

***Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech***

Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie

ORCID 0000-0001-9973-4423

## **Methodological Aspects of Research on Mediatization and Demediatization of Everyday Life. Current State and Key Challenges**

### **Introduction**

Research on mediatization is playing an increasing role in the development of communication and media studies. In the last decade, it has gained an important status, especially in European reflection, moving from initiating discussion on the concept to becoming more and more firmly established both in theory and institution. From the perspective of research fields investigated by researchers, not all spheres of human activity are subject to equally intense exploration. Everyday life is still one of the side realms. An even more niche issue is the study of processes opposite to mediatization (demediatization, counter-mediatization, media desaturation), which, on the one hand, are often questioned and, on the other hand, constitute an emerging phenomenon, which is the answer to problems, challenges and difficulties generated by the mediatization of life.

The aim of the article is to present the main paradigms and methodological problems in the research on the mediatization of everyday life and to determine the methodological gap in the research on demediatization, especially in this sphere of life. The article summarises the discussion of three key challenges for research in this area, which include: exploring specific areas of everyday life at the micro level, investigating the properties of new technologies, especially those that are conducive to media naturalisation; as well as conceptualisation and empirical research on the demediatization of everyday life.

### **The main research paradigms**

There have been many systematising studies (e.g. Lundby 2014; Nie, Suet, Kee, Ahmad 2014) on broadly understood mediatization as a phenomenon, research area, data container (Deacon, Stayner 2014), process or metaprocess (Krotz 2007). Therefore, it does not seem necessary to arrange general definitions, theories and research perspectives from scratch. There are also characteristics of the thematic areas covered by research on mediatization. These include politics, culture, religion, sport, business and economy, and finally everyday life. The latter is relatively

rarely the subject of research and is distinguished by a set of characteristics that determine the specificity and course of research procedures.

As Marian T. Adolf (2015) notes, many researchers of mediatization propose numerous typologies of approaches: Friedrich Krotz on “functionalist” and “cultural or social”; Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard and Knut Lundby on “institutional”, “cultural” and “material”. Göran Bolin (2016) distinguishes “institutional”, “technological”, “constructionist” and “cultural” approach. Perspectives and issues of contention in mediatization research were explained in detail by Knut Lundby (2014). Certain perspectives: cultural, institutional, material, agency, are best referred to by Joseph Pallas (2016). In general, the author states that mediatization research stems from social constructivism, symbolic interactionism, the theory of the medium, social materialism, as well as the theory of action. According to the constructivist approach, communication is mediated by the constitutionality of human relations and the importance given to different aspects of human worlds. In institutional terms, the media are treated as “semiautonomous institutions” (Pallas 2016) that influence various fields of human activity, although their influence cannot be isolated from other social processes. Following the agency perspective, mediatization arises from intersecting relations, contexts and models, focusing on “mediability” (Pallas 2016): actors’ responses to mediatization. In turn, from a material perspective, media technologies, tools and platforms that play a key role in users’ daily lives are being studied.

Mediatization in a very traditional way recognises that its basis and essence is communication, above all interpersonal and so-called mass communication. The content (merit and form of messages) is an essential transformer of relations between media and different spheres of life. However, “[m]edia are *not only* [emphasis in original] means of technologically based communication anymore. [...] Processes of social construction through media no longer refer only to human communication, but also to the automatised accumulation and calculation of the data we produce while we use digital devices for communication” (Hepp, Breiter, Hasebrink 2018: 5–6). Communication through media technologies, let alone communication with media technologies, is shaping reality through use. This applies in particular to the construction of one’s own reality and personal relationships with the media. Usage, including interactive and „passive communication” (Krotz 2011: 36), occurs between individuals and devices as well as data and systems, determining the capabilities of each individual. Thus, research on mediatization is increasingly concerned not with the consequences of mediated communication for social communication, but with the consequences of interaction with the device and infrastructure for the life of the individual.

