication). These changes have influences on the investigation agenda of this scientific field, which has increasingly expanded its study topics beyond the traditional triad *production-text-audience*, in order to apprehend the multiple dynamics that intertwine the media and society. At this level, in this section of the article we discuss issues that allow intensifying this debate: causality, effects, and interrelationships between the media and society, as well as the centrality of the media in the theories that conceptualize their relationship with society; i.e., media-centric and media-oriented theories.

The increasing “mediation of everything” results in the mediatization process (Livingstone, 2010: 2), but asking questions about social changes resulting from the mediatization process means not to overestimate the role of the communication media as agents of change and place emphasis on dimensions that go beyond classic questions in this area, such as media causality and effects on society.

Mediatization does not include analyzing the relationship between the media, society, and individuals from the classic perspective of its effects and causes. Thus, not thinking about these terms allows apprehending the complexity and multiplicity of dynamics that are involved in the relationship that is theorized by mediatization. This standpoint also results from the fact mediatization may be considered not to be a consequence from the media or driven by the evolution of the media. It may rather result from a complex combination of economic, legal, technological, political, and cultural factors. These process often take place in a contradictory way, and one of the consequences of mediatization may also be an reverse process of “unmediatization” (Möll e Hitzler⁵ apud Hepp; Hjarvard; Lundby, 2015).

A rising mediatization phase may thus be followed by a process of reduced mediatization intensity. Changes in structural dimensions of society – such as in

⁵ MÖLL, G.; HITZLER, R. Falsches Spiel mit dem Sport: zur Mediatisierung von Sportwetten und ihren nichtintendierten Nebenfolgen. In: GRENZ T.; MÖLL G. (Eds.). *Unter Mediatisierungsdruck*. Wiesbaden: VS, 2014. p. 169-187.

legal, institutional, or economic frameworks – have repercussion at mediatization level. These changes may also be related to specific characteristics of a certain institution or people who hold positions of power at a certain historic time.

The personalization of politics in articulation with the institutional context and the context of the media in Italy is paradigmatic to illustrate this point. The degree of mediatization in the Italian government under Silvio Berlusconi (2001-2006; 2008-2011) is very distinct from the one in Mario Monti's administration (2011-2013). In turn, the way through which both led the government finds no parallels in the way through which Matteo Renzi has run Italy since 2014. This politician is less averse to the media logic than Monti, but nonetheless he has a relationship with the communication media that is very distinct from Silvio Berlusconi's.

The media environment is constantly expanding and developing in distinct directions, so one cannot say the communication media are conducting society to a direction in particular. Thus, thinking in terms of causality becomes reducing and if does not allow apprehending the complexity and multiplicity of dynamics that are involved in the relationship that is theorized by mediatization. This perspective rather considers the existence of a wide set of possible interactions between different social, cultural, and historic conditions. Even within a certain society, there are different developments in the most varied fields and segments, and distinct forms of interaction are verified with the mediatization process (Lundby, 2014). Mediatization is therefore theorized as a process that does not develop itself in a single direction (Deacon; Stanyer, 2014; Livingstone, 2014), or indicate where the change process is heading for, nor does it indicate its results are similar in different domains.

While discussing the conceptional proposal of mediatization, it is then important to highlight the the media may not be the “driving forces” (Hepp, 2012) in the social change process. Some of the consequences of mediatization are observed in response to parallel changes in course in other fields of society. In turn, there are other change processes that may find their expression through the media, and this change results from a complex combination of economic, legal, technological, political, and cultural factors. This does not mean that, in certain change processes, the media are not the “driving forces” of transformation, but, even in these cases, it is necessary to consider the “inertia” (Hepp, 2009; Hepp; Hjarvard; Lundby, 2015) of certain fields, orders of interaction, and institutional contexts, which may cause them to be permeable to the media.

Thus, in the mediatization theories, its causes and effects are dimensions of complex and non-linear processes. The interrelationship between communication and the the media, on one hand, and culture and society, on the other



hand, are revealed in a multitude of juxtaposed processes, which suggests a multiplicity of influences between the media and other dimensions of life. The mediation processes then may be agents of change or re-transmit dynamics from other social and cultural domains. This means that, when we think about the impact of the media on society, it is necessary to include phenomena of extension, replacement, merging, and accommodation (Schulz, 2004; Krotz, 2009; Hjarvard, 2014)⁶.

