

The 'Logic' of Mediatization Theory in Religion: A critical consideration of a new paradigm ¹

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Abstract

The concept of mediatization was introduced to research on religion a decade ago by several scholars of communication: Hepp, Hjarvard and Sá Martino. The approach is controversial and has been debated in religious studies and beyond. This article critically analyses the core elements of mediatization theory in religion. These elements are the dating and measurement of mediatization, the secularization and the concept of 'banal religion,' the understanding of 'religion' and of 'media,' and the process of deterritorialization. This analysis questions the empirical evidence for and the theoretical consistency of the mediatization approach. Finally, some alternative research perspectives are presented.

About the Author

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1. The Debate on Mediation and Mediatization

There is no doubt that today's religions – at both the institutional and the individual levels – make use, to a lesser or greater extent, of various media. Of course, common media institutions such as newspapers, TV and YouTube channels also cover religious topics when their audiences expect it.

After an explorative period stimulated mostly by the pioneering work of Stewart M. Hoover in the US (1988, 1998), today, scholars of theology, religious studies and communication studies in Europe are very interested in the field of religion and media (e.g. Hjarvard/Lövheim 2012; Hojsgaard/Warburg 2005; Krüger 2012; Mitchell 2012).²

In the early days of media and religion studies, theory played a minor role,³ but two major concepts have become prominent in recent years: *mediation* and *mediatization*. There is little consensus on the meaning of these terms aside from the fact that both imply a universal perspective. *Mediation* is usually considered an anthropological concept that emphasizes the constitutive role of media at the core of religious practice (e.g. Meyer 2012; Morgan 2011:148-151). In contrast, *mediatization* describes a particular moment in world history when (late-)modern societies adapted new media or even incorporated the ‘logic of the media’ into politics, religion, culture etc.⁴

Broad concepts and theories often imply a set of basic assumptions and goals. They do not emerge in a cultural vacuum; rather, “They carry with them their historicity, modes of production, ideology and veiled suppositions” (Carneiro 2015:52). In the case of media and religion, it must be acknowledged that religious traditions usually develop ‘theories’ regarding media artefacts (books, television, internet etc.) in order to define their proper use. Content aside, media are received differently in different social, cultural, historical and religious settings: They are ‘socially shaped’ (Campbell 2010a:1-7). Academic scholarship is not immune to the religious – and more general – evaluation of media. Early research on religion on the internet, for instance, was driven partly by utopian ideas of an organic, holistic, democratic community; it drew on James Lovelock’s idea of Gaia and Teilhard de Chardin’s *noosphere* (Krüger 2015a:4).

In light of these considerations, the concepts of mediation and mediatization deserve a thorough discussion. For pragmatic reasons, this article focuses on the latter. Since the concept of mediatization is already part of a complex controversy in communication studies, this analysis is limited to the field of religion. How can religious studies benefit from the idea of mediatization? What are the core elements of mediatization theory? What consequences does its underlying understanding of religion, media and community have for research?⁵

I propose a hermeneutic analysis rooted in the sociology of knowledge as the theoretical and methodological starting point for this endeavour. The advantage of this hermeneutic approach is its double reflexivity. Our analysis will consider not only the conditions of knowledge of our human objects of investigation but also our own (academic) insights and their relation to other social spheres (Berger/Luckmann 1969:69; Krüger 2004:183-186).

After a brief introduction to the debate, this article examines the core elements of mediatization theory in religion. These elements are the dating and measurement of mediatization, secularization and the concept of ‘banal religion,’ the definitions of the two

systems 'religion' and 'media,' and finally the process of deterritorialization. The conclusion summarizes the critical points in this debate and seeks to provide a broad context for the debate.

2. Introduction: The Mediatization of Religion

The introduction and diffusion of the concept of mediatization in the field of religion can be traced back to three main authors: Andreas Hepp, Luis Sá Martino and Stig Hjarvard. Each of these focuses on a different aspect of the subject. Hepp and Krönert introduced the concept of mediatization in their study on the 2005 Roman Catholic World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany. Drawing on the works of Krotz, they consider mediatization a broad term for the production of a religious convention as a media event. In this case, mediatization is related to religious 'branding': 'Allgemein gesprochen bezeichnet die Mediatisierung von Religion deren zunehmende zeitliche, räumliche und soziale Durchdringung mit Prozessen der Medienkommunikation und die damit verbundene Prägung des Wandels von Religion auch durch Medien.' (Hepp/ Krönert 2009:31). Hepp and Veronika Krönert conclude that the relationship between the media and religion is changing dramatically and that the Roman Catholic church in particular must engage with the media in order to be relevant in today's religious world, which is characterized by an overall shift towards individualization (Hepp/Krönert 2009:8-10, 30-32). Hepp continued to elaborate on this concept in later publications (Hepp 2011; Hepp 2013; Hepp/Hjarvard/Lundby 2015).

Although other authors (such as Sá Martino 2013) have also made major contributions, nearly all studies on the field of religion refer exclusively to Hjarvard's early publication, "The mediatization of religion. A theory of the media as agents of religious change" (2008). His work started with an analysis of the mediatization of toys (2004), but over the last fifteen years, Hjarvard (with Knut Lundby and Hepp) has developed a more general approach that covers religion, politics and culture (2008a; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; Hjarvard/Lövheim 2012).

For Hjarvard, mediatization theory is framed by political theory and the so-called medium theory. He agrees with the Swedish media researcher Kent Asp, who examined the influence of mass media on politics and politicians adjustment to mass media (Hjarvard 2013:41-77). The medium theory by Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, Joshua Meyrowitz et al. describes the media as autonomous agents which have a more or less deterministic impact on universal social change:

As the printing press paved the way for a social and political revolution, so will the Internet – as a kind of generalized media platform – promote a whole new social infrastructure. Thus, media are not only channels of interaction, but mould the ways in which the interaction takes place. Communication and media structures will play the same role as natural and physical infrastructures have played in the past (Hjarvard 2004:44).

The empirical core of Hjarvard's thesis on the mediatization of religion is a representative internet survey conducted in Denmark. This survey examines the impact of popular media (e.g. books, cinema, computer games) on the participants' spiritual and religious lives (Hjarvard 2008b). Closely following Hjarvard's data and his interpretation of mediatization, Lundby (2016), Petersen (2010, 2012), Jin (2015), Setianto (2015) and Lövheim (2012) provided six case studies exemplifying the various possible interpretations of 'mediatization'. Others use the concept of mediatization in a more superficial way, mainly to mean the "process of using new media" (Moberg/Sjö 2012) or events getting (newly) displayed by mass media (Margry 2011:7, 12-13; Boutros 2011). Sometimes the term is used more or less interchangeably with mediation (Christensen 2012:68). Like Hjarvard, Fischer-Nielsen (2012) conducted a representative survey among the Danish population and over 1000 Protestant pastors. Thomas (2016) introduces an alternative understanding of mediatization processes in relation to mediation.

Sá Martino, a Brazilian researcher in communication, presents a concept of mediatization that is the opposite of Hjarvard's strong mediatization theory. Sá Martino frequently refers to Hjarvard and Livingstone but offers a perspective that diverges from theirs in his book *The Mediatization of Religion: When Faith Rocks* (2013). Sá Martino's approach is rooted in the work of the Spanish and Bolivian philosopher Jesus Martin Barbero, who stressed the importance of the social and cultural context of media in his seminal book *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations* (orig. 1987). Barbero rejects the split between 'media makers' and media's 'reception,' pointing out that the two sides share (at least partially) a cultural, historical and social background. He defines media reception as an individual, active reconstruction of a message (Sá Martino 2013:20-23).

