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# Mediatization: A Grand Concept or Contemporary Approach?

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**Abstract**

Mediatization is a concept to encompass the changes brought by media into every aspect of our lives. It goes beyond the conventional textual analysis, production economic-politics and audiences' studies. This paper therefore dissects the concept of mediatization and traces the researches done on it. Mediatization was also compared to mediation in terms of versatility in describing the totality of media impact. Mediatization researches need to be conducted in Asia's vibrant media landscape in its developed and developing countries. The researchers concluded that mediatization needs to be refined by further researches to be a contemporary media studies approach.

*Keywords:* Mediatization; media landscape; media studies; research approach

## 1. Introduction

As the world progresses and as the Internet took the world by storms, it is inevitable that the media is increasingly adapted into societal, political and economical institution. The omnipresence of traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers is further extended into many new forms such as television on smartphones, online version of newspapers and streaming radio. Put on top of that, the existence of social media - Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Myspace, continued changing the media landscape in a vibrant manner.

The question that begs to be answered now is this: How does the absorption of media into every aspect of our daily lives changes the society and the culture we live in?. Couldry and Hepp (2013) debated that it is not enough for scholars to focus only on the three main approaches of media studies, namely textual analysis, production economic-

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politics and audiences' studies. A more holistic approach is needed to understand societal and cultural changes brought by media.

Why so and why now? It is evident that media is not only changing individual communication, but it changes other social institutions as well. An easy example will be how politicians are no longer going on face to face campaign to have the personal touch with their constituency, but rather they engaged actively with the public through their online profile. It allows the public not only to have a transparent view of their politicians in real time, but also to voice their grievances and expect feedback from their politicians.

In the beginning of its inception, mass media was only a conduit of communication, as evident from its term, "mediating or medium." Therefore, the studies of media often focused on the technological aspect of it and not beyond that. However, as mass media evolved, unintentionally it grows beyond that to be a standalone institution with its own logic, rather known as "media logic" under the concept of mediatization.

Through the years, the traditional media had improvised and integrated in many different forms to make it accessible at anytime any place. With the emergence of online media, media landscape was completely renewed. Today we have social media, handphone applications such as Whatsapp and Line, as well as television service on the go. New ideas such as user generated content, citizen journalism and prosumers are new terms generated as a result.

This proves that media researches are in strong need of a new concept that could explain how media strongly impact and changes other institutions in society. This article therefore presents the concept of mediatization, a new approach of research that is taking over in the European country that needs to be examined within the Asian context to understand the extent and effect of the increasing adaption of media into our daily lives.

## 2. Background

Mediatization is a word that has its origin in German, *mediatisierung* (Livingstone, 2009). The essence of mediatization is the dominance of media in the existing system and institution in society. Livingstone (2009, p. 3) described mediatization as "meta process by which everyday practices and social relations are increasingly shaped by mediating technology and media organizations" while Krotz (2008) summed up mediatization as one of the processes that shapes modernity.  Table 1 by Hjarvard (2008, p. 120) sums up perfectly the reason why mediatization is a crucial area of studies as we look into the institutional development of the media.

Table 1. The institutional development of media by Hjarvard (2008, p. 120)

| Dominant period | Institutional character | Dominant logic | Media system | Purposes and objectives |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1920 | Media as instrument of other institution | Steered by particular interest | Party press, scientific journals, religious and arts publications etc. | Persuasion and agitation on the part of specific interests in the specific institution |
| 1920-1980 | Media as a cultural institution | Public steering | Public service radio and television (monopoly), omnibus press | Representation of various institutions in public arena |
| 1980 – now | Media as an independent media institution | Media professionalism | Commercial and competitive media, satellite TV, Internet, mobile media | Servicing of audiences, sales to target groups in a differentiated media system |

The table clearly indicates the shift of media's role from a mere companion to other institution to become a powerful and independent institution of its own. In the olden days, the media was guided and dominated by the elites of the society. As society becomes more literate, it becomes part of the public's tool whereby there were representations from all facets of life as players of the media. However, today, the scenario is such that media has become part of everyone's life due to its convenience, affordability and dynamic. It became a dominant institution of its own and increasingly independent of any other institution. In fact, other institutions are relying heavily upon media which resulted in new shift of paradigm where everything is now "mediated."