The changes in the media and in communication over the last few decades have also produced implications in the construction of analysis corpuses of research on media and communication. To conduct an investigation that is exclusively focused on one single medium is increasingly difficult, when the Internet makes it possible to distribute different kinds of media in a single technological infrastructure and when, in the digital landscape environment, all the media are connected online. Thus, besides mediatization not including the analysis of the relationship between the media, society, and individuals from the classic perspective of its effects and causes, it does not either suggest empirical analysis based on a single medium, rather adopting a transmedia approach (Knoblauch, 2013; Hepp, 2014).

Understanding the role of the media in the process of communication construction of culture and society implies to consider the variety of communication media within these processes. Thus, and contrary to what the heirs of the medium theory believe, it is both reducing and artificial to relate social change to only a specific type of media. Conversely to this, mediatization faces culture and society as simultaneously and communicatively constructed through a range of media. This does not mean to consider that all the media play the same role in social and cultural processes and that there are no specificities associated with each medium, of which consideration is required in order to reflect on their role in communication (Hepp, 2014). It means that, even if we are willing to understand the specificity of a medium in particular, we must not do so isolatedly from other media. We must contextualize the position of this medium in the global media landscape, and we also must contextualize its connection to the other media, once the relationship between society and the media is simultaneously cumulative and selective (Morley, 2009). With a range of media available, not only is any medium fully excluded as its use is too, by individuals and institutions, is decided due to a set of needs, meanings attributed to the media and of concrete communicative goals.

Thus, media are understood as forces that shape the communication processes in society, but mediatization is not a concept that is guided by technology, distancing itself from technological determinism (Meyrowitz, 1995). It is possible

⁶ Let us think about terrorism in order to illustrate this point. Such as other dimensions in society, it is also possible to view the transformations in terrorism throughout time as a mediatization process. Television, first, and Internet, later (namely, through recruiting websites couple with on-line video games on Youtube and Twitter, among other interactive digital platforms), have produced changes in the morphology of Islamic terrorists and in their modi operandi (planning, strategies, targets, and timing) (Nacos, 2007; Weiman, 2014). IT is also relevant to consider the relationship between the Islamic terrorism and the media. This reveals the double standard these groups relatively assign to Western modernity. On one hand, on behalf of their tradition and values, groups such as Al-Qaeda and Da'esh fight against modernity but, on the other hand, they use, with a high level of rationality, the technological media, which are a product from Western modernity. On another perspective, radical Islamic groups such as Al-Qaeda, as compared to German terrorist group Baader-Meinhof (1970-1998), for example, illustrate the mediatization process of terrorism well throughout time. If we, in turn, compare the former with another contemporary group, Hezbollah, we see how mediatization does not walk towards a single direction or as a single way mode.

to establish adjacent points and also distinctions between the mediatization proposal and the medium theory. Both Winfried Schulz (2004) and Franz Krotz (2007) point out some similarities between mediatization and medium theory, which was initially created by Harold Innis (1950), founder of Toronto School, and carried on by Marshall McLuhan (1964). More recently, this theory has evolved to the concept of media ecology, whose most famous proponents are Neil Postman (1971), Walter Ong (1982), and Joshua Meyrowitz (1995), and it kept the emphasis on the centrality of technological changes in social changes and as a fundamental explanatory factor for social change.

Both theories focus on the role media play in changing communication in society, by considering that the media exert a historic influence on its development. Mediatization also complies with media theory in regards to the fact different media have produced different impacts on interpersonal relationships throughout time.

In addition, it is important to mention the skepticism of mediatization when describing the change introduced by media theory at a macro level (Hepp; Hjavard, 2014; Krotz, 2014b). This narration of change is based on the idea that every culture and society are dominated by a single medium, which is rather stable throughout time. Instead, mediatization considers that the investigation must include several media; that is, it implies an approach across media. The transformation related to the media is guided by their relationship with the other media and also by the global media landscape.