3. Mediatization of Religion: The Core Elements

3.1 The Dating of Mediatization

Lundby, a communication scholar, asserts, "Mediatization is a process over time" (2016:30; 2014:23-26). By its very nature, mediatization implies a process from a non- or low-mediatized state to one of (ever more) mediatization (Deacon/Stanyer 2014:1036). First, we have to ask

when mediatization begins. The question of measuring its progress will be addressed later. Opinions about when it begins vary broadly, from viewpoints that predict the approaching end of mediatization to specific temporal definitions of mediatization that predict its ever-growing development (Lundby 2014:23-26; Deacon/Stanyer 2014:1036-1039; Krotz 2012:25). For Friedrich Krotz, who is the foremost reference for Hepp, Lundby and Hjarvard, mediatization is a meta process that changes human communication and therefore began in prehistoric times with the dawn of human culture. He calls it a meta process as a non-directional ‘process of processes,’ stressing the dynamic aspect of humans using, producing and appropriating media (Krotz 2009; Krotz 2012:37). In contrast to Krotz, Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby attempt to date the mediatization process.

In their early study on the World Youth Day, Hepp and Krönert do not specify a time frame. In that study, they define mediatization as simply the “increasing temporal, spatial and social spread with processes of media communication and the change of religion by media” (2009:31). Later works by Hepp are ambivalent and inconsistent. On the one hand, Hepp stresses the growing significance of media over the last six centuries, identifying the three cumulating waves of mechanization, electrification, digitalization, and the latest phase of datafication, which indicates the beginning of ‘deep mediatization’. Each wave does not simply signify a replacement of ‘old media’ by ‘new media’ but usually encompasses a continuation of the former media. So far, this is common ground in media studies; this phenomenon is known as Riepl’s Law (Krupp/Breunig 2016:11). Mediatization, then, has quantitative and qualitative dimensions (Couldry/Hepp 2017:34-52). In contrast to this image of waves, Couldry and Hepp present a chart that illustrates media innovations since 1430 using a graph that grows exponentially to indicate evidently the importance of these innovations (Fig. 1; Couldry/Hepp 2017:40). The acceleration of media innovations, their variety and the increased interrelatedness of contemporary digital media and datafication indicate the current wave of *deep mediatization* (Couldry/Hepp 2017:53-56).

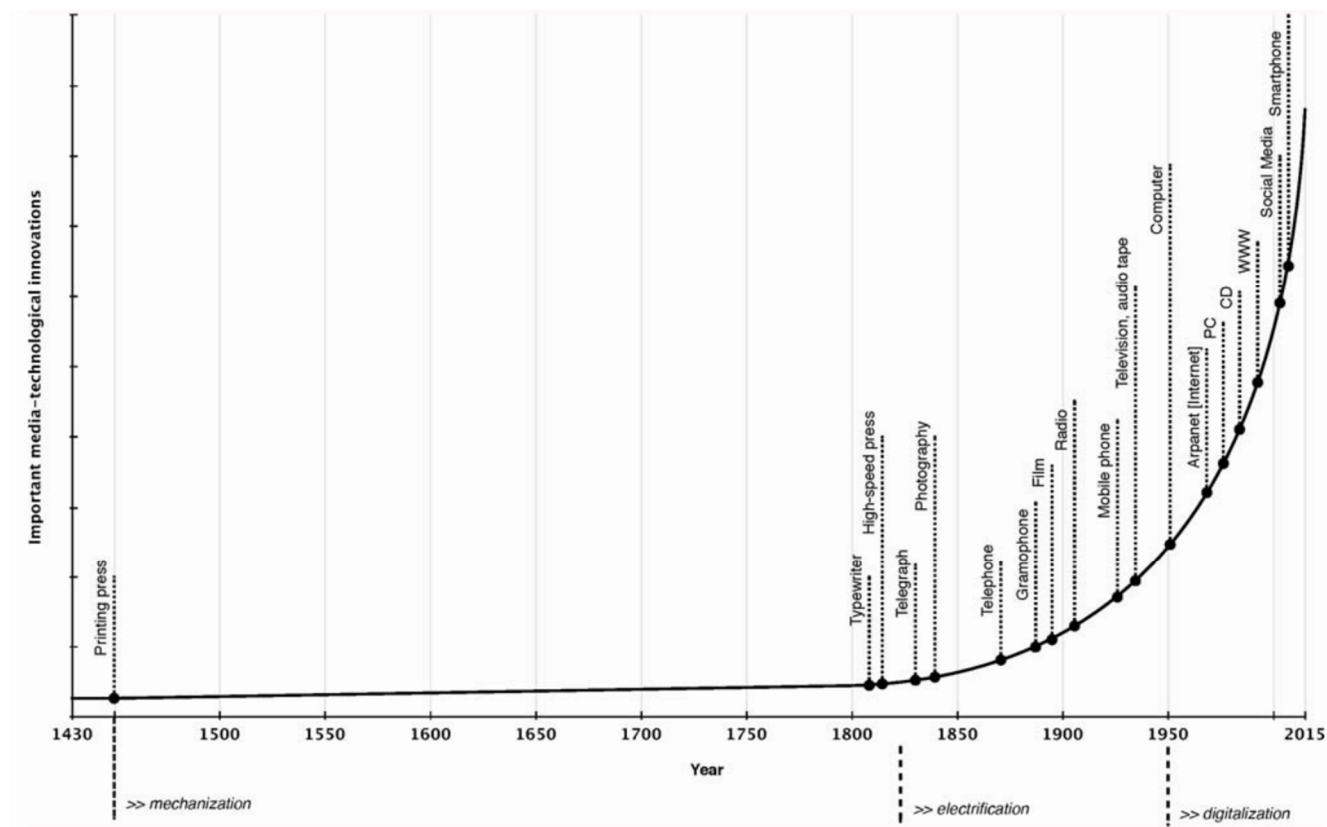


Fig. 1; Couldry/Hepp 2017:40

On the other hand, Hepp rejects all efforts to generalize his social constructivist approach in mediatization theory:

This approach is linked with the argument that context-free definitions of mediatization cannot be appropriate. Therefore, we have to consider that we can distinguish between various mediatization processes in different times and for different groups of people. All of them have to be described in a concrete way (Hepp 2013:618).

Couldry and Hepp even acknowledge that mediatization differs significantly across cultures. It manifests differently in Brazilian favelas, in rural India, and it looks different among the Chinese working class or in suburban Malaysia (Couldry/Hepp 2017:37). They criticize most authors for applying the concept of mediatization from a Eurocentric perspective, based on the assumption that modernization accompanies media which are independent from religion and politics: “It is especially problematic to link mediatization too closely with European specifics and then assume that it unfolds identically wherever we go in the world” (Couldry /Hepp 2017:36). Therefore, the only level at which mediatization can be empirically scrutinized is in mediatized lifeworlds, a concept borrowed from the sociological phenomenology of Thomas Luckmann and Alfred Schütz (Hepp 2013:621).

Hjarvard's work on mediatization focuses on institutional changes. He believes that radio broadcasting marks the starting point of mediatization, which parallels the evolution of late modernity. Unlike newspapers, whose readership is bound to specific political and social parties, radio broadcasting addresses the whole population and establishes "a general public interest". Mediatization began when the media attained autonomy as a social institution (Hjarvard 2008a:118-120; Hjarvard 2014:210-212). Thomas agrees with Hjarvard, situating mediatization as the moment when the media become a system of its own with its own genuine logic (Thomas 2016).

Though Lundby is well aware of the need to date the process of mediatization (Lundby 2016:30-32; Lundby 2014:23-26; Lundby 2009:9-11), he is hesitant to elaborate his own position. In his study on institutional changes in Norwegian television, he frankly admits to sharing Hjarvard's view and situates mediatization in Norway in the 1980s, when the public media were reformed (Lundby 2016:31).

Sá Martino uses a non-temporal measure of mediatization, describing highly and low mediatized churches. Although this method of analysis is promising, he neglects further specification of this concept – the empirical measure remains obscure (Sá Martino 2013:61-72). Is a church's level of mediatization defined by its level of media production to spread information and promote its mission (on the Internet, radio etc.) or by media use during services? Is it defined by the media use by the church as an institution or by the individual use of (religious) media by church members?