The media has obviously changed human interaction as it allows people to transcend physical and space boundaries. The media was a mean of interaction and extension of human's senses to reach out to the most people in

shortest time possible. The media has changed the interaction and relations among the people. Simply put, it is not just a mean of interaction, but that it directly changes and intervene interactions.

The postmodern theory scholars argued that media has blurred the line of distinction between the reality and perceived reality. Baudrillard (1994) has said that the "hyperreality" created by the media is even more real to the audience than the reality. Hjarvard (2013) do not deny the impact of media, but reinstated that the postmodernist's approach may seems "too grand."

Livingstone (2009) pointed out the shift by considering the changes in book titles. She explained that while books used to look at mass communication as a companion of other matters, it is now shifting to a paradigm where everything is mediated such as "Mediated Politics." She also went on to expound that researchers has now moved on from acknowledging media as one of the many influential institution to a social analysis whereby everything is transformed and reconstituted by contemporary mediation.

As stated earlier, the term "mediatization" emerged among the German-speaking countries. The term was said to be an awkward term among the native English speaker. Couldry and Hepp (2013) however argue that a term is needed for non-native English speaker to encompass the broad consequences of media in our lives, hence mediatization is coined.

## 3. Mediatization and politics

In the beginning of its development, mediatization was applied in political context, whereby "political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics" (Asp, 1986, p. 359). Mediatization conceptualizes the effect and power of media in the political scenes, especially in European country (Kepplinger, 2002; Schulz, 2004).

In the era of propaganda theory, broadcast media was a tool by politicians to spread their ideologies to the people. Due to expenses needed to maintain a broadcast or radio station, traditional mass media was largely owned by the state political powers. Inevitably, all media contents were staged and controlled by political logics. Media organizations needed the support of political power to survive. At current times, political powers are very much dependent upon the media while the media is getting more independent of political power. While this was true with the traditional media, it is more so now with the advent of technologies where anyone can disseminate information using online media.

Election campaigns have gone digital (Edgerly, Bode, Young, & Shah, 2013). The social media allowed personalization, interactivity and engagement of politics like never before. Social media also empowered the audiences where anyone with Internet access can make their voices heard. In other words, there is a revolution of what democracy constitutes now than last time. Political elites clearly have strong love-hate relationship with media whereby news of them can go viral at any time, be it good or bad. This is clearly proven when Barack Obama, the President of United States is one of the most highly followed figure on Twitter with around 7 million followers (Parmelee and Bichard, 2012). He was deemed the new generation of presidents as he engaged with the society and makes known his policy using new media.

## 4. Mediatization and society

Mediatization of society refers to the process of increasing dependency of society upon media and its logic. Media logic refers to the construction of reality as portrayed by the media. According to Hjarvard (2008, p. 113), media logic refers to the "institutional and technological modus operandi of media, including the way in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules."

Human are interactive being that wants to be part of the society. This sense of belonging are what gives us security, identity and a sense of purpose. In the olden days, the point of reference had always been family members, opinion leaders of society, religious figures and education authorities. However, the online media has changed that whereby we can always find people who are across the world who think like us. The interactivity of human no longer confined to a certain time and space. It changes the concept of relationship whereby you can feel very connected to people that you may not have met in real life (Hjarvard, 2008).

Mediatization was then further elaborated with media's pivotal role in embedding and promoting contemporary culture. Culture that was once decided by the masses prevalent taste and trend is now dominated by the media. In other words, the media today become the providers of cultural products and belief, rather than a mere medium and carrier (Jansson, 2002).

A simple example will be the merchandise chain churned out by the manufacturer upon the release of any new animation movie in the cinema. When a cartoon is successful, the merchandise will prove to be top-selling products in the market, indicating how the media culture is turned into a society contemporary culture. Again this is an indication of "hyperreality" created by the media that seems to be even more real than reality itself in describing the latest trend (Baudrillard, 1994).

## 5. Mediatization and media itself

One of the neglected areas of studies in terms of mediatization is ironically the media system itself. The media no doubt has changed other institution, but what about the mediatization within the media itself? The media itself has experienced a storm of changes.

Many have said that the traditional mass media such as television, radio and newspapers is at the crossroad now. It is being challenged by the online media for the status of "mainstream" media. There were assumptions that the traditional media had also been attacked in terms of its credibility as it often time linked with political authorities. There lies in the challenge, do the traditional media continue to stand on its own and revolutionize their ways or do they join the online media bandwagon?