Thus, it is important to reflect on the epistemological stance of the mediatization theory. It has a decentralized approach of media and communication. As mentioned by David Morley (2007: 200)

We need to 'decentre' the media, in our analytical framework, so as to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other. [...] The key issue here, to put it paradoxically, how we can generate a non-mediacentric form of media studies, how to understand the variety of ways in which new and old media accommodate to each other and coexist in symbiotic forms and also how to better grasp how we live with them as parts of our personal or household 'media ensemble.'

To apprehend nuances, subtle features, and dimensions not always explicit of these variations helps understanding why mediatization claims for a non-media-centered approach. This point allows discussing the ontological and epistemological differences of mediacentric and non-mediacentric theories. In the mediacentric theories, as in the theories centered around media (discourse



analysis or analysis of effects), “non-media” players are not sufficiently taken into account, which generates a risk of placing the media and their logic in the center of any change.

The non-mediacentric perspective of the medium is distanced from the media theory, which tends to center around some logics that are intrinsic to technology itself. The interaction between technology and culture, and the fact that technology is also an expression of culture, has been a neglected view, and media are primordially reduced to their technological nature and to an essentialist approach. The mediacentric perspective (technocentric, in this case) is illustrated with the “paradigm of viral technology” (Jenkins, 2009), which was created with the emergence of the new media and gained followers, including many of the studies conducted on the Internet. Through this analysis, it is possible to discuss how the viral model, which inherited a linear and transitive model of mass communication, still reflected the cultural weight of the sender and technology to explain the relevance that was given to contents. Metaphors such as *infection* and *contagion*, which populated the discourse zeitgeist of this model, were based on overestimating technology, which, as virus, was sufficient in itself to propagate any and all contents. The technological determinism of this mediacentric paradigm then caused the first explicative models of information technologies not to include the importance of logics that were external to the media, namely the role of individuals and their social relationships in the spreading of contents by digital platforms, such as theorized in Henry Jenkins, Henry Ford, and Sam Green’s “spreadability model” (2013), which shows a non-technocentric approach that results from a reassessment of the initial standing of the author, which was translated into a viral approach of messages on the Internet.

There is no causal relationship with technological evolution, but with the uses and meanings attributed to technology as it evolves. Mediatization transforms human communication, offering new possibilities to it; however, this is a process that is conducted by the individuals (Krotz, 2009; Jenkins; Ford; Green, 2013). Thus, we must also take into account the reasons by which people introduce new media in their lives, how they are incorporated, and with what consequences. This means the objectives and expectations from individuals are equally important components in the mediatization process.

The multiplicity of dynamics that may be involved in the mediatization process means these analyses require a non-mediacentric approach, albeit oriented towards questions about them. Thus, and paradoxically, the more society becomes increasingly centered around the media, the more research gains by becoming less “mediacentric.” Nick Couldry (2006, 2012), David Morley (2009), Sonia Livingstone (2010), and Andreas Hepp (2013, 2014) are among

the authors who have most discussed the need to include a non-mediacentric perspective in⁷ mediatization and mediation studies, thus getting closer to the anthropological approaches that have a long tradition of researching the media beyond its contents (Bird, 2003; Bräuchler; Postill, 2010), media texts (Hall, 1973), and reception contents (e.g. Morley, 1986; Gauntlett; Hill, 1999) and cognition contents, such as Perti Alasuutari's "mediascapes" (1999).

This "non-mediacentric" approach also includes sociological perspectives, namely the practice theory (Bourdieu, 1997; Schatzki; Cetina; Savigny, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002), developed by Nick Couldry (2006, 2012), which systematized the advantages of observing the media as practices. Firstly, a practice is related to the regularity of an action. The actions of individuals (and also institutions) in the world are only possible based on different levels of regularity and order. That is why it is important to consider the specific regularities of actions related to the media and to the contexts that make certain types of actions related to the media possible or impossible, probable or improbable. Secondly, practices are *social*. Practices are social constructions that carry with themselves a set of possibilities and restrictions. Thirdly, these practices are related to *human needs*, which does not imply there is a fixed and universal set of needs. The media-related practices are shaped by basic needs for coordination, interaction, community, reliability, and freedom, and, despite the inexistence of a pre-established plan of needs related to a practice, it is necessary to take into account that certain needs influence the variety of practices.