However, most researchers do not explicitly examine when the mediatization of religion started or how to measure it, nor do they discuss the dates and criteria proposed by Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby. So, mediatization is usually accepted as an unquestioned, self-evident phenomenon linked to 20th century media technology such as newspapers and magazines (Christensen 2012), movies (Jin 2015; Petersen 2012), television (Petersen 2010; Boutros 2011; Margry 2011), computer games (Jin 2015), and various internet services such as online radio streaming (Setianto 2015), online newsgroups (Moberg/Sjö 2012; Setianto 2015), blogs (Lövheim 2012), e-mails and social media (Fischer-Nielsen 2012).

In summary, mediatization appears to be a broad term for describing changes in media use. It encompasses situations when new media are introduced for religious consumers or producers or when religious events are displayed on new types of media for the first time.

3.2 The Measure of Mediatization

Reviewing the arguments by Hepp and Hjarvard (Lundby and Thomas are included here), it is striking that the quantitative argument is addressed frequently – even with an impressive chart (Fig. 1; Couldry/Hepp 2017:41), but quantitative data is never provided. The media-saturated society is presented as an unquestioned fact.

I presume that this neglect of quantitative data is a conscious decision and is a response to two problems. The first one is that statistics do not clearly support the view that the significance of the media is constantly increasing. Since 1964, the study *Massenkommunikation*, a representative survey of the German population (only West Germany was included before 1990) has been conducted every five years. This study is quite particular in worldwide media studies. At first sight, it does indeed illustrate an immense increase in average daily media use, from 3.14 hours in 1964 to 9.26 hours in 2015.⁶ This is mainly due to an increase in television and radio consumption, from 70 minutes per day (for television) and 89 minutes per day (for radio) to 208 and 173 minutes per day, respectively. This increase is partly due to the inclusion of more media types in later studies (sound recordings, books and magazines have been included since 1980) and media innovations (video has been included since 1985, the internet since 2000). The most astonishing finding of this long-term study is that the peak of media consumption was in 2005, with 10.00 hours a day; it then declined to an average of 9.43 hours in 2010 and 9.26 hours in 2015, even among younger users (of course, internet use on mobile devices was also taken into account) (Krupp /Breunig 2016:2-43).⁷ These data make it hard to support the quantitative argument for society's constantly increasing mediatization.

The second reason for neglecting media statistics is even more important to the debate on mediatization. If we compare, for example, 'today's media use' with that of newspaper readers of the early 20th century, we will quickly discover that our focus is inappropriate. We might find that, in Vienna in the 1930s, urban upper-class readers studied their voluminous newspapers in detail (usually two editions per day), while working-class readers mostly read brief publications by the yellow press (*7-Groschen-Hefte*) (Schreder 1936:30-38). We might also observe a decline in Germans reading (printed) newspapers, from 35 minutes per day in 1964 to 23 minutes per day in 2015. However, when online news media, age and the social milieu are considered, some groups' use of newspapers has remained steady or even increased, while use by other groups is significantly below average (Krupp/Bräunig 2016:24-26, 108-108, 193).

Any general conclusions on the use of newspapers – let's say for the last century in Germany – is only of limited value. We have to ask: Who is reading newspapers? Are they in urban or rural areas? Is this a free press or a political system enforcing strict censorship – reading newspapers meant something completely different in fascist Germany or in socialist East Germany than it does today. To what extent do readers read – what is their reading routine? Is it a matter of education or economics? The questions go on.

Mediatization theory avoids these distinctions in favour of proclaiming general trends. One more example from religion illustrates the limits of mediatization's universal claims: media use by Jehovah's Witnesses.⁸ Since the founding of the original *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* in 1879, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society has looked back on a dynamic account of the media they have used for mission and teaching. Jehovah's Witnesses publish two journals, *Watchtower* and *Awake!*, and the society's leaders have published numerous books. Furthermore, in 1914, for missionary purposes, they introduced an innovative photo-drama – a combined film and slideshow – depicting creation. Ten years later, they started broadcasting on their own stations and on national radio networks in the US, Canada and the UK. When they abandoned radio due to increasing political tensions, they praised phonographs and sound cars as the most effective means of promoting their mission. Jehovah's Witnesses mostly ignored the internet for a period of about fifteen years, but digitalization took place on various levels after 2010 (journals, the Bible, movies, and apps for mobiles and tablets). Eventually, in 2014, the members of the Watch Tower Society's governing body even started a monthly streaming/podcast television show (Krüger/Rota 2015). Of course, we could consider the Watch Tower Society's progressive media use an exemplary case of mediatization. It clearly demonstrates increasing, cumulative appropriation of new media technologies, on the level of the institution and of individual members. But is this a valid interpretation of these events?

Indeed, a closer look reveals a more complex, dynamic story. The print journals *Watchtower* and *Awake!* are persistent with a circulation of 62 million copies in 303 languages (*Watchtower*) and 60 million copies in 117 languages (*Awake!*), making them some of world's most read periodicals. However, Jehovah's Witnesses' media use throughout the 20th century was not simply cumulative either (as Couldry and Hepp would suggest): Electronic media were rejected after a short enthusiastic phase (radio) or ignored entirely (television). The general frame of mediatization would imply that now we should introduce concepts of de-mediatization and non-mediatization to explain this phenomenon (Pfadenhauer/Grenz 2017). And yet, the elephant remains in the room: Can we state that Jehovah's Witnesses are more 'mediatized'

today than twenty years ago? This assumption is not justified on the institutional level or on the individual level. They use different media now, but in the past, they spent a great deal of effort producing media (journals, books, booklets, audio-cassettes), distributing them to promote their mission, and seriously studying these media in assemblies and in families.

Only if we consider new media (such as digital media) to be more ‘media’ than other forms, only then, mediatization in terms of an increase of media use would be valid. But as much as such an assumption is of no use for the media history of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, it isn’t for any global perspective: “[...] while it is impossible to research the mediatization of a culture or society as a whole, we can investigate the mediatized world of stock exchange dealings, of schools, of the private home and so on” (Hepp 2013:621).

3.3 Secularization

Just as most researchers reject a concrete timeline for mediatization, they also ignore the debate on secularization. Only Hjarvard and Lundby closely link secularization with the current process of mediatization; Thomas endorses the idea that religions are “dethroned” by the secular media in modern societies (Thomas 2016:41).

Though he is well aware of the ongoing sociological debate on the de-secularization or re-sacralization of the modern (Western) world, Hjarvard advocates the simple thesis that religion in general has declined during the process of modernization. He depicts media as agents of secularization: “At the level of society, mediatization is, therefore, an integral part of secularisation. At the level of organisation and the individual, mediatization may encourage both secular practices and beliefs as well as more subjectivised religious imaginations” (Hjarvard 2011:132). This leads Hjarvard to the following conclusion: “Consequently, institutionalized religion in modern, Western societies plays a less prominent role in the communication of religious beliefs and, instead, the banal religious elements of the media move to the fore of society’s religious imagination” (Hjarvard 2008b:24; Hjarvard 2011:130-133). Hjarvard refers exclusively to Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart’s study *Sacred and Secular*, but this work does not link the process of secularization to modernity or rationality but rather to economic factors (Norris/Inglehart 2004:3-33). Hjarvard (2008:10-11; 2013:79-80; 2016:15) ignores the debate on secularization theory (Martin 2005; Davie 2002), the concept of the multiplicity of modernity, and Western examples of persistently high levels of religiosity, such as the US (Eisenstadt 2000; Lövheim 2014:555).

In his most recent article, Lundby mentioned that in the 1970s he had already started “to explore the sociological hypothesis of the increasing secularization of Scandinavian societies

and the possible impact of radio and television on this process” (Lundby 2016:30). He measures secularization mainly by declining church membership in the formerly Evangelical Lutheran state church, which has decreased from 90% to 75% within the last three decades. However, 85% of the Norwegian population are still part of a religious community, due to religious pluralization and immigration (Lundby 2016:34).⁹ The indicators for his strong thesis – that religion has lost authority while the media has gained it (Lundby 2016:31) – is finally only based on the fact that the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (and not the church) made a decision about a cross-wearing news anchor. Acknowledging that the church is still very present in the public media, Lundby concludes, “Today, I would hesitate to draw conclusions about the level of secularization based on an analysis of programming in national broadcasting”. But still, “Secularization and mediatization appear in 2014 as clearly intertwined processes” (Lundby 2016:35).

