

Mediatization experts Panel, October 27th 2021

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Mediatization experts Panel took place on October 27th 2021 and was devoted to mediatization research trends. Here we present the opinions of mediatization experts from different European countries about the most influential and most promising research trends:

Prof. Göran Bolin

Department of Media & Communication Studies, Södertörn University

Mediatization and the Social Dynamics of Datafication

I think that comparative aspect of mediatization research belongs to the most important. I don't think it is not only the question about East and West, because there are many Western countries that are also very different, and Portugal can be an example, but also Sweden. Both countries are regarded as Western countries, but they can be very different as far as mediatization is considered. We have to evaluate the development of cultural differences that are not necessarily East-West or North-South divided, as there are also differences between Eastern countries. We can take for example Ukraine, where I have been doing research, and I have learned from one of our Ukrainian colleagues, that they actually do not have word for privacy. At the same time, when we consider Ukraine and Estonia, we can notice that they are mostly different countries when it comes to datafication and mediatization. Similarly, there are essential differences also in terms in trust in institutions between Estonia and Ukraine or Bulgaria. Consequently, I think it is important to find those interesting differences, and meanwhile much of the theories of datafication and mediatization for that matter post a uniform direction. Similarly, technology is basically the same everywhere, but technology also gets some domesticated forms in the specific cultures, which produce differences in how people approach technology attitudes to different things.

Dr Barbara Brodzińska-Mirowska

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Wydział Filozofii i Nauk Społecznych, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu

A trend worth mentioning is the issue of some kind of rebellion against the media. The pandemic and the increase in dependence on technology have reinforced these attitudes, which is evident both in the functioning of individuals in everyday life, but also in wider social and political processes. There is a clear reflection on media role in the context of many processes, such as strengthening the polarization of societies, creating information bubbles, in the democratic crisis, and the feeling of loneliness and withdrawal at the individual level. Functioning in a kind of "mediatization trap" may deepen the processes of change in the approach to the media. This, in turn, will create a need to redefine media relations with other systems and subsystems. Therefore, many questions arise whether and how this will influence into the dimension of media practices of individual and institutional actors? Will the functioning of the media themselves change and how? These are great challenges in terms of both empirical research and theory. Therefore, this research direction is very promising.

Dr Olivier Driessens

Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

I have the impression that internationally mediatization is perhaps an old or even 'dead' concept as many scholars are shifting to studying datafication. One of the questions for me is: what do mediatization studies teach or what should datafication researchers learn from mediatization? This seems essential, and I think that datafication not necessarily refers to mediatization studies, maybe except for 'deep mediatization'.

For me, one of the big questions is media- or technology-related social and cultural change - whether that is called mediatization, datafication or something else. Mediatization is part of such labeling question but for many people it does not sound fresh or new.

Of course, very important things happen under the term mediatization and very interesting studies can be found. For example, currently the pandemic question is among the most important and I think this is an accelerator of mediatization or media change.

The question of the relationship between continuity and change, more generally, is also very important, because mediatization and datafication give the impression that everything is changing, that everything is revolutionizing. Data revolution, AI era, every two years we enter a new era of big data, and robotics. This leads to a big question: but what is really changing? What do we mean when we say that the media is changing, society is changing? And how to study social change? We still do not know whether it is structural, nominal, social or cultural change? And finally, in my opinion, it requires comparative work. For example regarding the pandemic, I could study Denmark and Belgium, and they were very different cases, so the perfect idea is to compare, look at different effects, realizations, and different kinds of technology.

Prof. Rita Figueiras

Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Data and democracy in the individualized digital age

Questions of data and democracy are part of the core concerns of our times. Western legal order, intertwined with the architecture of digital platforms, has fostered new forms of surveillance and algorithmic power that are insulating surveillance power from democratic control. This means that societies marked by digital media abundance are increasingly immersed in a surveillance culture (Andrejevic, 2019; Lyon, 2018), where measuring, manipulating and monetizing online human behaviour have become routinized procedures of corporations as well as states (van Dijck, 2014).

Surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) is data-driven and, thus, embedded in the deepening of mediatization. In a landscape of connectivity where digital platforms, physical spaces, objects and mobile communication devices are increasingly interconnected, the proportion of operations able to produce, collect and process data have intensified just as well.