### **Defining and studying mediatization in the context of everyday life**

Friedrich Krotz (2017) believes that the essence of research on mediatization is to study the presence of new media technologies in everyday life, their integration into everyday practices and the consequences that result from this. “Media in this

sense profoundly influence the realm of everyday, unstructured understandings and activities [...]. Media, in other words, are seen as gradually systematizing and organizing the relatively unstructured realm of the everyday” (Friesen, Hug 2009: 62–63). According to Knut Lundby (2014), everyday life is an indigenous topic of research on mediatization. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, everyday life, despite its richness, is relatively rarely studied, compared to e.g. politics or even religion. “Mediatization is extended into everyday life, at work, at home and in between” (Finnemann 2011: 84). Research on mediatization at the macro level (global phenomena level) and mezo level (social level of communities and institutions) focuses, firstly, on the institutional rather than technological or cultural perspective. Secondly, it concentrates on production rather than consumption. Thirdly, content rather than processes and activities are investigated. Meanwhile, it is only research at the micro level (the level of operating individuals) that reveals specific mechanisms of mediatization resulting from the interaction between technology (at the level of structures, functionalities and the affordances that link them) and the user. Descending to the micro level means: the study of “media in the day-to-day activities of individuals, families, peer groups, and organizations” (Pallas 2016). “[M]icro studies may look at particular practices of mediatization as performed and experienced by individual actors or small groups and how this may transform their life and work” (Lundby 2014: 22). Given the “agency-oriented” perspective, it allows for “examining microdynamics of mediatization processes” (Pallas 2016). In other words, it is a vision of mediatization “from *below* [emphasis in original], changing the lives of individuals in their immediated environments” and not “from *above* [emphasis in original]: as a collective process transforming societies” (Lundby 2014: 23). Thereby, in this context the best definition of mediatization is proposed by André Jansson. For the author, mediatization is a “broad societal transformation in which continuous everyday adaptations to, and negotiations of, media as socially amalgamated cultural forms also implicate the modification and emergence of structures of feeling [...] – that is, how it feels to live with media and ultimately to be dependent on them” (Jansson 2017: 15).

As mentioned before, everyday life is not the focus of attention of mediatization researchers. Among the main researchers in this area are: Maren Hartman (2009), André Janson (2017), Andrew Hoskins (2009) Anne Kaun and Christian Schwarzenegger (2014), Christine Linke (2011). An interesting proposition within home media materialism, not even defined by the author with mediatization, is presented by Orvar Löfgren (2009), who writes about ‘media staff’<sup>1</sup>. Individual, selected aspects of everyday life, such as physical activity (Kopecka-Piech 2019), are equally underexplored areas of research.

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<sup>1</sup> “a suitably vague term that includes media as well as all kinds of media technologies, products and props that facilitate or clutter up daily life” (Löfgren 2009: 57).

## Neglected demediatization

Göran Bolin (2016: 24) notes: The “[...] avoidance strategies [...] are signs that we actually go in and out of our water, or at least have the ability to change its character.” David Deacon and James Stayner (2010: 7) appeal: “The abandonment of ‘new’ media networks and technologies should interest mediatization scholars just as greatly as their adoption.” In the context of the development of the mediatization theory and its methodological aspects, the study of reverse processes, which are called as well as conceptualised in different ways, is as important as the study of mediatization. Demediatization and counter mediatization are the two most common terms. Studies on quantitative and qualitative variability in mediatization (including the reverse of mediatization and its effects) also propose research on media desaturation (Kopecka-Piech 2019).

What is reverse mediatization in general? It can be described as the opposite of the dominant trend of mediatization, manifested, among other things, by slowing down or reversing transformation processes related to the presence, use and impact of media on all spheres of human life. From a methodological perspective, it is a study of reactions to mediatization, aimed at “[...] captur[ing] and recogniz[ing] the active role of actors subjected to mediatization pressures. The active, skillful, and resourceful responses to mediatization pressures. [...] to describe and understand the changes and dynamics of mediatization itself” (Pallas 2016).

Research on demediatization is a definite niche. In studies on mediatization of politics, Julie Firmston and Stephen Coleman (2015: 11–12) talk about “civic demediatization” which puts the media power in question in the context of citizens’ capabilities through digital media. In the studies on the mediatization of business Esben Karmark (2010) describes “demediatization of LEGO”. LEGO has been diagnosed by the author as a company resigning from the production of media products in the context of corporate branding from an institutional and managerial perspective. At the same time, it proposes a “mediatization balance,” a strategy which allows to maintain an equilibrium of corporate brand identity despite the production of media products, in its nature of variables. Tilo Grenz (2013), studying the changes in the business model of online poker, describes demediatization as deoptionalization, dequantification, deacceleration, which is an opportunity to stop the momentum and consequences of mediatization. Everyday life is residually reflected from the perspective of demediatization. The mentioned work on “hiding, dying, haunting of media” of Orvar Löfgren’s (2009) evokes many interesting insights from a materialistic perspective, such as transformative relocations, “afterlives”, mundane, routine and fossilization.

