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Book Review

The Mediatization of Culture and Society
*Stig Hjarvard*¹

Routledge, 2013, 192 Pages

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The Background of the Translation

This article discusses the Japanese edition of Stig Hjarvard's *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (Routledge, 2013). I began translating this book at the end of 2021 and published the complete translation in August 2023. In this article, I present the book from a translator's perspective.

Hjarvard is a Danish media researcher and currently a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Copenhagen. He has been actively researching the globalization of media and news since the 1990s, and is the editor of *News in a Globalized Society* (Nordicom, 2001) and *Media in a Globalized Society* (Museum Tusulanum, 2003). Hjarvard's work on mediatization in the 2000s greatly raised his profile in media studies. In one sense, the idea of mediatization is simple. It refers to the process by which cultural and social institutions become increasingly dependent on the media.

In Japan, the impact of information technology has been discussed as "jo-ho-ka" (informationization) since the 1960s. However, these arguments have often fallen into technological determinism and ignored the interaction between media technology and social dynamics, although some Japanese researchers have developed more complicated theoretical models that include this interaction. Therefore, I was quite impressed by the idea of juxtaposing the increasing influence of the media with major social forces, such as industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and individualization.

With the spread of media technology in people's daily lives, social scientists in various fields, including sociology, political science, social psychology, and anthropology, are paying attention to the role of the media. However, I had been

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¹ This is an English translation of part of the article I wrote in the *Japan Journal of Media, Journalism and Communication Studies* (Tsuda 2022).

under the impression that the presence of media studies had paradoxically decreased because, in Japan, such social scientists tend to ignore media scholars' academic contributions (Tsuda 2020). One major reason is that many Japanese media scholars cannot follow the latest trends in the media environment and tend to focus their interests on media history. I do not deny the importance of historical perspectives. In fact, my current research focuses on British propaganda during the Second World War. Nevertheless, I thought that the inability of media and communication studies to provide useful insights into other social sciences regarding the current media environment was quite problematic. Therefore, I believed that the concept of mediatization would help increase the presence of media studies in Japan and decided to translate this book which is one of the leading works on mediatization studies.

The Summary of the Book

Chapter 1 provides an overview of mediatization research, while Chapter 2 attempts to establish its theoretical foundations. Because Chapter 2 is slightly more difficult to understand than the other chapters, I have added some translator's notes for some of the terms. The content of this chapter is crucial for understanding the differences and continuities between existing media and communication studies and mediatization research. I believe having a solid theoretical foundation for new concepts is important to avoid a sterile process in which fashionable concepts are used vaguely and abusively and soon discarded.

Chapter 3 deals with the process of political mediatization. Hjarvard discusses a wide range of issues related to this process; however, I am particularly interested in his argument regarding the "dual communication system." The fact that people other than the ostensible targets hear political messages and that the messages' senders are aware of those people, has not been discussed in media and communication studies in Japan so much. In my research on wartime propaganda, I often find cases in which the intercepting people are the propagandists' real targets. Moreover, as is often noted, in social media debates, the real target of persuasion is not the disputants but the gallery of onlookers. This chapter helps provide a theoretical understanding of such phenomena. Other topics discussed in this chapter include "the politics of visibility," "the personalization of politics," "conversational politics," and "media-affiliated political commentators." The last topic is often discussed in relation to the problem of commentators who appear on information television programs and conveniently utilize their plausible backgrounds. When I first read this part of the chapter, I admit that I saw the faces of various former journalists, academics, and politicians in my mind.

Chapter 4 examines the relationship between religion and the media from the perspective of mediatization theory. The assassination of former Prime Minister

Shinzo Abe in 2022 and following events reminded us that, despite the apparent religious indifference in Japanese society, we need to take the issue seriously. As with the Aum Shinrikyo incidents in the 1990s, how journalists should cover religion-related incidents remains an issue to consider in Japan. This chapter also discusses the possibility that media culture, although seemingly unrelated to religion, may influence religious thinking to some degree. In Japan, Norichika Horie (2019) has discussed the religious imagination in anime and video games. Further research on this topic will provide interesting insights.