Peter Fischer-Nielsen takes a different stance. He distinguishes between the mediatization of religion and the mediatization of the church. The first is the fragmented presentation of religion in secular media (aligning with Hjarvard’s concept of banal religion), and the second is the presentation of religion as a whole, such as an institutionalized church web site. Hence, Fischer-Nielsen recommends examining mediatization in the context of secularisation and the individualization process (2012:47-51, 54).

What is striking here is that Hjarvard and Lundby ignore or downplay the role of religions as media agents. And yet, it is no accident that religious institutions simply do not appear as media producers in Hjarvard’s initial article on the mediatization of religion (2008). This underlying opposition of (modern) media and religion has been a common theme of theological debates on religion in television since the 1970s. According to its logic, ‘the media’ are replacing religion, and of course, considering the churches as media actors would contradict the very foundation of this argument (Krüger 2012:354-372).

All researchers who deal with proper religious traditions and their methods of mediatization underline the significance of the media for the spread of religion in recent times: Hepp describes media use in the Roman Catholic Church, Boutros in Haitian Voodoo, Fischer-Nielsen among Danish pastors, Lövheim among Muslim women, Moberg and Sjö examine post-secular Finland, Sá Martino looks at Brazilian churches and Setianto looks at Indonesian Muslims in the US (Hepp 2011:112-115; Hepp/Krönert 2009:268-275; Boutros 2011; Fischer-Nielsen 2012; Lövheim 2012; Sá Martino 2013:61-72; Moberg/Sjö 2012). Hence, it is not surprising that Lövheim concludes in her general introduction to the mediatization debate: “There is a broad agreement that religion does not disappear with the introduction of and

increased use of media technology in society. This process does, however, not only mean that secular media mediate religion but also increasing access to and use of media by religious actors” (Lövheim 2014:553; see also Hoover 2009).

3.4 Banal Religion and Entertainment

Another core element promoted by nearly every researcher committed to the mediatization paradigm is the assumption that mediatization goes hand in hand with the banalization and commodification of religion. The consequences of this are twofold. Traditional churches begin ‘branding’ their teachings and figures (Hepp/Krönert 2009; Thomas 2016) and turn rituals into entertainment in order to meet the ‘media expectations’ of their ‘consumers’ (Sá Martino 2013). On the other side, popular TV series, movies and computer games rework ‘hybrid’ religious characters, symbols and messages by applying ‘media-logic,’ eventually resulting in amusing ‘religious-tainment’ (Jin 2015; Petersen 2010, 2012). Apart from Sá Martino and Setianto, these authors recognize the emergence of fictional, entertaining religion in the media – ‘banal religion,’ to use Hjarvard’s phrase – as an example of mediatization. For some, this phenomenon reflects the process of media becoming a (semi-)independent social institution or system (Hjarvard 2008a; Thomas 2016). This simultaneously indicates that the media are taking over the function of traditional religion: “The media have become society’s main purveyor of enchanted experiences” (Hjarvard 2008b:17; see also Lundby 2016). The media have also replaced liturgical hours for dividing the day (Hepp/Krönert 2009; see also Thomas 1998). Only Petersen (2010, 2012), who studied fans of popular media, doubts that media has a steady impact on the actual religious life of media consumers.

Hjarvard underpins his argument with a representative internet survey (N=1007) conducted by the Zapatera Research Institute in Denmark in 2005. Since he refers to these data in his numerous later publications and this study is the anchor point for nearly all studies on the mediatization of religion, his data are worth examining in detail (Hjarvard 2013, 96-101).

In this study, Hjarvard asks for the religious and spiritual impact of popular movies, books and computer games. It is confusing that, despite Hjarvard’s basic definition of mediatization, which is linked to electronic media, books play a major role in his empirical argument. Some methodological aspects of this study and the presentation of the data are questionable and inappropriate: For example, for all three questions, Hjarvard only includes the responses of interviewees who were familiar with the book, film or game. However, 42% of his participants had not read or seen the Harry Potter series, 65% did not know the novels of Dan Brown, 28% did not know the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and even 87% had never played the

computer game *World of Warcraft*. Since he uses the data to support broad claims about the impact of media on today’s religious world, this procedure is invalid. The next section presents Hjarvard’s original data and adds a statistically valid version that includes participants who were unfamiliar with certain media (Hjarvard 2008b:22-24).¹⁰

1. The effect of different media stories on the ‘interest in spiritual issues’;

Hjarvard’s original table (4)

The media story has increased my interest in spiritual issues	Harry Potter stories (novels, films and/or computer games), n=588	Dan Brown’s novels (<i>Da Vinci Code</i> and/or <i>Angels & Demons</i>), n=350	<i>Lord of the Rings</i> trilogy (novel, films and/or computer game), n=716	<i>World of Warcraft</i> (computer game), n=133
Yes	11.5%	38.4%	13.4%	12.1%
No	84.5%	58.1%	83.7%	86.5%
Don’t know	4.1%	3.5%	2.9%	1.4%

Revised version

The media story has increased my interest in spiritual issues	Harry Potter stories (novels, films and/or computer games)	Dan Brown’s novels (<i>Da Vinci Code</i> and/or <i>Angels & Demons</i>)	<i>Lord of the Rings</i> trilogy (novel, films and/or computer game)	<i>World of Warcraft</i> (computer game)
Yes	8%	13%	9%	2%
No	49%	19%	60%	11%
Don’t know	2%	1%	2%	0%
Don’t know the medium	41%	77%	25%	87%

Although ‘interest in spiritual issues’ is a very broad concept, only about 10% or less of the interviewees agreed with the first statement.

2. The effect of certain media stories on the interest in religious issues;

Hjarvard’s original table (5)

The media story has increased my interest in religious issues	Harry Potter stories (novels, films and/or computer games), n=588	Dan Brown’s novels (<i>Da Vinci Code</i> and/or <i>Angels & Demons</i>), n=350	<i>Lord of the Rings</i> trilogy (novel, films and/or computer game), n=716	<i>World of Warcraft</i> (computer game), n=133
Yes	4.5%	53.5%	7.2%	7.1%
No	91.7%	43.1%	90.1%	90.0%
Don’t know	3.7%	3.4%	2.7%	2.8%

Revised version

The media story has increased my interest in religious issues	Harry Potter stories (novels, films and/or computer games)	Dan Brown's novels (<i>Da Vinci Code</i> and/or <i>Angels & Demons</i>)	<i>Lord of the Rings</i> trilogy (novel, films and/or computer game)	<i>World of Warcraft</i> (computer game)
Yes	3%	19%	5%	1%
No	53%	15%	64%	12%
Don't know	2%	1%	2%	1%
Don't know the medium	41%	77%	25%	87%

In the revised version, an increase in 'interest in religious issues' is only observed with Dan Brown's novels, but again, this approaches circular reasoning: The books are based on conspiracy theories about the biggest Christian church. And in the case of Dan Brown's critical novels, it is doubtful that 'interest in religion' means a positive view of religion or a source of 'enchanted experiences' (Hjarvard 2008b:18-24). Similarly, the survey conducted by Fischer-Nielsen indicates that one consequence of 'internet mediatization' was participants' increased tendency to criticise religion (16%), rather than an increase in religion (2%) (Fischer-Nielsen 2012:48-54). However, for Hjarvard, this data provides evidence for the mediatization of religion:

The media as cultural environments have taken over many of the social functions of the institutionalized religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community. Consequently, institutionalized religion in modern, Western societies plays a less prominent role in the communication of religious beliefs and, instead, the banal religious elements of the media move to the fore of society's religious imagination (Hjarvard 2008b:24).