However, so far, the only consistent, comprehensive and discerning changeability in the line between mediatization and demediatization have been the studies of André Jansson, who in his book *Mediatization and Mobile Lives* presents both a comprehensive research program and the results of specific research in this area. He is one of the few to see: “reactive elements (emphasis in original)” (Jansson 2017: 15), “discomforts of mediatization” (Jansson 2017: 26), “everyday negotiations as

well as outright resistance” (Jansson 2017, 198), “victims of mediatization” (Jansson 2017: 15) and “»antimediatization« movements” (Jansson 2017: 29). The author postulates: “First, we should conceive of counter-mediatization as *structured forms of agency* (emphasis in original), either habitual or organized, that problematize the normalization of media dependence. Counter-mediatization should not be reduced to individual cases of media abstention or singular occasions of protest – just as mediatization refers to more than single acts of mediated communication or the mere appropriation of new media technologies – but concerns more profound transformations of people’s life biographies or broader trends within a certain population or social context” (Jansson 2017: 200). In André Jansson’s work we will therefore find both examples and calls for research into disconnection strategies, daily technology-user negotiations, or new forms of self-discipline. As we address both the niche theme of everyday life and the niche perspective: seeing not only mediatization but also demediatization, we have to face challenges, problems and even resistance. We face many challenges, three of which seem crucial: exploring specific areas of everyday life at the micro level, investigating the properties of new technologies, especially those that are conducive to media naturalization; as well as conceptualization and empirical research on the demediatization of everyday life.

### Key methodological challenges

The first methodological challenge in research on mediatization and demediatization of everyday life is to explore specific areas, spheres – or, as Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, Knut Lundby (2015, 8) put it, ‘sociocultural forms’ – not so much from the perspective of diagnosing the way and nature of mediation, i.e. what, how and with what effect it is mediated, but of exploring in-depth transformation processes and their consequences. This is a return to the old postulate of examining mediatization, not mediation: “[...] the question of media and communication research cannot only be restricted to the study of »mediations«, e.g. the »influence« of »media coverage« on this or that. Instead, by focusing on »mediatization«, we must ask much more fundamentally: how are media and communications related to certain sociocultural forms and their transformation(s)? Which interrelations do we find? What consequences can we observe during these transformational processes?” (Hepp, Hjarvard, Lundby 2015: 8). It involves going down to the micro level<sup>2</sup>, conducting research on an individual entangled in the media and on his or her reactions to this entanglement: “[...] different areas of everyday life from the perspective of an individual today demand different access to and different experiences with media, as different rules apply and people operate with different expectations [...]. This means that mediatization is a complicated, long-term process that takes place in different areas in different ways. We may conclude that we cannot study a long-term meta

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<sup>2</sup> “the approach mediatization on the level of everyday life practices will result in drastically different research designs than looking at institutional change on the meso-level, as will historical approaches that delineate changes in social structures and cultural patterns over long periods of time” (Adolf 2011: 160).

process in general; instead it makes sense to examine and analyze in detail what happens in particular individual areas of life" (Krotz 2014: 74).

The second key challenge is undoubtedly the need to take into account new digital technologies and the consequences of their use in the form of datafication and algorithmization. As Niels O. Finneman (2011) states, it is precisely these technologies that cause the perception of what is and what is not a medium to change completely – and there is a need to redefine the concepts. Too little attention is paid to the properties of specific media. "The «modernist» bias in the concept of media has dominated media studies, both in general understanding of what counts as media, and even more so in the empirical studies. It can be argued however, that the properties of digital media invite a breakdown of this bias for several reasons" (Finneman 2011: 78). The key feature of modern technology is its transparency or 'invisibility', to which it is subject in the process of naturalization. "Media practices often constitute microslots, amalgamating with other day-to-day practices and rhythms [...]" (Jansson 2013: 288). How does it happen that we no longer 'see' the media, that we no longer separate the mediated from the non-mediated? How "material presence of these things is naturalized in our day-to-day lives" (Jansson 2013: 284). We should look at those mechanisms of naturalization which to some extent inhibit our reaction to mediatization, as it may be demediatization.