Chapter 5 begins with a historical examination of the concept of “child” and explores the mediatization of play. Regarding the relationship between play and the media, many readers’ first thoughts may be of video games. Although video games are mentioned in this chapter, the focus of the analysis is on LEGO, reminding us of the author’s Danish origins. I apologize for the personal anecdote; however, when I watch my son, who is a big fan of LEGO, playing and creating his own narratives, I must admit that Hjarvard’s arguments about the imaginization and narrativization of play are quite convincing.

Chapter 6 examines the mediatization of habitus from a more theoretical perspective. Although the concept of habitus is often discussed in relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory, this chapter focuses on David Riesman’s work on social character. In recent years, Riesman’s views on other-directed character have been described as still “novel” (Mori 2020: 136), despite it being almost 70 years since its publication. However, given that the media environment as well as political and social conditions have changed dramatically since Riesman’s discussion of other-directed characters, an update of the concept is essential, and this chapter provides a good starting point.

As described above, this book not only discusses theory but also analyzes a wide range of topics, including politics, religion, and play from a mediatization perspective. In a sense, this book is somewhat unusually structured for an academic volume by a single author. This suggests that mediatization, as an analytical concept, can be used in various fields. It refers to the underlying changes that affect different areas of human life and produce varying outcomes.

Studies in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere have discussed mediatization in areas as diverse as food culture, sports, popular music, science, tourism, and journalism. For example, Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2015) analyze the conflict between Russia and Ukraine since 2014 from the perspective of mediatization. The conflict in Palestine is also necessary to examine from it because the narratives related to this conflict and their impact on public opinion are impossible to consider without examining the role of social media. Although research in Japan is still in its infancy, Takumi Sato and his fellow researchers have published a historical study that discusses politicians who have journalism experience (*media giin*) from a mediatization perspective (Sato 2018).

However, the original book was published approximately 10 years ago, and given the rapidly changing media landscape, some may consider this translation to be published too late. Since the book's publication, the proliferation of smartphones and accompanying expansion of social media use have occurred, and the media content and hardware mentioned in this book are undeniably somewhat outdated. However, the discussion of mediatization in this book has by no means become outdated; in fact, it has become more relevant. I would like to make some additional comments, including more recent research trends, in the following section of this article.

Ubiquitous Media

As mentioned above, although the concept of mediatization has become popular in recent media studies, some researchers had already used it in the first half of the 20th century (Couldry and Hepp 2013: 195). However, the work of Swedish media researcher Kent Asp and American sociologist David Altheide can be regarded as the pioneering studies of mediatization in a more contemporary sense (Asp and Esaiasson 1996; Altheide and Snow 1979). These 20th century works use the term "media" mainly to refer to mass media, which differs from the perspective of more recent mediatization studies.

An important point in the study of mediatization in the 21st century is the focus on the relationship between ubiquitous media, culture, and society. In particular, with the development of mobile media, people are now connected to the Internet daily and commonly disseminate information over social media (Couldry and Hepp 2013: 192-193). This has caused a serious discrepancy with previous media and communication studies.

Traditional media and communication studies tend to focus on a particular channel through which messages from the sender reach the receiver and how they affect the latter; specifically, the study of what criteria news organizations use to select news, what types of content they report, and how news reports affect audiences. While narrowing the focus of the research to ensure its rigor is inevitable, such an approach implicitly assumes that mediated communication can be separated from other aspects of people's lives and, therefore, analyzed in isolation. Certainly, media scholars have often emphasized the need to analyze mediated communication in relation to larger social, cultural, and political contexts, but still assumed that we can distinguish mediated communication from these contexts. However, this assumption can no longer be sustained. For example, when interacting with family members on a chat application, should we consider it a family gathering or media use (Watanabe and Yoshifuji 2018: 71)?

Furthermore, media digitization has made it difficult to distinguish between different types of media use. When streaming a Netflix program with an Internet-

connected television, whether this activity should be categorized as Internet use or television viewing is unclear. This ambiguity becomes problematic for traditional research conducted by asking informants to write down what activities they perform and for how long each day.