It is a great merit that Stig Hjarvard undertook one of the few studies on the impact of religious or magical content in popular media on the religious lifeworld. However, in fact, his data only support the thesis that popular media have a *minimal effect* on people's 'interest' in religion and spirituality, not to mention the impact on actual religious belief and behaviour.

If we now undertake to review these elements step by step, the first claim – the recent emergence of religious-tainment – is refuted simply by a superficial look at the history of religion and literature. In antiquity, the novel the *Golden Ass* or *Metamorphoses* by the Latin author Apuleius (2nd century CE) depicts the amusing adventures of the hero Lucius in Graeco-Roman mystery cults. Starting with Boccaccio's *Decamerone* in the 14th century and continuing to the works of Marquis de Sade during the French revolution, the church and its characters have appeared in entertaining – even erotic – novels since the dawn of literature. During the first decade of film, the 1890s, hundreds of short films with biblical and Christian motifs were

created. All of them exhibit the ‘magical’ tricks of the new medium. These movies, such as *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* by Georges Méliès (1898), were not produced for the purpose of religious education but for entertainment, first at fun fairs and later in the nickelodeons (Krüger 2012:238-244).

Last but not least, neither the hybridization nor religion as part of games are bound to recent processes of mediatization. ‘Hybridization’ – the exchange of religious ideas, practices and symbols between East and West – is as old as defined religious traditions. The study of religion is full of examples of this entanglement, especially between historical and present forms of Christianity, Manichaeism, Buddhism and Hinduism (Krech 2012). On the other hand, games and religion have been mixed for entertainment as well as educational purposes since antiquity, as Jens Schlieter (2012) illustrates with historical Tibetan Buddhist games that preceded the secular ‘snakes and ladders’ board games.

Nihil sub sole novum – there is nothing new under the sun. When these historical insights are considered, the thesis that the ‘banalization’ of religion is a phenomenon of late modernity, parallel to mediatization, is indefensible. It has also been demonstrated that Hjarvard’s own statistical data contradict the supposition that popular media have any significant impact on people’s “interest in spiritual and religious matters”.

Whenever a thesis deviates so obviously from the empirical findings, it can be assumed that a strong normative stance is implemented. The implicit idea that religion – the original, pure, traditional religion – is now degenerated by (entertaining) mediatization and ‘branding’ commodification mirrors the lengthy history of Protestant criticism of all sorts of commercialization of religious goods. It is theologically justified by the biblical accounts of the worship of the Golden Calf (Ex 34:4) and of the cleansing of the temple (Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-16). Contemporary theologians, such as Dorothe Sölle (who wrote the famous 1979 tract *Du sollst keine Jeans haben neben mir – Thou shalt have no other jeans before me*) echo this accusation of consumerism. While American theologian Harvey Cox points critically to the broad alliance of the media and market religion (Cox 2016), many German Protestant authors, beginning in the 1970s, go so far as to identify the mass media as *Medienreligion* – the idolatrous worship of hedonism and consumerism (Krüger 2012:354-372).¹¹ Similarly, the acclaimed pedagogue Neil Postman – following McLuhan’s arguments – declared the end of a democratic, sophisticated society in his books *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985) and *The End of Education* (1996).

One may object that none of the researchers of mediatization (except Thomas) explicitly refer to the theological and pedagogical discourse. But human history witnesses not only the constant emergence of new media but also constantly new interpretations and evaluations of existing media (Campbell 2010:41-63; Krüger 2012:27-31). Certainly, media theory and research are not situated in a cultural vacuum. We are part of a long chain of interpretations of media that lasts two millennia and is deeply influenced by Christianity. Concepts in media studies (e.g. Ong and his mentor McLuhan) were influenced to some extent by the Jesuit philosopher Teilhard de Chardin and by Catholic ideas on community (Krüger 2015a:64-71). As Alexandra Boutros points out, we have to ask for the underlying normatives in concepts like the banalization of religion:

Do forms of banal religion manifest completely outside the structures of traditional religion? Or do they intersect with religious discourse in all sorts of culturally significant ways? Banal religion and mediated enchantment, when it comes to representations of Vodou (and Voodoo), intersect with constructs of race and ethnicity in ways that need to be unpacked if we are going to understand the supposed re-enchantment of the public sphere via mediated representations (Boutros 2011:194).

Hence, it is no accident that some researchers see a rupture between non-mediatized ‘traditional religion’ and mediatization that is driven by entertainment and consumerist market ideology. It is also no accident that the same approach is not taken in studies on the age of printing, although the printing business was a major driving force in the production of religious pamphlets from the Reformation to the 19th century’s missionary societies.¹²

Opposing a ‘non-mediatized’ religion in the printing age and a secular age of electronic media is – from a historical standpoint – arbitrary and based on a profound normative stance that depreciates the current mediatization of religion in favour of a past literary age. Carneiro emphasizes the significance of this nostalgia for a pre-technological world in Western philosophy and its impact for mediatization theory (Carneiro 2015:55). Even Hjarvard warned in his early article: “At worst, such a definition would entail a normative perspective of permanent decline, interpreting all new dependencies on media as one further step down the road of political and social deterioration” (Hjarvard 2004:48). Some mediatization researchers express concerns for the future of religion: Hepp and Krönert aim at a critical evaluation of the mediatization of religion (2009:8), observing that the traditional separation of the sacred and the profane has been overcome: The pope is presented as a celebrity and religious events resemble a show more than a Catholic mess. They see risks for the Roman Catholic Church on the “black market of popular religion“ if the church were to be reduced to just one “brand of

fetishism” (2009:268, 276-277). Thomas considers the mediatization of his own church an “illusion and temptation” (2016:43-44).¹³

3.5 The Two Systems and the Logic of the Media

Closely linked to the idea of secularization is the definition of the media and religion as two separate social spheres and the idea that religion is now being overtaken by “the logic of the media”. This concept has been extensively criticized, even by many proponents of the mediatization theory: “[...] its tendency to claim that it has identified one single type of media-based logic that is superseding (completely replacing) older logics across the whole of social space” (Couldry 2008:6). The idea of a simple, single principle that steers the media regardless of social, political and legal contexts was generally refused; as Lundby puts it, “[...] it is not viable to speak of an overall media logic; it is necessary to specify how various media capabilities are applied in various patterns of social interactions” (Lundby, 2009b:115; see also Hepp 2013:4-5; Livingstone 2009:9; Clark 2011:180; Boutros 2011:189; Fischer-Nielsen 2012:46).

Compared to the concept of the “logic of the media” concept, the idea that media and religion are separate systems seems to be more broadly accepted. Though Hjarvard’s opinions shifted significantly between 2008 and 2012, when he acknowledged that the media are only semi-independent institutions and that religions can run their own media, he did not alter his general assumptions on mediatization, secularization and the emergence of banal religion. According to Hjarvard, Lundby and Thomas, mediatization began when the media gained autonomy as independent institutions. This was the case when radio broadcasting, the first medium, met general public interest, rather than any party interests (Hjarvard 2008a:118-120; Hjarvard 2014:210-212). Thomas describes the present relationship between media and religion as an ongoing conflict between two systems that have collided. The media system helps “dethrone” religion and maybe even establishes “a new and peculiar form of non-traditional and non-church religion” (Thomas 2016:41).

Firstly, Hjarvard’s date for when the media created a public sphere for a general-interest audience is clearly wrong. Newspapers, pamphlets and encyclopaedias were the three media formats that opened the political sphere to public discourse, including reports on religious issues, and this occurred two centuries before radios became generally available (Heyd 2012:195; Krüger 2017:5-19). Furthermore, the 20th century witnessed harsh censorship and propagandist radio use in the autocratic systems of communist Russia, Francoist Spain, and fascist Germany and Italy.

Secondly, the opposition of the media and religion lacks historical evidence and neglects more nuanced examples, such as David Morgan's (2011:140-151) study of 18th-century evangelical printing culture, Horsfield's (2013) study of literacy in early Christianity and Boutros's (2011:189) consideration of Voodoo in Haitian media under the dictatorship of Duvalier (see also Tyson 2005:4964).