Finally, the third key challenge is to further conceptualize the problem of reverse mediatization and to update the research programme, especially in the face of resistance and criticism of the concept and the phenomenon itself, and taking the view that reverse mediatization is not happening and is fundamentally impossible.

The driving questions in the context of doubts about the occurrence of these reverse transformations are: Is mediatization unchangeable? What is its possible variability in time and space? What is the geographical or environmental diversity and uniformity of mediatization? What does the change of mediatization in time consist in? The answer to the questions in a specific research context indicates increasingly frequent demediatization tendencies. David Hakken's (2013: 26) programme may be helpful here: "First: identifying social changes, or the absence thereof, that correlate with digital mediation. With regard to evident change correlates, one should then consider how frequently a change is present with a particular mediation and how frequently it is absent, as well as trying to grasp the range of its relevant possible forms".

Thus, within the scope of the subject matter of the research, it is necessary to include not only "what is" but also "what is not" in the context of both mediation and mediatization, i.e. phenomena that do not occur at all (activities that are never mediated) and phenomena that disappear from social practice (no longer mediated); potential transformations that have passed the initial stage, but have not entered the advanced stage, thus ultimately they have not occurred, and withdrawing transformations. From the perspective of mediatization, what is important are the media technologies currently in use: popular or niche technologies, but also technologies that do not exist – which were, but no longer exist (abandoned technologies); they are, but almost no one uses them (rejected technologies); they have never been,

although they could be (potential technologies). At the same time, users, non-users and anti-users should be the subjects of research. Particularly resistant and active opponents should be in the centre of research interest: individuals and their identities, personalities..., communities, social worlds, industries, sectors, and finally the spheres of life, including everyday life, which do not effectively undergo media transformation or even strongly resist such a change or its effects. To cast this perspective, to oppose it as impossible by definition may prove not only wrong, but also harmful to the mediatization studies defending its identity.

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## Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to present the main methodological paradigms and problems in research into mediatization of everyday life, as well as determining the methodological niche concerning the studies on demediatization, especially of this sphere of life. The paper begins with defining mediatization and presenting the main research paradigms. The following part concentrates on locating the discussed issues in the sphere of studies on mediatization of everyday life. The next part focuses on demediatization as a real phenomenon and an under-researched field. The final section of the paper contains the analysis of the main challenges related to the discussed studies on everyday life.



## **Metodologiczne aspekty badań nad mediatyzacją i demediatyzacją życia codziennego. Stan obecny i główne wyzwania**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest prezentacja głównych paradygmatów i problemów metodologicznych w badaniach nad mediatyzacją życia codziennego oraz określenie luki metodologicznej dotyczącej badań nad demediatyzacją, szczególnie tej sfery życia. Artykuł rozpoczyna się od zdefiniowania mediatyzacji i przedstawienia głównych paradygmatów badawczych. Następnie lokuje omawiane zagadnienia w obszarze badań nad mediatyzacją życia codziennego. W dalszej części odnosi się do demediatyzacji jako realnego zjawiska i zaniedbanego badawczo obszaru. Artykuł wieńczy omówienie kluczowych wyzwań dotyczących omawianych badań nad życiem codziennym.

**Key words:** mediatization, demediatization, methodology of media studies, everyday life

**Słowa kluczowe:** mediatyzacja, demediatyzacja, metodologia badań medioznawczych, życie codzienne

**Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech** – doktor habilitowany z zakresu nauk o komunikacji społecznej i mediach, pracownik Instytutu Nauk o Komunikacji Społecznej i Mediach Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie. Interesuje się transformacjami nowych mediów, w sposób szczególny problematyką mediatyzacji życia codziennego, autorka m.in. *Mediatization of Physical Activity. Media Saturation and Technologies* (Rowman & Littlefield: Lexington Books, Lanham, MD 2019), *Leksykonu konwergencji mediów* (Universitas, Kraków 2015), *Media Convergence Strategies. Polish Examples* (Astrum, Wrocław 2011).