Media Logic

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Media logic is discussed as a general framework for understanding the nature, impact, and relevance of media and information technologies for social life, as well as its use and appropriateness for investigating political communication. Media logic is defined as a form of communication, and the process through which media transmit and communicate information (Altheide, 1985, 1995a, 2006; Altheide & Snow, 1979, 1988). A basic principle of media logic is that events, action, and actors' performances reflect information technologies, specific media, and formats that govern communication. A related principle is that communication guidelines become institutionalized and taken for granted, serve as an interpretive schema, and guide routine social interaction, and thereby become integral in creating, maintaining, and changing culture. These principles are not restricted to television and the mass media but, as numerous publications have shown, will be adapted and modified by other media (e.g., Internet, digital media, smartphones, etc.). A major point, then, is that media logic does not refer to just one logic for one medium, such as television, but is a conceptual model of mediation (some people prefer mediatization). It is not, as some have suggested, a "unilinear" process (Brants & Praag, 2006); nor does it entail a "linear nature of change" (Lundby, 2009a); and it is not confined to the use of formats (Hjarvard, 2013).

Media logic refers to the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium. This includes rhythm, grammar, and format. Drawing on Simmel's (Simmel & Wolff, 1964) insights about the nature and power of social forms, one can affirm that format, while a feature of media logic, is singularly important — as a kind of metacommunication device — because it refers to the rules or "codes" for defining, selecting, organizing, presenting, and recognizing information as one thing rather than another (e.g., "the evening news" and not a "situation comedy," or a "parody of news"). It is as though each medium is associated with its own code of interpretation which the audience members recognize. The point is that media operate with a set of grammatical rules for using certain symbols, and have developed general perspectives for interpreting various objects and events. In turn, audience members selectively adopt this overall logic and symbol system for making sense of media experience. Stated differently, format is that explicit and implicit understanding which joins an activity and/or actor via a medium to an audience. However, since formats comprise "pregivens" or basics for interaction and communication, they tend to be taken for granted. Formats reflect technologies, contexts, substantive and procedural familiarity, and intended audiences. Formats are part of an ecology of communication which refers to the structure, organization, and accessibility of information technology, various forums, media, and channels of information (Altheide, 1995b).

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Media logic is central to the process of the social construction of reality by individuals as well as an institutional form for guiding organizational behavior and social perspectives about what is normal and typical. The key element of a thoroughgoing theory of mediation (Bennett & Entman, 2001) built on media logic is not only that the institutional media forms help shape and guide content and numerous everyday life activities, but also that audiences-as-actors normalize these forms and use them as reality maintenance tools. Research subsequent to the publication of *Media Logic* in 1979 has added other terms to elaborate mediation (Altheide, 2013). *Mediation* refers to the impact of media logic and form of any medium involved in the communication process that is part of an ecology of communication that joins information technology and communication (media) formats with the time and place of activities. *Mediatization* may be regarded as the process by which this takes place, including the institutionalization and blending of media forms (Hepp, 2011, 2013; Krotz & Hepp, 2013). Several of these basic points have been widely discussed during the last few decades, especially the nature of media logic (Mazzoleni, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008).

Much of the published work concerning media logic has been informed by a symbolic interactionist perspective on the nature of meaning and the social construction of reality (Blumer, 1969). Placing this approach within a symbolic interaction theoretical model suggests that audience members interact with media and vice versa in at least a parasocial fashion to develop various meanings based on the symbols employed and interpreted in a specific context (Blumer, 1969; Douglas, 1970). In short, symbolic interaction theoretically encapsulates the entire communication process from message formulation to interpretation and action.

The nature, process, and significance of the definition of the situation are paramount to this approach; indeed, power is the ability to define a situation, and the interaction and communication which help accomplish and enact definitions are crucial to social order, social reality, and social change. Media logic reflexively shapes interaction process, routines, and institutional orders; everyday life and institutional orders reflect and reify a communication order operating with media logic (Horlick-Jones & Farre, 2010).

Media logic is the broad theoretical construct, while ecology of communication (Altheide, 1995a) is more specific about the interplay between social activities, social change, social organization, and activities. Social order is increasingly mediated, which simply means that social action is shaped and informed by media technologies and the logics that orient behavior and perceptions. Elements of media logic include the distinctive features of each medium (e.g., newspapers, Internet, blogs, etc.) and the formats used by these media for the organization, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Snow, 1983).

