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Mediatization: key concept or conceptual bandwagon?

David Deacon and James Stanyer

Abstract

Mediatization is emerging as an influential new concept that places the media at the centre of all kinds of important cultural, political and social developments. However, it has so far attracted little critical evaluation. In this article the authors identify three areas of concern, namely, how causal processes are thought about, how historical change is understood, and how concepts are designed. It is hoped this article will contribute to the development of mediatization by generating critical debate and reflection, to prevent the term from being applied so inconsistently and indiscriminately that it becomes a 'concept of no difference'.

Key words

Mediatization, media-centrism, causal processes, concept design, criticism, historical change

Introduction: the mediatization of 'this-and-that'

Mediatization (or 'mediatisation' as it is sometimes alternatively spelt) is emerging as an influential new concept in media and communication studies. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of articles, special issues, monographs, conference panels and papers that invoke it; some have even put forward a case for mediatization studies (for synoptic accounts see Couldry and Hepp, 2013; Hepp, 2013; Hepp et al., 2010; Lundby, 2009; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014 a and b). The concept has already demonstrated remarkable portability, with discussions about, *inter alia*, the mediatization of politics, war, religion, medicine, science, music, identity construction, health, childhood, theatre, tourism, memory, climate change,

policy making, performance, consumption, madness, death, intimate relationships, human geography and education.

As Livingstone has already noted (2009), this is the second incarnation of the term, being initially coined by historians to describe processes of imperial deputation, whereby heads of conquered states retained vestigial sovereign powers through which they mediated the will of their imperial controllers (e.g. Vonoreradovich, 1965; Broers, 2001; Klueing, 2008). This original usage described processes of disempowerment, whereas the more recent invocation describes the accrual of power created by the increased pervasiveness and autonomy of media institutions, values and technologies. In essence, these factors no longer mediate power, they constitute it and it is this proposition that is used to justify the need for this new nominalization to replace the old descriptive workhorse of 'mediation' (e.g. Hjarvard, 2008: 14; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999: 250, Cottle, 2006: 9).

The concept has an undeniable rhetorical value for communication and media scholars, as the term places media analysis at the centre of all kinds of important developments. But does it have any conceptual rigour, and are there unforeseen risks in automatically centre-staging media actors, logics and technologies? The term implies a process of historical change, but how is this conceptualised and analysed and is there any agreement as to when mediatization started and where things currently stand? There has already been some criticism of the concept (see for example, Couldry, 2008; Witschge, 2014); and this article seeks to add to this critical debate and reflection, which seems to have become lost in an unseemly rush to proclaim the mediatization of 'this-and-that'.

What's in a name?

While it is perhaps not surprising that there is no single definition of mediatization, definitions in the leading studies on the concept tend to fall into one of two camps, labelled by Hepp (2013) as 'institutionalist' and 'social-constructivist' (for related discussions, see also Couldry and Hepp 2013, Hoskins, 2009). In institutionalist accounts, mediatization is seen as a process in which non-media social actors have to adapt to 'media's rules, aims, production logics, and constraints' (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999:249; Hjarvard, 2008, 2009). In social constructivist accounts, it is seen as a process in which changing information and communication

technologies (ICTs) drive ‘the changing communicative construction of culture and society’ (Hepp, 2013: 616: see also, Couldry and Hepp, 2013; Krotz, 2009). The word ‘media’ in mediatization, therefore, differs in each tradition, with the former emphasising ‘big’ media organisations and their centripetal power, and the latter ‘small’ media and their centrifugal presence. In this respect we can detect the influence of different intellectual heritages, in one, the work of Altheide and Snow and in the other, medium theorists like Innis and McLuhan (see Lundby, 2009 for a full discussion).

To ascertain the extent to which these approaches have filtered into the literature we conducted a word search of 14 leading mainstream media and communication journals¹ from 2002 to 2012. The search identified every article mentioning mediatization and found 93 articles that mentioned the term at least once (book reviews and articles where the word appeared in the references only were excluded). However, in the vast majority of cases (81 percent) the word was just mentioned in passing, more casually invoked than defined and operationalized with no clear reference as to which type of mediatization was being referred to (this is a tendency previously noted by Strömbäck, 2011b). This absence suggests there is a routine imprecision, even conflation, in the use of the term by many authors, which is a recipe for confusion and can only degrade the analytical value of the term.

Contemplating causal processes

Where articles presented theoretical discussion and/ or primary empirical research, the majority inclined towards the social constructivist rather than institutionalist approach (10 to 3) (Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2011; Fortunati, 2005; Jansson, 2002; Kepplinger, 2002; Kunelius and Reunanen, 2012; Peleg and Bogoch, 2012; Reich, 2005; Schrøder, and Phillips, 2007; Schulz et al., 2005; Strömbäck, 2011a. compared to Hopmann and Strömbäck, 2010; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; van Aelst, et al., 2008). What both conceptualisations of ‘mediatization’ share is a tendency to identify ‘the media’ (however defined) as causal historical agents.

¹ Media, Culture and Society; European Journal of Communication; Journalism ;Journalism Studies; New Media and Society; Journal of Communication; Political Communication; International journal of Press Politics; Critical Studies in Media Communication; Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly; Communication Theory; Communication Monographs; International Communication Gazette; Journal of International and Intercultural Communication. The authors would like to thank David Smith for his assistance with this task.