The relationships between religious institutions and actors and their media use have always been and still are complex; for example, media tycoons like Rupert Murdoch (owner of the conservative Fox Entertainment Group) and pastor Pat Robertson (CEO of the Christian Broadcasting Network) play complicated roles. Thus, Hoover argues that religion and media cannot be examined as two separate spheres; they are integrated. Public media in modern Germany provide a good example of this point (Hoover 2009:124).

After World War II, German public broadcasting was federally structured. There are nine different public media providers for radio, television and online media, and each is responsible for one or more federal states. (The German public media providers are BR, HR, MDR, NDR, RadioBremen, rbb, SR, SWR and WDR). They each run several radio channels (including streaming and podcasts) and one regional TV channel, and they all contribute to the collaborative German TV Channel One (ARD or ARD alpha). In addition, the ZDF, 3sat, Deutsche Welle and Deutschlandfunk provide nationwide TV and radio programs and are broadcast abroad. The relationship between the churches and public media is regulated by each German state's media laws (*Landesmediengesetze*) and the national media law (*Rundfunkstaatsvertrag*). In most cases, all religious communities that the states recognize as statutory bodies (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechtes*) have the right to broadcast via public media and to have representatives in the governing bodies of these media corporations (*Aufsichtsgremien/Rundfunkrat*). Currently, these religious statutory bodies are the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church, the Jewish communities and Jehovah's Witnesses, but the extent of religious broadcasting can vary significantly in different states. Consequently, only the two major Christian churches are privileged to broadcast their Sunday services and a brief sermon every week on television (ARD/ZDF); they can also broadcast short daily sermons or prayers on most radio channels. These shows are directed exclusively by the churches, specifically, by the broadcasting commissioner (*Senderbeauftragter*) chosen by the Catholic and Evangelical Church for each station. Public television and radio stations also offer more than 50 different shows a week, including news, reports and discussions of religious issues. All of these are directed by the channel's editorial staff; in some cases, radio, television and online editors comprise one department. Most of the units specialize in the church and religion, and

some also cover other topics such as immigration. I contacted the editorial teams of all the German public media stations in June and July 2017 and asked about the editors' training (*Redakteure*).¹⁴ Of 30 full-time editorial staff, 16 have a university degree in Catholic or Evangelical theology, and 14 studied topics in the humanities (from history to politics and psychology) or law. Only one editor minored in journalism.¹⁵

This example demonstrates on three levels that a simple distinction of the two systems – the media and religion – is useless. Firstly, specific legal frames determine the relationship between religious institutions and public media, which guarantees the broadcasting of religious services and coverage of religious topics. This might differ in other countries (see e.g. Moberg/Sjö 2012), but the relationship is always complex and must be considered individually in each country or even state (as in Germany's federal system). Secondly, as we have seen, about half of the journalists in public radio and television in Germany who report on religion have university degrees from a theological school. Thus, the assumption that public secular media simply report *on* religion the way a meteorologist reports the weather forecast is not valid. The agency of reporting on religion stays – at least to a certain extent – in the hands of the churches and their actors.

Thirdly, the idea that media and religion are opposed has deep epistemological consequences: Religious broadcasters and media enterprises disappear from the academic “screen”; they are theoretically impossible. But, in fact, religious media has multiplied since the 1980s, along with an overall increase in television providers, online video and radio streaming etc. In fact, there's much more religion in the air today than in the 1970s. When these factors are considered, the simplistic assumption that an increase in media providers, technologies and programs goes hand in hand with secularization proves to be meaningless.¹⁶

3.6 Deterritorialization and Community

A last element of mediatization, which is addressed primarily by Hepp, is ever-increasing deterritorialization and the emergence of religion as an event (Hepp/Krönert 2009; Hepp 2011:112-115).¹⁷ These findings are surprising insofar as they pretend to be a general trend of religious life. Indeed, the history of religion is a history of ‘deterritorialization’: the spread of Buddhism in South and East Asia, of Judaism in the Mediterranean world after the destruction of the second temple (70 C.E.), of Islam from its founding to its modern migrations, of Hindu communities all over the world, of Christianity during the Roman Empire and during the colonial period, and of the merging of religions along the Silk Road. In those days, religion travelled more slowly than on the data highway, but its progress was steady and covered an

enormous range. Deterritorialization also impacted religious iconography; for example, Hellenistic coins carried images of gods and divinized rulers from Alexandria and Athens to India and central Asia (Krüger 2015b). The counterpart to religion's globalization (which has always existed) is and has always been gatherings for feasts and pilgrimages at local sacred sites. 'Events' as temporal religious gatherings have been part of religious life ever since. Interestingly, the mass production of religious media – mostly apotropaic amulets and idols – began 5000 years ago at Egyptian pilgrimage sites (Staubli 2003).

If we assume that it is not a simple lack of knowledge that leads Hepp to his conclusions, his determination to ignore the steady migration of religions – especially when combined with individualization theory (Hepp/Krönert 2009:21-30) – implies a specific understanding of religion. In some sociological schools, the ground-breaking study *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Community and Society*) by Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) is still very influential. Tönnies famously sets two types of social order in opposition to each other. On one side is *Gemeinschaft*, the original, traditional community of affective loyalty that is characterized by blood relationships or by close relationships within a village. On the other side, a *Gesellschaft* is a group of individuals that define their relationships by contracts and functional reasoning. This basic idea of an original organic community that shares the same place for most of its members' lifetimes was later included in Stark, Luckmann, and Berger's theory of the sociology of religion. According to this approach, in pre-modern times – before the Reformation, individualization and industrialization – people were still embedded in a 'holy cosmos' and lived in homogenous communities (Krüger 2012:96-104, 107-134). This image is invoked when Fischer-Nielsen states that, in a "non-mediatized religious context", the church, family and friends would be an individual's sources of religious knowledge (2012:50-52). This picture is even present when Lundby compares mediatization (which parallels secularization) to an organic phenomenon, quoting Scott Lash to describe how the influence of the media spread 'like a disease' in late modern societies (Lundby 2009:2). Larissa Carneiro concludes sharply:

Lundby's use of the trope of an infectious disease is not haphazard. Disease implies at least two different things. First, that we are not well but sickened by hidden agents infecting our bodies. Second, it also implies that something that once was immaculate is now irremediably poisoned by the logic of contemporary media. This perception of loss of what was previously pure is existentially profound (Carneiro 2015:54).

With this background of an original religion, Hepp and Krönert's cryptic apprehensions become comprehensible: "Wenn Religion in diesem Sinne zu populärer Religion wird, können wir sie

nicht mehr jenseits ihrer Mediatisierung fassen.“ (Hepp & Krönert 2009:268). But what is behind „mediatized religion“? What is the ‘real,’ the ‘pure’ religion?

4. Conclusion

4.1 A Critical Review

Reviewing nine years of studies on the mediatization of religion, the first pragmatic question is: What do researchers actually do with this concept? All studies take Hjarvard’s 2008 publications as the starting point for their analysis. And yet, most authors do not follow the circle of core arguments that links mediatization to secularization in late modernity, to the emergence of banal religion and to media becoming autonomous systems bound to a particular logic. Most studies simply define mediatization as the process of using new media. As an aside, there is no consensus on nor explicit discussion of what constitutes ‘new’ media; they range from books (Tolkien’s novels in Hjarvard’s study), to film, television and the internet. Interestingly, this common understanding of mediatization conforms with Hjarvard’s early definition of strong mediatization: “Mediatization implies a process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity (like work, leisure, play etc.) assume media form“ (Hjarvard 2004:48). Strong mediatization describes a process through which non-mediated activities become mediated (e.g. from home banking to online banking), and weak mediatization is composed of references to the media in daily life (such as the symbolic environment in a McDonald’s restaurant) (Hjarvard 2004:49). These common-sense definitions of mediatization seem to be widely accepted in this field of study.