In contrast, mediatization studies somewhat paradoxically shift the starting point of the analysis from mediated communication itself to a particular institution, organization, or individual. It allows us to observe how they are changing in the age of ubiquitous media. However, as Hjarvard argues, mediatization studies do not aim to negate the findings of previous research on media and communication or establish an entirely new research paradigm. Rather, this approach seeks to clarify the media's role in the process of contemporary social and cultural change by drawing on the perspectives and methodologies of sociology, political science, and other adjacent fields, in addition to previous findings of media and communication studies.

However, whereas some do question the validity of the concept itself, mediatization scholars are by no means monolithic and their stances differ considerably. Therefore, after a brief introduction to the criticisms of the concept, I will examine the distinction between the “institutionalist tradition” and the “social-constructivist tradition” often used to summarize mediatization studies.

Criticisms of the Mediatization Concept and Differences in Perspective

The first criticism of the concept of mediatization that I introduce is made by David Deacon and James Stanyer. According to them, mediatization is nothing more than a buzzword and is used quite loosely (Deacon and Stanyer 2014). They also posit that these studies tend to focus only on media and fail to analyze other non-media variables. Despite their differences, leading mediatization scholars have jointly responded to this criticism (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby 2015). Although I do not have the space here to go into detail on their response, a consensus among them is that mediatization research takes a “media-centered” rather than “media-centric” approach. While the latter assumes that the media unilaterally influence culture and society, the former focuses on the role of the media in the process of change, wherein various forces intersect and interact. For example, in the context of the mediatization of politics, this means paying attention to the influence of the media while considering the effects of various factors on political institutions. Therefore, the study of mediatization requires collaboration across academic disciplines.

Other criticisms of mediatization studies include the failure to consider the influence of capitalism, which is essential for discussing structural changes in the media industry in the modern world (Murdock 2017: 120). As noted in the preface to the Japanese edition of this book, Hjarvard acknowledges the need for research that considers the influence of the global media industry.

Furthermore, Ralph Schroeder suggests that mediatization studies are overtly comprehensive and do not consider the diversity of the media's role in different spheres (Schroeder 2018: 324). For example, the role of the media in the political sphere differs from that in the cultural sphere. However, this criticism misses the point because, as noted above, mediatization refers to the underlying changes that can produce different outcomes in each sphere. Therefore, mediatization studies often require a secondary concept that allows the different roles of media in different spheres to be included in the analysis. In this book, these secondary concepts include the personalization and conversationalization of politics and the imaginization, narrativization, and virtualization of play.

If the above criticisms are external, I would like to introduce the different positions within mediatization studies. The first question I address is when the process of mediatization began. Carlos Scolari's classification identifies three positions: (1) 2 million years ago, when humans first produced stone tools; (2) the early modern period, when news media emerged and public opinion began to form; and (3) the late modern period, when the diffusion of digital media began. This difference in positions is related to the question of what mediatization is, and Hjarvard appears to position himself near the third. This is because his theoretical framework emphasizes that the commercialization of media after the 1980s promoted media as "semi-independent institutions" and urged other institutions to be susceptible to "media logics."

This assumption that the media is a semi-independent institution is an important point of contention when applying mediatization theory, which has mainly been developed in Northern Europe, to other regions. For example, a study in Chile examined the mediatization of politics from the micro perspective of the relationship between journalists and politicians (Orchard 2017), finding that media commercialization does not strengthen its independence because the political elites are in a stronger position than journalists in Chile, and journalists who betray their trust are subject to sanctions. Regarding the media system in Japan, Kaori Hayashi and Akira Tanaka note that as the commercialization of the media system progresses, its degree of dependence on the political system tends to increase. In addition, in recent years, many large corporations have strengthened their own public relations functions, absorbing ex-journalists from traditional media companies and striving to disseminate information from their own viewpoints. This phenomenon seems to contradict the argument in this book that the media, which used to be a means of transmitting information for other institutions such as political parties and religious groups, has become more independent as an institution. Therefore, the media as a semi-independent institution should be an important point of contention, especially when we examine mediatization in the future.

