Transforming Communications – Studies in Cross-Media Research

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We live in times that are characterised by a multiplicity of media: Traditional media like television, radio and newspapers remain important, but have all undergone fundamental change in the wake of digitalization.

New media have been emerging with an increasing speed: Internet platforms, mobile media and the many different software-based communication media we are recently confronted with as ‘apps’. This process is experiencing yet another boost from the ongoing and increasingly fast sequence of technological media innovations. In our modern social world, communication processes take place across a variety of media. As a consequence, we can no longer explain the influences of media by focusing on any one single medium, its content and possible effects. In order to explain how media changes are related to transformations in culture and society we have to take into account the cross-media character of communications.

In view of this, the book series ‘Transforming Communications’ is dedicated to cross-media communication research. It aims to support all kinds of research that are interested in processes of communication taking place across different kinds of media and that subsequently make media’s transformative potential accessible. With this profile, the series addresses a wide range of different areas of study: media production, representation and appropriation as well as media technologies and their use, all from a current as well as a historical perspective. The series ‘Transforming Communications’ lends itself to different kinds of publication within a wide range of theoretical and methodological backgrounds. The idea is to stimulate academic engagement in cross-media issues by supporting the publication of rigorous scholarly work, textbooks, and thematically-focused volumes, whether theoretically or empirically oriented.

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/15351
CONTENTS

1 Media Logic or Media Logics? An Introduction to the Field
   Caja Thimm, Mario Anastasiadis and Jessica Einspänner-Pflock

Part I Theorizing Media Logics

2 The Media Syndrome and Reflexive Mediation
   David L. Altheide

3 Media Logic and the Mediatization Approach: A Good Partnership, a Mésalliance, or a Misunderstanding?
   Friedrich Krotz

4 The Logics of the Media and the Mediatized Conditions of Social Interaction
   Stig Hjarvard

5 Mediatization as Structural Couplings: Adapting to Media Logic(s)
   Mikkel Fugl Eskjær
Editors and Contributors

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4.1</td>
<td>The reciprocal relationship between mediatization and mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4.2</td>
<td>Media as part of an inter-institutional system: Broadcasting as an institutionalized practice influenced by the logics of other institutions, the family, the market, the nation-state, and politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4.3</td>
<td>Mediatization as interaction between media logics and the logics of other social and cultural domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 5.1</td>
<td>Structural coupling between media system and social system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6.1</td>
<td>Functional operator model of twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 7.1</td>
<td>Interaction interdependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 7.2</td>
<td>Interaction interdependency as key in media logics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 8.1</td>
<td>The CIE 1931, 2° observer chromaticity diagram showing the color gamut of a color copier, standard RGB and the gamut of the combination of a HeNe laser (633 nm), an Argon laser (514 nm), and a HeCd laser (442 nm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 8.2</td>
<td>Example of Photoshop refusing to carry out the command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 9.1</td>
<td>A continuum from mass news media logic to social media logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 11.1</td>
<td>Comparing commercial News media logic characteristics over time and between offline and online channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 11.2</td>
<td>Comparing News topic over time and between offline and online channels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 11.3 Comparing journalistic style over time and between offline and online channels
Fig. 12.1 News Program. Scan of the original schedule, collected during fieldwork in the news room
Fig. 12.2 First news report concerning OSCE incident in. Scan of the original AFP news feed, collected during fieldwork in the news room
Fig. 12.3 Organization of category devices in partly overlapping word fields
Fig. 12.4 Russia Today
Fig. 12.5 Financial Times

Table 4.1 The logics of the media expressed in a general sociological vocabulary and understood as the totality of institutional rules and resources, including both cultural and societal aspects of rules and resources
Table 4.2 Mediatized conditions of interaction: Media dynamics following three dimensions or metaphors of media: Amplification, framing and performative agency, and co-structuring
Table 7.1 Media logics. Perspectives, issues, and focal points
Table 10.1 Analytical categories and the systematization of media logic for secondary data analysis
Table 10.2 Sample of organizations and interviewees
Table 12.1 Categorization of group A
Table 12.2 Categorization of group B
CHAPTER 1

Media Logic or Media Logics?
An Introduction to the Field

Caja Thimm, Mario Anastasiadis
and Jessica Einspänner-Pflock

In 1979, David Altheide and Robert Snow developed the concept of media logic. Originally following the idea of creating a theoretical framework to better understand mass media formats and the media's impact on institutions and social behavior, the focus was on the mass media system of television, radio, and newspapers and its power to influence and even transform society. Although the authors primarily concentrated on the functionalities and implications of media logic in the political sphere, their overall objective was an analysis on how "social institutions are infused with media considerations" (Altheide, 2011, 122). From a critical perspective on mass media, their main argument was about an "underlying media logic that dominates our increasingly mediated (or mediatized)
social order” (ibid., 119). In this sense the original media logic concept can be understood as a term for media-infused formal and informal rules entailing multiple transformations in the social world. On that basis, the interrelation of technology, institutions, actors, and formats of media was at the core of media logic and its formative impact on society.