Aside from this general understanding, some researchers also share the idea that the media promotes banal religion (Jin 2015; Petersen 2010, 2012). Only Hjarvard, Lundby and Hepp address and define additional specific aspects of mediatization, such as the dating and measure of mediatization, secularization, the concept of the two systems (religion and the media) and the logic of the media, and the effect of mediatization on communities and deterritorialization.

Hjarvard, Lundby and Hepp disagree on the dating of mediatization of religion. While Hepp identifies four waves of mediatization, Hjarvard and Lundby connect it to modern times, when the media gained autonomy. Hjarvard’s supposition of (semi-)independent media in late modernity is obviously challenged by the essentially more complex relations between the media and religious bodies. And when one acknowledges that “[...] from a historical perspective, the media have always been important for the practice and spread of religion [...]“ (Hjarvard

2013:84), the assumed uniqueness of today's situation fades away. Hepp's chronological model of constantly increasing mediatization faces another basic problem, which Krotz points out. According to Krotz, all societies are, in one way or another, media or information societies. As modes of communication constantly change in specific contexts, mediatization shapes human history. Thus, all approaches describing a simple linear increase of media technology must be rejected (Krotz 2012:26-27): "Wie nennen wir denn dann, was wir in einem Jahrzehnt haben werden oder vor einem Jahrzehnt hatten? [...] Man kann nicht einfach wie Harold Innis oder Marshall McLuhan eine Abfolge von je vorherrschenden Medien bilden und dabei unterstellen, dass Gesellschaften mit Schrift höher entwickelt sind als Gesellschaften ohne Schrift [...] " (Krotz 2012:37). Furthermore, it is difficult to quantitatively measure mediatization; attempts to do so mask the highly diversified use of media by different age groups, in different regions, social milieus etc.

As we have seen, Hjarvard and Lundby advocate the idea of secularization and ignore the complexity of religious trends in Eastern and Western Europe, the US, and the world. The global claim of secularization in late modern societies is not an adequate interpretation of today's religious trends. And again, this argument loses its grounds when 'the media' are not simply assumed to be secular agents who view religion from a journalistic perspective or see it as 'banal,' but rather as agents of religious organizations who also spread religion through education and missionary work.

We could enter the debate on the concept of 'banal' religion, but Hjarvard's own statistics clearly reveal that popular book and film series such as the Harry Potter hype have only a marginal effect on people's "interest in religious/spiritual issues", not to mention their actual religious beliefs and actions. The normative stance behind this critical discourse describing new and popular media as competing with religion (and traditional education) is obvious.

The theoretical construction of two opposing systems – secular media versus religion – lacks supporting evidence. Historically as well as in modern times, the relationship between these two systems was and is complex and many-sided. The idea of a single 'media logic' has been refused by all proponents of the mediatization theory examined in this study (except Hjarvard, of course).

The idea of religion's increasing deterritorialization is also difficult to maintain in the face of contrary historical accounts of religious spread and missionary work, which span several millennia. Furthermore, this idea mirrors the normative idea of homogenous local communities in the past.

What appeared to be a chain of arguments for the theory of the mediatization of religion turns out to be a row of shaky dominos. On closer inspection, none of its core elements – dating, measure, secularization, banal religion, the concept of two separate systems, the logic of the media, and deterritorialization – are sustainable. Some aspects contradict historical evidence, and most apply only to specific cases and neglect the complexity beyond those examples.

4.2 The Context of Mediatization Theory

Evidently, two major tendencies coin the mediatization theory in religious studies. The first is the focus on the media as an agent of social change, the second is an evaluation of new media that implies some normative aspects. Though Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby recently claimed that their approach is not media-centric but media-centred (involving a holistic view of various social forces), the whole chain of arguments in their mediatization theory still rests on the idea that the media is the centre of social change (Hepp/Hjarvard/Lundby 2015:3). The best illustration of this media-centric position is Couldry and Hepp's chart of media developments and their importance (2016:41) (Fig.1).

In her sophisticated analysis, Larissa Carneiro contextualizes the mediatization thesis in the larger scope of the European philosophy of technology, which shaped the underlying idea of technology's agency long before the current debate began.¹⁸

These industrial forces affected the labour process and, according to the authors, absorbed traditional cultures into the logic of technology. The parallel with mediatization theory is unmistakable: technology is the machine that propels the phenomena of urbanisation, industrialisation, globalisation, commerce and new process of individualisation in contemporary time ... Here, media technology is perceived as an external force, an alien, and a new factor that juxtaposes, threatens or transforms old forms of traditional religion (Carneiro 2015:57).

So, in fact, the strongest claim in mediatization theory suggests that technology drives the future of religion by adapting the 'logic of the media'; that is, "Religion either takes form of or is totally replaced by media [...] " (Carneiro 2015:61).

The idea that media innovations have a massive impact on societal change – for good or bad – has been around for centuries. When Hjarvard, Lundby and Hepp declare that modern mediatization is causing a shift in human history (and religion) – contrasting the Gutenberg Galaxy to the Internet Galaxy (Hjarvard 2004:44; Couldry/Hepp 2016:38-56; Livingstone 2009:4) – it is simply an updated version of the previous comparison of the electronic age with the printing age. This argument – first expressed in Walter Ong's *Ramus, Method, and the*

Decay of Dialogue (1958) and in Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) – praised the Enlightenment, science and democracy as the outcomes of a literate society and argued that the visual nature of electronic media could threaten the art of rational discourse.

However, 200 years ago, many principle elements of the current mediatization debate were argued in Britain and America during the emergence of daily newspapers. Contemporaries harshly criticized newspapers as a menace to modern civilization, which was built on reason and books. Instead of reading for personal education and devotion, people would waste their time on gossip and cheap entertainment in the form of (mostly) fictional stories invented by industrious editors. The cover, they argued, would interest readers more than the content (Heyd 2012:162-167).

Maybe this emphasis on the impact of a medium (and changes to it) on society and especially religion even traces back to the outstanding significance of one book, the Bible, to Occidental culture. Theories on the holiness of scripture and other books were first expressed in ancient Egypt and later received by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the 19th century, Oxford historian Friedrich Max Müller even established the concept of book-religions (Krüger 2012:188-203). A comparison of any 'new' medium with the 'printing age' or the 'Gutenberg Galaxy' likely refers to this much larger cultural narrative surrounding the 'book'.

4.3 Perspectives

Certainly, shifts are occurring in many specific aspects of religion today; examples include global migration movements and new alliances between political and religious institutions in Russia, Poland India and the US. But, so far, the global religious landscape has not been shattered by a wave of media-spurred democratization, neither in Rome nor in Jerusalem. In specific cases – e.g. Muslim TV preachers or video-sharing websites as a battlefield for religious extremists of all kinds – new forms of education and missionary work emerge, but usually, conventional religious institutions assimilate quickly. In most cases, religious structures are persistent and are duplicated in the world of media.

Maybe the misleading expectations connected to the internet (Krüger 2015a:57) are based on an unbalanced understanding of religion as a set of beliefs and dogmas that could be seriously challenged by an open online discourse. This stance totally neglects the material and sensual dimension of religion in ritual and in daily life (ethic considerations about clothing, nutrition, sexuality etc.). It is not accidental that the concept of mediation has recently become so popular in religious studies; this emphasis stresses the physical dimension of media use in

place (Meyer 2012). Reviewing the internet hype, the previous decade, and the strong normative aspects of mediatization theory, we may conclude that all approaches that see the media itself as the origin of change will have limited usefulness for analysing current and previous religious lifeworlds. According to Boutros, “deterministic approaches narrow the potential scope of mediatization, failing to explore how media and social or cultural conditions are intrinsically interconnected, each constituting the other in complex ways” (2011:199). With this in mind, Sá Martino sees mediatization as an uneven process with significant differences across different churches; it is a “colourful panorama from highly appreciated mediatization to openly anti-media” (Sá Martino 2013: 26).