Analyzing the media from the perspective of practice places research questions not as a reference to the media as objects, texts, perception mechanisms, or production processes, but as a reference to what people and institutions are doing in regards to the media, in the contexts they act. In this perspective, the interesting actions are those laterally involving the media, the one that are directly oriented towards the media, and, also, actions whose possibility is determined by the previous existence, presence, or operation of the media (Hobart, 2010; Couldry, 2010, 2012).

When they are centered around media, in discourse analysis or in its effects, "non-media" players tend to not be sufficiently taken into account, which generates a risk of placing the media and their logic in the center of any change. Mediacentric theories tend to offer a unilateral approach that is based on a pre-conception that considers the media as a causal factor in explaining social processes (Couldry, 2006). In turn, a non-mediacentric perspective attributes the media with a variable importance among a wide range of other factors and practices. This understanding involves a holistic comprehension of the several forces that cross over the media, at the same time it implies a hued perspective

⁷ Such as any new perspective that aims to solve crises or contradictions in how an investigation field is developed, these questions had already been partly anticipated by other theories and models. Firstly, by Elihu Katz, in the 1950s, when he, for the first time, raised the question about "what are people doing to the media?," which drove the approach that followed on the uses and gratifications, although this one has only focused on the individual use of the media (Katz; Blumer; Gurevitch, 1973). Secondly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this perspective was also implicit in the seminal studies on domestic practices of watching television, which started studying audiences in a less mediacentric way to place everyday life in the center of a set of constellations that were part of the use of the media and interconnected them to family routines and to other domestic technologies, such as vacuum cleaners or dishwashers (Morley, 1986; Silverstone; Hirsch, 1992). Thirdly, by the investigators who sought to go beyond specific contexts of media consumption to analyze audiences, such as Elizabeth Bird (2003). However, one of the first researchers to directly question the "mediacentric" approach in the scientific field of media and communication studies was Jesús Martín-Barbero, in *De los medios a las mediaciones*, published in 1987. Barbero suggests to look at communication through mediations rather than only through media, and theorizes the reception process as an activity that is mediated by everyday practices in the cultural and social context of the receiving subject. To Barbero, communication becomes a matter of mediation, in which the key aspects do not lie in the media, but in the social relationships that take place in the reception process.

A

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of the role the communication media play in social and cultural change. An orientation for the media, but not a mediacentric one, also considers all types of media, not only those traditional but all other mobile and fixed platforms, through which all kinds of contents – both institutional and individually produced – are accessible or transmittable.

In epistemological and ontological terms, the concept of mediatization contributes to enriching the theoretical approach on the media and communication in society, which allows them to be based on an interdisciplinary crossing. Our need to reflect on our complex societies and their connection to the media, in a synchronous and diachronic way, enables to consolidate the approximation to other disciplines, by opening space for different questions, and reflecting on both the communication practices in their most varied contexts and devices and the forms to produce knowledge itself in the knowledge field of media and communication.

Friedrich Krotz calls this “meta-process of mediatization” (2014b: 74). The authors thus views mediatization as a meta-process in parity with other meta-processes. In modern societies, globalization (Petras, 1993; Giddens, 2001), individualization (Beck; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), and commercialization (Sennett, 2005) are understood as relevant meta-process that structure and influence the most varied social organizations, which became key concepts for the most diverse fields of scientific knowledge. Among many others, Marshall McLuhan (1962) reflected on the globalization of communication, such as Armand Mattelart (1997) and Manuel Castells (1996), among many others. Deborah Chambers (2013), in turn, is part of a new wave of researchers who have combined the individualization process with personal relationships and social media, and the commercialization process is fundamental in analyzing the political economy of the media – in a process that also combines globalization as a key force to understand the rationale of media industries, which operate in an increasingly transnational scale.