As the media landscape has changed dramatically since the early days of research on media logic, the concept has become an important approach in communication and media studies and has just recently evoked new research activities. Its strength lies in the combined assessment of theorizing and empirically analyzing the features of media and media formats in their consequences for both individual and institutional contexts. For this reason, a large part of research resting on the media logic framework addresses the core question if, and how far, different societal fields change due to the formal and informal rules of a media logic, which can also set the direction of social behavior and perceptions.

While the more traditional perspective focuses on the influence of media institutions and the respective media logic on other systems and societal fields, a socio-constructivist approach discusses the role media logic plays for social interaction, media appropriation, and media usage. On both levels, extensive theoretical and empirical research deals with the interplay between media and other social domains, such as politics (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Landerer, 2013; Meyen, Thieroff, & Strenger, 2014), culture (Siapera, 2010), journalism (Dahlgren, 1996; Korthagen, 2016), or sports (Duncan & Brummett, 1987). In European communication science, the media logics approach is also being discussed within the framework of mediatization (Krotz & Hepp, 2011; Hepp, 2012; Couldry & Hepp, 2013). In this respect, media are regarded as ‘modifiers of communication’ (Krotz & Hepp, 2011, 137), while the model of media logics is seen as a concept which helps to understand how mediatization processes come into place.

1.1 MEDIA LOGICS IN A DIGITIZED WORLD: A NEW PLURALITY OF LOGICS

The advent of new technologies, the rise of the networked media, and a constant emergence of new media applications and platforms call for a reconsideration of the media logic concept. Nowadays, in an increasingly digitized, globalized, and networked world, powerful media structures and technologies influence people's daily routines in many respects. Digital media have become embedded into many human activities. This multifaceted media environment calls for a new and critical reflection on the media logic approach in order to include the paradigm shift from curated media to user-generated media content, just to name one of the most decisive parameters of technology change. In an era of technology as “disruption,” we need to ask more precisely where these disruptions occur and how the subsequent changes can be described. Regarding the present media landscape, we can see the integration of media in various social contexts and an increasing complexity of the resulting consequences. So more than ever, this development calls for critical reflections on the idea of a single mass media logic. One major challenge, both for theoretical and empirical perspectives on the concept, is to reflect on the diversity of several media logics at play instead of focusing on one single, mass media-related logic. Overall, a variety of (partly overlapping) media logics seem to be in effect—especially against the backdrop of digitalization and the “power of the internet.”

The ubiquity of the internet and networked media does not only influence people's communicative practices in their private and professional lives, but media environments themselves are changed, transformed, and further developed by their appropriation in various social and cultural contexts: Human actions redefine and reconfigure the media themselves, another unprecedented technological development. Particularly, social media pose questions as to what the formal and informal rules of digital media formats will develop into (Van Dijk & Poell, 2013). While the internet can empower users to connect with peers and engage as critical consumers or politically active citizens, they also, to some extent, change the media environment by means of their individual actions and interests.

At the same time digital media can have critical implications for the formation of a public sphere, as discussed in the course of the filter bubble (Pariser, 2011) or echo chamber effects (Sunstein, 2001; Vaccari, 2012). Furthermore, the internet brings the logics of algorithms and filters into play (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), which are mainly programmed and controlled by commercial organizations and institutions.

Not only the growing importance of platform and networked media, but also the partial loss of relevance of curated mass media content in favor of personalized content, calls for a reflection. The challenge is to describe more precisely what and how the media logic concept can contribute to the understanding of mediatization processes with numerous media technologies, formats and actors blending into one another. Remodeling, adapting, and maybe deepening the concept media logic for the digital age consequently poses an important challenge, in order
to better understand the interplay between media and media-related institutions. Hence, one of the aims must be a better understanding of mediated social control means in a digital environment of ubiquitous connectivity, all-embracing digital networks and more and more fragmented forms of media usage.

This challenge was taken up by the contributors of this book, who all reflect on the concept of media logics from their specific perspective. Some employ a very critical position; others regard in more detail how the concept should be developed and changed in order to grasp the new role that digital networked media play in people’s lives all over the globe.