To put it into a metaphor, some had liken the traditional media on a "sunset" and its transition is made complicated as it overlapped with the rising online media. Media sustainability link strongly with society's acceptance of it. We have generations that are resistant to the transition into the new media and generations that are all out for new media. Activists asked the questions, who is left behind when the traditional media transit into the new media?

Media researchers therefore are caught in this period of awkward transition. Do the researchers continue on with the conventional media researches or should the researchers focus on the online media? To stay on with the conventional approach will means that media studies will be on a static motion, but researchers are struggling to conceptualize and measure the online media.

## 6. Mediatization versus mediation

Mediatization seemingly broad and grand definition to be the overarching theory describing media's consequences is contested with other terms such as medialization and mediation. The term "mediation" seems to have caught on even before "mediatization." Mediation is rather known as "vermittlung" in German (Livingstone, 2009).

According to Hjarvard (2008), mediation is of broader concept whereby it refers to communication via a medium and an intervention between sender and receiver. In other words, just like how money is the medium in economical sense, media is the medium of communication or rather a visible tool.

Hepp (2013) however seems to define mediatization as larger than mediation as Hepp argued that mediation describe general characteristics of any process of media communication whereas mediatization understand the interrelationship between the media and historical changes in any institutional processes.

Scholars such as Couldry (2008) and Livingstone (2009) initially skewed their preference towards the terms "mediation" rather than "mediatization". Mediation contended that media is used as the transmitter of social communication to bridge gaps between two communication partners. However, the argument arises whereby there are confusion of the term "mediation" across different cultures especially when translated. Some considered it a judicial or religious term, whereas some define it as an intervention (Livingstone, 2009).

Mediatization and mediation must not be seen as coming from the end of two different spectrums. But rather it should be viewed as complementary of each other (Livingstone, 2009; Hepp, 2008). However to put it on the same level is to not doing justice to both of the terms that have rich connotation alongside with it

## 7. Researches suggestion on mediatization

The study of mediatization had been blooming in recent years. There are however areas on which mediatization have yet to be explored. Firstly the concept has not been refined in terms of its definition and its theoretical framework. There is a need to identify the many intervening factors and variables that are encompassed under this term to make it workable and practical research approach and not mere ambiguous term.

Mediatization is a concept from the non-native English European country. The concept has not been established in the Asia's context. Asia has been growing especially superpowers such as China, Japan, Korea and others. To narrow it further, mediatization has not been explored in South-East Asia such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Myanmar. Changing media landscape is experienced across Asia with its development at great speed. Therefore, countries in Asia, South East Asia in particular will need to grasp mediatization to make sense of what is happening with media in their country.

It is important to study mediatization in the Asian's context especially in developing nation such as Malaysia. The media landscape has been very vibrant in Malaysia since the development of media technology within the country. Media's power had been questioned, debated and studied in Malaysia especially since the online media became a main player with the emergence of Internet savvy generation. Malaysia had been going through a turbulence with media and this was very evident during the missing flight MH370 issues. Malaysia was put on international limelight out of a sudden and the power of international media to spin every single statement made has shocked us into realizing how this world is so mediated even in times of crisis.

Media landscape and its organization changing dynamic during this transition period from traditional media to online media must also be captured. To capture how media organizations themselves view mediatization and their impending role as the overarching elements across other social institution will give scholars a better understanding of mediatization in current times.

## 8. Summary

This paper is intended to review and understand the concept of mediatization from its inception to its practical usage within the media researches. It has traced the institutionalization of media from a tool to a system and presently to its arching power over other institution, such as the political institution, social institution and also the media institution itself.

A term, semantically is very important for us to make sense of the world around us. That is what the researchers of mediatization is advocating, a term wide enough to simplify the effect of media. Some researchers argued that it is too grand an idea while some agreed to it. The question is, should scholars not take up the challenge and go to the depths of this term to decide if it can change the way researchers approach their work?

The researchers found the need to further define this concept into quantifiable research approach and also measurable variables. The concept can change and revolutionize media researches but only if it is refined carefully. Indeed in times where the online media has changed the media landscape so differently, it is timely for us to look into these.

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