Regular daily activities feed surveillance processes, and this tends to be framed as an inevitable consequence of living in a digital world. This means acknowledging that almost everything people do generates a digital record and that individuals have the responsibility to deal with the pressures and tensions of connection. This is an expression of a self-regulation society (Syvertsen et al., 2014) where collective political responsibility was privatized and individualized under self-regulation practices. This is well aligned with the needs of surveillance capitalism: its successive expansion needs the lack of data mining and algorithm regulation and it also needs to continuously promote datafication as a naturalised social practice, both at the expense of democratic structural values.

Technology is progressively becoming social and cognitive infrastructures embedded in increasingly sophisticated surveillance practices, and this invites mediatization research to explore the complexities, contradictions and ambivalences shaping data and democracy in the individualized digital age.

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Dr hab. Katarzyna Kopecka –Piech

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The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the importance of certain mechanisms of mediatization, has intensified certain technology-based processes, and hence deserves a closer look at the particular transformations of different spheres. However, before the pandemic, certain metaprocesses had already begun to dominate the technological transformation and result in social, cultural, political, and economic changes. These undoubtedly include datafication. Investigating the significance of datafication for the deep mediatization of different subfields of everyday and social life, especially from a comparative perspective, appears as a great need and challenge of contemporary mediatization studies.

Such a study could include the relevance of datafication to changes in politics, culture, sports, daily life, including family life, religion, education, entertainment, or childhood and parenting. This area poses great challenges both because of the cognitive and practical importance of exploring these phenomena, but also the ethical and far-reaching thinking about freedom, security as well as well-being of current and future generations. Particularly in the context of the development of artificial intelligence, we should ask ourselves questions about the purely human dimension of the effects of these processes: the place and value of human in the world emerging from this radical transformation, regardless of the dynamics and opportunities of technological development.

Dr Bartłomiej Łódzki

Instytut Studiów Międzynarodowych, Uniwersytet Wrocławski

As new forms of communication constantly develop, it becomes necessary to monitor changes in this area in a permanent manner. Mediatization research should take into account the knowledge and data from the field of digital marketing. Analyses should be more focused on factual information, for example, about the traffic on websites, real indicators of comments or content sharing in the social media space. It is also worth to examine how the most important international players use the new forms of communication. It is about the media and the entities responsible for making decisions of international or global importance. This directions of research would allow us to understand also the mediatization of climate change, humanitarian crises or human rights.

Dr Łukasz Wojtkowski

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I assume that mediatization needs more critically framed probes to capture the processual issues. While mediatization scholars are often transitioning to datafication studies, we can also emphasize the theoretical relation between mediatization and approaches to data-related transformation.

I think that combining the idea for media-related or tech-related change or lack of it is one of the most critical issues in mediatization research. Also, the comparative approach to mediatization can give interesting results, particularly how society in the same country can be compared on different levels, how some social practices and institutions follow the mediatization process while others do not. It allows for heading into the direction of mediatization and datafication resilience.

In my view, framing the research very 'hard' as mediatization or datafication is not necessarily suitable for the field. Eventually, it ends in the studies that want to prove a linear correlation between media, technology changes, and society extracting particular case-oriented studies from a vast plethora of social interactions. Instead, we should take a problem-oriented mode and inductively search for variables and insights to grasp if these processes operate. Last but not least, the issue of agency is vitally crucial for mediatization studies. Implementing the role of human agency in relation to technology and non-human actors can refurbish the field in a less media- or tech-oriented, or even deterministic manner.

Dr hab. Olgierd Annusewicz

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In the first group of ideas, I see many similarities and a common denominator - the impact of the pandemic. On the processes of political communication, on the way teams communicate, on the organization of the media, on the behavior of social groups and the use of remote communication tools with all its consequences. These issues are probably best connected by Olivier's idea, which could be extended with additional elements. We should work on a projects that may lead us to finding answers to the question: how pandemic change the life, politics, communication, education? How are these spheres mediated? And what lessons we could learn?

We have this almost two years of experience with new style communication, mediatization, datafication, and we can observe some of the consequences of pandemic reality. On many aspects of our life. On politics, what I proposed to analyze, but also on many other. Let's find what have we learned and what we should avoid in the future or what we have to change.