Each of these meta-processes has its own development logic, and explaining one does not mean to explain the others. Thus, Friedrich Krotz (2007) considers that mediatization is the most relevant meta-process for media and communication research, in that it allows understanding the changes in society through the media. However, as the author warns, focusing on this meta-process does not mean to ignore the remaining processes. It is clear there are complex relationships among the four meta-processes mentioned. Besides the combinations already mentioned, globalization, for example, is related to mediatization in at least two other ways: on one hand, globalization implies the existence of technical media to extend communication and interaction to long distances;

and, on the other hand, it drives the mediatization process through the institutionalization of communication and interactions, which are mediated in many new contexts (Hjarvard, 2014). On the other hand, as globalization advances, more and more regions and cultures will be affected by mediatization, although there are differences that are culturally situated in the way through which this process interweaves itself with the remaining ones.

Thus, such as the field of media and communication studies comprise the meta-processes of globalization, individualization, and commercialization of society, the meta-process of mediatization is also important for other disciplines. Mediatization is relevant to several disciplines, and this is a concept that should be connected to the other processes mentioned, therefor recognizing the relevance of the mediatization process for several knowledge fields. For example, the development of medicine was simultaneous to technological evolution, which was shown to be fundamental for diagnostics procedures (such as the development of radiology, for example) or in the development of surgical procedures. Also, mediated communication has recently expanded and promoted new forms of relationship between doctors and patients. Medical appointments and distance transformed technology into a place where this new relationship is being built, which has reconfigured this interaction and produced new medical protocols and new medical and ethical discussions.

Studies on childhood offer another illustrative example. Sonia Livingstone (2010, 2014) has conducted a wide range of studies on the incorporation of media in children's plays. However, such as the author has reported, the parties in this interaction cannot be understood isolatedly. Instead, there are – nonlinear and unpredictable – transformations in progress that alter children's identities, their recreational activities, and the cultural meaning of the act of playing. This process is subtle and easily seen as an acquired piece of data, as if the involvement of the communication media could be easily ignored by a casual observer. It should be pointed out that the media do not simply add a new element to childhood history and psychology, they rather transform these. However, as Livingstone mentioned, the increasing mediation and mediatization of childhood are processes that are usually absent from childhood history, psychology, and sociology books, which also tend to give little emphasis to topics such as television or the Internet or exclude these.

As these examples illustrate, the mediatization process must no be seen as something irrelevant, negligible, or ignored by other knowledge fields. It implies changes in the practices, meanings, and relationships of power within each field, as professions and knowledge fields, but also in the relationship with society and individuals throughout time.



FINAL DISCUSSION

Human history may be understood, among many other dimensions, as the history of the processes of intensification of mediatization. In this context, mediatization refers to the long historic sequence of institution-alized media phenomena. The notion of meta-process is understood as useful, inasmuch as it points towards the transinstitutional dimension of mediatization, considering the latter takes place through a range of social spaces and cultural contexts.

To understand mediatization as a long-term meta-process does not mean, however, to understand it as inexorable or possible to be described only from different stages at different points in time (Deacon; Stanyer, 2014: 1038). There is no such thing as a last stage of mediatization, the same way as no last stages of globalization or individualization exist. On the contrary, meta-processes – such as globalization, individualization, and commercialization – are theoretical constructs that are partly based on empirical evidence, even though they do not have to be fully verifiable empirically (Hepp, 2013).

If media and communication studies may sometimes suffer from excess mediocentrism, other scientific areas seem to ignore the way through which the media are increasingly interwoven with their research topics, which implies what Nick Couldry defined as “marginalization of the media” (2006: 14). The idea that the media – as organizations, texts, technologies, or practices – are not relevant to other knowledge fields is based on the scarce presence of the topic in the literary production of the most varied scientific disciplines. However, the virtualization of institutions – such as banks and medicine, or work in general – only mirrors brief examples of how the mediatization process is important to all knowledge fields. The *media-as-institutions* and the *media-as-environments* permeate all areas of life, ergo all scientific fields, and the absence of analyses of these processes means there are clear gaps in the knowledge these varied knowledge fields produce on themselves, with mediatization being a key concept that may contribute to take the media away from the fringes of the other social and human sciences. ■

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