Media logic and political communication

A major change in political communication noted by researchers involves the emergence, adaptation, and innovation of communication formats associated with more entertainment-oriented content. Numerous studies show how this process has

influenced political communication. Mass media organizations, including journalists, adjust practices and perspectives to produce "good television," on the one hand, but also more entertainment-oriented coverage of topics. Political culture is affected by these expanding evocative formats as journalists and news sources now routinely package events for media attention, including visuals, urgency, language, and drama, that will appeal to audiences. The interaction and shared meanings of news workers who follow the entertainment format and audience members who "experience" the world through these mass media lenses promote "sufficient communication" to achieve the news organization's goals of grabbing the audience while also enabling audience members to be "informed" enough to exchange views with peers. These and other research efforts sought to clarify whether, and to what extent, political culture is also affected by these expanding evocative formats as journalists and news sources now routinely package events for media attention.

Many scholars, especially in Europe, have expanded and refined the basic perspective of media logic with concepts such as mediatization, mediality, and so on. Much of the research on the role of media logic has focused on such adjustments. According to Schrott, the mediatization of politics leads to a "gradual displacement of political logic through media logic" (2009, p. 44).

Mazzoleni's study of Italian elections clarified the impact of media logic over party logic:

> These functions vary according to two basic patterns of message production: party logic, that is, the structural and cultural assets that govern the communications enacted by the parties; and media logic, that is, the set of values and formats through which campaign events and issues are "focused on, treated, and given meaning [by news workers and news organizations] in order to promote a particular kind of presentation and understanding that [is] compatible with, for example, scheduling and time considerations, entertainment values, and images of the audience" [Altheide & Snow, 1979]. (1987, p. 85)

Indeed, much has been written about the merits of using "mediation" or "mediation" or "mediatization," as well as "mediatric" (Friesen, 2009; Hepp, 2011; Livingstone, 2009; Lundby, 2009a). As Lundby notes, "Mediatization takes place within matrices of communication, culture, and hegemony … It shapes society and culture as well as the relationship that individual and institutional participants have to their environment and to each other" (2009b, p. 4). Investigations of political communication in several countries assessed the nature and extent of adoption of media logic reflecting American entertainment formats and style (Brants & Praag, 2006; Esser, 2013; Landerer, 2013; Takens, Atteveldt, Hoof, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013). The best description of the current situation is "mediatization," where political institutions increasingly are dependent on and shaped by mass media but nevertheless remain in control of political processes and functions (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 247).

While researchers differ in their preference for terms (e.g., media logic, mediation, mediatization, etc.), there appears to be a consensus that at least some part of political communication is informed by media logic. But there is not unanimity, perhaps because of the multiple uses of the related terms. For example, Landerer suggests that

a "normative logic" along with "market logic" serves to contextualize the communication framework, and that politics is mediatized "when both media and political actors adapt their behavior to the audience oriented market logic" (2013, p. 239). Arguing that different authors have used media logic in various ways, Landerer notes:

> Media logic has been defined, conceptualized, and operationalized in different ways over the years … In their definition [Altheide and Snow, 1979], namely the detailed definition of format stands out … But by what logics this formatting logic is driven—and why, if at all, it is so particular to the media—has led to much debate in the subsequent interpretation and operationalization of the concept. (p. 242)

The nature and impact of such media logic on political communication and social order, including international relations, are of utmost importance. Clearly, prognostications in the late 20th century that "changes in how people receive politics" in future political communication would be less influenced by television formats did not negate the principles of media logic about the impact of other formats guiding the Internet, blogs, twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and so on (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999, p. 209). Researchers continue to find applications of media logic in new information technologies as users adapt communication formats to change as well as initiate new activities (Schneider & Trottier, 2011; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). This includes network research:

> Our empirical analyses show … that personal action frames that emerge from connective networks often satisfy mass media demands for a simple angle to make it possible to intensify networking within various organizationally enabled or crowd-enabled organizations. (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 7)

The role of media logic—and its iterations—will undoubtedly continue to shape and transform political communication and culture. Consider how the terror group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has appropriated media logic and entertainment formats of social media to dramatically present real-life deadly theater of individual and mass executions. A compelling guideline is to continue to examine how these principles are guiding our culture—a media culture—and our future. As Adolf suggests:

> As we engage the media, they engage us, as technological form and as sources of meaning. As we shape them, in contingent processes of production and consumption, they shape us, as sources of knowledge and—enabling and constraining—means of repression. The term I propose for such a totality of meanings and practices, frames and forms, social actions and sensory experiences and their technological infrastructure, is culture. Media Culture. (2013, p. 166)

SEE ALSO: Mediatization

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