Human agents, not the media, construct social reality, culture and religion. As a means of human communication, the media provide optional conditions (Krotz 2012: 25). The origin of change is not primarily changes in media technologies (or a greater variety thereof), but changes in social lifeworlds which might affect the forms and tools of communication (Krotz 2012:29). To illustrate his thesis, Krotz highlights changes in common reading habits from the 11th to the 12th century in Europe: from monastic reading to scholastic reading. The former involved reading aloud in front of fellow monks in order to memorize biblical and philosophical scriptures (in order to quote them later). Scholastic reading involved reading for pragmatic purposes, reading for oneself in order to find arguments and ideas to question, consider and work with. Tables of contents and portable books were invented for this type of reading. Krotz considers this a change in communication that is equivalent to a mediatization process, even though no technical media innovations were involved (Krotz 2012:33-37): “Mediatisierung von Kommunikation entsteht durch die Menschen, die spezifische Techniken für ihr kommunikatives Handeln benutzen und diese Techniken so auf je spezifische Weise erst zu Medien machen“ (Krotz 2012:26-27).

The sociological tradition in media research pointed to this other side of the coin early on: “[...] the question [is] not ‘What do the media do to people?’ but, rather, ‘What do people do with the media’ ” (Katz/Foulkes 1962:378). This implies the rejection of claims that a certain medium has a determined effect on society or religion; instead, this perspective searches for different modes of media use and reception among different social groups (defined by age, gender, education, cultural/religious background etc.), taking historical dynamics into account. This type of media research figures as social science (Ayaß 2012; Keppler 2005), and it benefits from innovative approaches to media anthropology, which cover media use in the context of social, ritual and physical practices (Meyer 2012). Questions of agency shed light on the complex dynamics between media production and contents and its reception and use (Lövheim

2012:133, 141-142; Lövheim 2014:555; Moberg/Sjö 2012:87-90). The media are not a transcendent entity. Researchers in religious studies would be ill-advised to transform from 19th century's 'armchair philologists' – who barely left their offices and ignored religious lifeworld – to the 21st century's 'couch-potato internet surfers.'

Labels such as McLuhan's 'electronic age' or Castells' 'Internet galaxy' (2001) are meaningless unless we ask who uses media, who is excluded from it, and who produces media content in specific economic, religious or political contexts, including normative attitudes towards certain media, censorship, media hegemony etc. The 'printing age' as impact of the Age of Reason did not exist for the common people until books were available via subscription libraries in the mid-18th century – Benjamin Franklin, who introduced this system in 'the colonies,' wrote a graphic account of contemporary conditions regarding reading (Franklin 1998:71-72).

After a decade of debate on the concept of mediatization in the field of religion, the benefits of this approach appear to be few. Most researchers simply ignore its deeper theoretical impact. Proponents of a strong idea of mediatization differ on significant aspects, especially in their understanding of 'the media' as an agent or as a result of social change. Many of this theory's core elements are also challenged by historical and empirical findings. In the end, the concept of mediatization lacks coherence, clarity and conclusiveness while claiming far-reaching insights about religion, secularization and modernity.

Alternatively, we could define the 20th century as the age of the automobile or even as the age of the refrigerator with as much legitimacy as the age of mediatization. Paul Feyerabend, a philosopher of science, urged us to see things and develop concepts from a completely different point of view. Even if alternative ideas are not very useful for the concrete inquiry, they may disclose the limits and conditions of our conventional ways of thinking (Feyerabend 1993:9–13). The spread of the refrigerator and its 'logic' had an immense impact on nutrition, work, individualization, health, economics, gender relations etc. In principle, it would be impossible to disprove this thesis. However, apart from devotees of cryonics (Krüger 2010), nobody would seriously make this proposition. If we start to ask 'Why not?' we may discover the cultural and normative frames that define our knowledge of the world. Academic concepts – such as mediatization theory – are part of this constant social construction of reality.

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² New academic journals on this topic have also been established, including *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* (2005), *Cyberorient* (2006), the *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* (2012) and the *Journal of Religion, Film and Media* (2015). But few studies or new theoretical approaches to this topic have come from France or Southern or Eastern Europe (e.g. Mayer 2008; Jonveaux 2013; Duteil-Ogata 2015).

³ In the 1990s and 2000s, most published studies were case studies focused specifically on the internet. The study of film and religion, which started in the 1950s, is mainly characterized by theological interpretations rather than empirical film studies (Krüger 2012:260-293).

⁴ Carneiro (2015) and Morgan (2011) introduce both concepts in their comparisons.

⁵ For more about the general debate on mediatization, see Deacan and Stanyer (2014) and the response by Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby (2015).

⁶ This does not mean that people actually spent an average of 9.26 hours (or 566 minutes) using media in 2015. The most recent study also examined the simultaneous consumption of different types of media, which ranges from 64 minutes (age group 14-29) to 37 minutes (age group plus 65) per day (Krupp/Breunig 2016:60-89).

⁷ The overall decline can be traced back mainly to the decrease in the use of radio (-48 min), sound recording devices such as CDs, MP3s, LPs and MCs (-21 min), and television (-12min) that was not countered by the increase

in internet use (+61 min). Internet use also includes online news, audio and video streaming, etc. (Krupp/Breunig 2016:24-34).

⁸ From 2014 to 2017, Andrea Rota, Fabian Huber, Evelyne Felder and I conducted a research project on media use among Jehovah's Witnesses and the Pentecostal Vineyard movement (*Die Dynamik von Mediennutzung und religiöser Gemeinschaftsbildung*).

⁹ Thomas Luckmann challenged this equation of religion with the church as early as 1960 in his critical survey of congregation studies.

¹⁰ Hjarvard's chart on 'The effect of different media stories on the interest in magic and fantasy' (2008b:23) is excluded here. Participants' interest levels on this chart were higher than for the other measures (from 3% for *World of Warcraft* to 25% for *Lord of the Rings* in the revised version). But here, we risk circular reasoning: An interest in the fantasy genre might be a condition for consuming some of these media.

¹¹ A minor aspect Hepp and Krönert introduce here is the idea that the media take over the function of traditional religion: Media offer a "quasi-liturgical structure" for the day, and the media audience resembles a quasi-religious community (*quasi-religiöse Vergemeinschaftung*) (Hepp/Krönert 2009:32-33; see also Thomas 1998).

¹² At the time of the 'Gutenberg Galaxy,' religious criticism was directed at the printed media and consumerism. For example, in the *Journal* (1694) Quaker founder George Fox illustrates: "[...] and when I heard the bell toll, to call people together to the steeplehouse, it struck at my life: for it was just like a market bell, to gather people together, that the priest might set forth his ware to sell. O the vast sums of money, that they are gotten by the trade they make of selling the scripture" (Fox 1998:39).

¹³ Furthermore, the idea that the media take over the function of religion (Hjarvard 2008b:24; Hepp/Krönert 2009:32-34; Thomas 2016:41) contradicts system theory, to which some authors refer. According to this theory, a system is defined by its function; otherwise it does not exist as independent system. Therefore, one system cannot take over the function of another system (Luhmann 1982).

¹⁴ With the exception of SWR, all editorial teams provided detailed information.

¹⁵ Private television and radio stations have no specialized editorial staff, and religion plays only a marginal role in broadcasts by the big television corporations (RTL, Sat1, ProSieben).

¹⁶ In his later distinction between religious media, journalism and banal religion, Hjarvard does not question his basic understanding of media and religion as semi-independent spheres (Hjarvard 2013:83-92; Hjarvard 2012). The actual complexity of this relationship can't be encompassed in this institutional perspective.

¹⁷ In contrast to this general supposition, Setianto limits his insights to the special situation of the small Indonesian minority in the US. As far as we know, all diaspora religions throughout history began to establish local communities when they reached a certain size and economic power.

¹⁸ This attitude is also observable when Fischer-Nielsen assumes that, in the past, in a "non-mediatized religious context" the church, family and friends would have been the most common sources of religious knowledge (Fischer-Nielsen 2012:50-52). But this would have been long before the Reformation and the spread of literacy in society.