1.2 CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The volume presents findings from the conference “Media Logic(s) Revisited: Modeling the Interplay between Media Institutions, Media Technology and Societal Change,” which took place at the University of Bonn (Germany, Department of Media Studies) in September 2015. Researchers from various disciplines, such as media and communication studies, sociology, political science, and philosophy provide insights into their theoretical and empirical perspectives on the media logic approach. Consequently, the aim of the book is to contribute to the ongoing debate about media logic in the light of current developments at the intersection of traditional media, digital media, and its different forms of appropriation.

The first part of the book focuses on theoretical perspectives on media logic. After having conceptually refined his original approach of media logic, David L. Altheide opens the discussion in part one of the book by presenting the concept of the Media Syndrome. He emphasizes the prevalence of media logic in our social life and argues that global political events today become mediated and are shaped by media formats. By that, they are a resource for another level of mediated experience, through which our sense of reality is altered as we become oriented to the mediated.

The strong influence of the media logic concept especially applies to the context of mediatization related research because it draws attention to the actual modalities by which a certain social domain becomes mediatized. In Chap. 3, Friedrich Krotz draws a theoretical line between media logic and mediatization by discussing and systematically analyzing the relation between both approaches. In this course, he argues that both approaches share some similarities, but are very different regarding their conceptual starting points and facets of media. The media logic approach originally focused on the influence of TV on the mediation of political communication, which is one of communication studies’ most central concerns, while the mediatization approach focuses on media change and its consequences for everyday life, culture, and society in a much broader sense. Even though Krotz emphasizes how helpful the media logic approach can be to analyze how TV and mass media transform political communication, he also raises the question whether and how far the term logic might be misleading.

From an institutionalist perspective on mediatization, Stig Hjarvard discusses in Chap. 4 how various forms of media logics contribute to social interaction and how the logics of social network media can be conceptualized as a part of mediatization allowing a further integration of system world and life world. He underscores his position by an empirical analysis of social network media and their role in face-to-face interactions.

In Chap. 5, Mikkel Fugl Eskjær proposes a re-interpretation of the concepts of media logic and mediatization based on systems theory. His focus in particularly is on the notion of structural coupling. It is argued that mediatization as structural coupling allows for a plurality of media logics. This is also being applied to a case study of the mediatization of six Scandinavian NGOs. On the basis of six in-depth interviews with communication directors of Danish NGOs it is discussed in what ways organizations adjust to media demands or rather strategically integrate media logics into their communication plans.

Caja Thimm discusses in Chap. 6 the interconnectedness of technology, user behavior, and culture based on a critical assessment of the concept of “technological determinism.” She redeems the concept of media logic within the context of interactive media and offers a systematic approach for the analysis of media logic and media usage. Thimm’s concept of “media grammar” is based on the idea that media form their own grammar in a specific environment with their own affordances that relate to certain usage patterns. By drawing on the example of Twitter, it is shown that an approach to new media logics needs to take into consideration users’ creative appropriations of technology. Thimm thus concludes that the pragmatics of technology can be seen as a baseline in order to understand the character of the digital society.
Chapter 11 deals with the question of news media logic and its different characteristics. Maria Karidi examines the development of media reality constructions as they appear over time, as well as between online and offline channels. Based on theoretical concepts of actor-structure dynamics and drawing from a quantitative content analysis of German newspapers and TV programs, as well as online news websites, Karidi finds that German news media tend to be more commercially oriented in 2014 compared to 1984-1989 as they integrate more aspects of conflicts, celebrities, scandals, negativity, and personalization within their reportage. The author concludes that the altered (media) structures and constellations might have significant consequences for the opinion-forming process in Germany.

Based on the theoretical background of the structural change of the public media sphere, Mirco Liefke in Chap. 12 analyzes German TV news coverage during the Ukraine conflict in 2013-2014 arguing that mass media's monopoly of coverage has begun to sway and its inherent logic has changed and adopts to new circumstances. He demonstrates how established mass media face new challenges caused by an ongoing structural change of the public sphere by applying Harvey Sacks's apparatus of Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) to the analysis of TV news coverage.

In Chap. 13, Tales Tomaz uses a techno-philosophical approach to discuss digital media logics. It is argued that not only our comprehension of human life nowadays has been simplified to algorithmic processes due to the emergence of big data but that algorithms are becoming "the real". The discussion draws on a review of Heidegger’s and other philosophers’ work on the logic of the being and the logic of the real, both based on the mathematical. Main argument of the author is the idea that the mathematical is at the core of Western thought.

In the course of these thirteen chapters various theoretical and empirical perspectives on media logic are being discussed, showing that the concept is a vital part of media and communication research.

REFERENCES