In addition, as noted earlier, Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp classify positions within mediatization studies as the "institutionalist tradition" and the "social-

constructivist tradition” (Couldry and Hepp 2013: 196). The institutionalist tradition is represented by Hjarvard and Swedish political communication scholar Jesper Strömbäck, whereas Hepp and German media scholar Friedrich Krotz are considered to support the social-constructivist tradition. Couldry also appears to belong to the latter tradition. The institutionalist tradition is an extension of research on journalism and political communication, focusing on how institutions such as politics and religion change under the influence of the media. In contrast, the social-constructivist tradition is based on phenomenological sociology and symbolic interactionism and views mediatization as a process by which sociocultural reality is constructed through communication via the media. This classification has been criticized for overemphasizing the differences between the two traditions and for ignoring the differences among studies that fall within the same tradition. (Adolf 2017: 16-19). However, I rely on this classification in the following discussion, as it is useful in showing the differences in perspectives on mediatization.

The following quote from Hjarvard seems appropriate for showing the nature of the institutionalist tradition: “the task before us is ...to seek to gain an understanding of how social institutions and cultural processes have changed character, function, and structure in response to the omnipresence of the media” (Hjarvard 2013: 2). Conversely, the nature of the social-constructivist tradition is summarized by Hepp and Krotz’s concept of a “mediatized world” (Hepp and Krotz 2014: 6-9). This suggests that the increasing acceptance of mediated content and communication in everyday life has changed the intersubjective world people share. From this perspective, they aim to build a theory of mediatization as a meta-process that exists behind various changes through a series of empirical case studies.

Another feature of the social constructivist tradition is the notion that the media are socially constructed (Hepp 2020: 66-67). In other words, the nature of the media is not only determined by its technological characteristics but also depends on how people perceive it, and it changes by the moment, according to the situation. For example, in Japan, Facebook, which used to be the newest medium, is now seen as a service mainly for middle-aged and older users and is shunned by younger users. Thus, the main function of Facebook today is to organize reunions for middle-aged and older adults.

However, the difference between the institutionalist and social-constructivist traditions is most evident in the debate over the concept of “media logics,” which I will discuss next.

The Controversy over “Media Logics”

As with mediatization, the concept of media logics is not new. In 1979, Altheide and Snow published a book titled *Media Logic*; however, not until mediatization scholars began to actively use the concept did it begin to attract

attention.

According to Hjarvard, “media logics” consist of three dimensions, which he describes as follows:

- *Technology*: typical modus operandi for specific media technologies, e.g., mass communications, network communications, mobile or stationary, online or offline, etc.
- *Aesthetics*: typical modus operandi in communicative practice, e.g., dramaturgy, performativity, modality (text, sound, images), framing, style, etc.
- *Institutional*: typical modus operandi as a result of legislation, organizational form, financing, historical experience, reputation, etc.

(Hjarvard 2017: 71)

For example, in contemporary developed countries, when religious actors seek to disseminate their arguments through mass media, they must follow the media logics in the aesthetic dimension, which favors secular over religious framing. Accordingly, they tend to frame their arguments based on secular values such as science, humanity, freedom, and equality, rather than the words of God (Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019: 215).

Hjarvard argues in support of the need to analyze the process by which different institutions adapt to media logics, as the example above shows. Through this analysis, he posits that we can “stipulate general patterns of development within particular social institutions or cultural phenomena, and within specific historical periods in particular social and cultural contexts;” in other words, build middle-range theories, as Robert Merton insisted. This idea is neither the macroscopic grand theory that new media will transform the world universally, nor a mere collection of the myriad forms of media communication. This theory is highly dependent on time and context, yet with a degree of generality.

However, this understanding of media logics has often been criticized. Couldry questioned this by asking (1) whether it is possible to assume that one inherent logic exists for each medium, (2) whether it is possible to assume the existence of stable media logics in the face of rapid changes in the media environment, and (3) even if it were possible to show that media logics permeate other social institutions, would this explain all media effects? (Couldry 2012: 135-136). Indeed, if we assume that certain media have an intrinsic and fixed logic and exert a unilateral influence on society, we cannot avoid the criticism that it is technological determinism.

Nevertheless, Couldry does not deny the concept of media logics altogether, because he acknowledges the possibility that something like “logics” can operate (Couldry 2012: 142). Understanding this point requires turning to his views on the power of the media. According to Couldry, the power of media can be understood as

“meta-capital.” Following Bourdieu, he argues that a society has a myriad of spheres (“fields” in Bourdieu’s terminology), within which social actors compete and media operate as meta-capital (Couldry 2012: 140; 2014: 235). Thus, the more the meta-capital of media increases, the more important the capital related to media becomes in each field. If this happens, the influence of media as meta-capital can be seen as something like “logics” for the actors in each field.

To use Couldry’s example, as the popularity of music competition television programs increases (increasing media capital), the fields that produce singers cannot ignore the influence of these programs. Consequently, it becomes easier for those who have suitable capital to appear on one of these programs and receive many votes to make their debut, whereas the chances for those who do not have such capital may decrease. Thus, the format of a music competition program can act as something like logic if following it comes to be seen by those involved as an inevitable means to success as a singer.

At first glance, Couldry’s views on media logics do not appear to differ from those of Hjarvard. However, an important difference between them is that Hjarvard takes a somewhat fixed view of media logics and focuses on how they affect other institutions, whereas Couldry’s focus is on how something like logic is generated. From the latter perspective, media logics are only established when people perceive them as such, and they manifest themselves differently across fields and are often subject to change. Thus, for Couldry, media logics are themselves objects to be discovered.

Clearly, the difference between the two lies in their concerns. Indeed, as the discussion in Chapter 2 of this book shows, Hjarvard acknowledges that the media do not have a single and unchanging logic and that their *modus operandi* is influenced by other institutions. However, he argues that overemphasizing the variable nature of media logics and reducing them to individual practices makes it difficult to build a theory that can be generalized to some extent. In a dialogue in 2016, Hjarvard states that Couldry’s approach is overtly bottom-up and underestimates the structural and collective dimensions of the mediatization process (Hjarvard and Linares 2021: 32), thereby showing his orientation toward building a middle-range theory. Hjarvard’s explanation of media logics as quoted above indicates that each *modus operandi* is accompanied by the adjective “typical.” While acknowledging the plurality and variability of logics, he insists that the assumption of typical media logics makes the institutional transformations that result from mediatization easier to analyze.

Accordingly the position on media logics that should be taken depends on the researchers’ interests. For example, if researchers can find relatively typical media uses in a particular institution and want to analyze its mediatization process, the institutional tradition of assuming typical media logics and examining how the institution responds to them is an advantageous research strategy.

As a concrete example, Internet page views are crucial for many news media, and various efforts are made to encourage users to click on their articles. Moreover, when an event attracts the attention of many people, distributing articles about it earlier than other media, even if only slightly, in order to have them appear at the top of portal sites is quite important for news media because these sites are popular access points for news readers (Ishido 2021: 196-204). In the 2023 Hakone Ekiden (relay race), which is very popular in Japan, a sports media outlet managed to win the competition for the most popular portal site by distributing an article on the results one minute before the runner of the winning team crossed the finish line. This suggests that the technology of the Internet and the institution of current media system form media logics and affect the nature of sports journalism. The technology makes it possible to control of the timing of distribution more precisely than before, and the institution makes portal sites the agglomeration area of news and requires each news media outlet to increase the number of page views as much as they can.

However, the social-constructivist tradition is more useful in analyzing the process of media penetration into people's lives and various fields when media use is in flux. Recent significant changes in media have occurred not only in hardware but also in software (users often complain about changes in social media interfaces), and some have suggested that we should consider media as "permanently beta" versions (Manovich 2013: 10). Recently, Hepp has raised the concept of "deep mediatization" from such a perspective, arguing that mediatization is necessary to discuss not only in terms of human-to-human communication but also human-machine interaction (Hepp 2020: 5-6). This suggestion became significant in the age of generative AI, which suddenly began to attract attention in 2023. Moreover, research on media use by young people, which shows diverse inventiveness and ingenuity, also needs to be sensitive to such changes, and an approach that emphasizes the social construction of media would be more useful.

Concluding Remarks

In this article I have discussed the controversy over mediatization and media logics from the translator's point of view. Needless to say, different views exist on this concept, and several elements are likely missing from this discussion. I hope that this translation of Hjarvard's book will contribute to the further development of mediatization studies in Japan.

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