For example, the 'institutionalist tradition' sees growing media autonomy from politics over time and the spread of its logic into the political field, requiring political actors' adaptation and internalisation of this logic. Similarly, 'social constructivist' approaches emphasise how the profusion and infiltration of ICTs have restructured all sorts of activities through their 'immediate and extensive interpenetration with the everyday on an individual, social and continual basis' (Hoskins, 2009: 148). In our view there are some problematic assumptions that underpin this causal formula.

First, the agents of mediatization which trigger change tend to be narrowly defined. For example, there is little attention given to industries allied with, but distinct from, media organisations, such as the advertising and public relations industries, or transnational media moguls (see for example Miller and Dinan's discussion of the independent significant of the PR Industry above and beyond mainstream media in the UK [1999]). Further, the role of non-media factors tends to be overlooked in mediatization processes. For example, national and intergovernmental communication policy has played a central role in the development of the mass media and ICTs, but these issues rarely surface within the literature. Our concern is that the current focus on ICTs and the media is overly media centric with all the problems this entails (see Couldry, 2006; Krajina et al 2014; Morley, 2009). There is clearly a need to include other possible conditions as drivers of changing communicative practice including non-media factors.

Second, the agents of mediatization tend to be seen as innately powerful. As Billig (2013) notes of Schulz's account of mediatization, but which can apply equally to others, 'it posits the media as agents of change and holders of power – rather than particular individuals or social groups' (2013:111). Although power is not defined, the language used is suggestive of its strength. For example, Hepp uses the term 'moulding forces' (2013) which exert 'a certain pressure' on the way we communicate (2009: 145). Strömbäck and Esser note mediatization is concerned with 'how media exert influence' (2014: 4). Meyen et al. (2014) talk about mediatization as 'second-order long-term mass media effects...' (2014: 1). Krotz (2009) sees mediatization as a new form of 'socialization' (2009: 22). Hjarvard, observes that the media 'mould the way people communicate, act, and sustain relationships with each other' (2009: 175). Mazzoleni and Schulz see political communicators being 'forced to respond to the media's rules, aims, production logics,

and constraints' (1999:249). We could go on, but these quotes illustrate the clear assumption that a narrow set of agents have a strong effect on all manner of social, cultural, political and economic practices.

While we would not reject out of hand the possibility that agents of mediatization can have a powerful effect we would argue this cannot be assumed to always be the case. Mediatization scholars presuppose that the mass media or ICTs have the power to bring about change on their own, in other words, they always exert a powerful net effect on communicative practice. However, we cannot assume ICTs or the media are always necessary and sufficient to bring about change, it might well be that the agents of mediatization only have an effect when combined with other cultural, political and social variables. ICTs or the media may only transform things as part of a group of conditions which are all individually necessary but only jointly sufficient (see Ragin, 2000 for a wider discussion of joint sufficiency). Any exploration of the possible causal combinations needs to consider a range of contextually relevant macro, meso, and micro-level conditions, including the possibility of non-media factors mentioned earlier. Take the example of political parties adapting and internalising media logic. The growth and autonomy of the media needs to be seen alongside other system level factors, such as the changing nature of party systems, other meso-level factors, such as the extent of professionalization amongst political parties, and other micro factors, such as the perceptions of spin doctors about the importance of specific media (see Maurer and Pfetsch, 2014). Importantly, such a multi-dimensional (or complex) view of causation opens the possibility that the outcome we are trying to explain, namely changing communicative practice, might have different causes in different contexts. Downey and Stanyer have shown how this is the case in relation to the personalization of politics (2010). Although there has been some recognition that mediatization may operate alongside other processes (see Adams and Jansson, 2012; Hjarvard, 2008; Hartmann, 2009; Krotz; 2009) research is undeveloped and the causal theorising common in other social science disciplines has not found its way into common assumptions about how causal processes operate here.

Our third point concerns changing communicative practice – and more specifically the reaction to media logic. Here we are confronted by a narrow set of possible behavioural responses to the agents of mediatization. The supposition is

that all political actors adapt to, internalize, and accommodate media logic (Billig, 2013: 111). For example, Mazzoleni and Schulz, (1999) observe political institutions adapt to the 'rules, aims, production logics, and constraints' employed by mass communicators' (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999:249). In Strömbäck's third phase of mediatization political institutions adapt to media logic and in the fourth phase they internalise media logic (2008). However, we would suggest that a broader range of possible responses needs to be considered. For example, Schulz observes that in the 'evolving new media environment' political actors may well choose to 'bypass the mass media and use their own channels for directly communicating' (2004:95). Another response might be to seek to control the media. When faced with 'a media environment that is perceived as omnipresent and influential' political actors may well seek to manage it rather than adapt to it. As Maurer and Pfetsch (2014) observe, 'instead of adopting media logic, politicians can leverage the advantage they retain with regards to information that is interesting to journalists, professionalize their news management, and intensify their efforts to manipulate journalists' (2014: 342). Governments and states, for example, have a number of options at their disposal, they can respond by regulating agents of mediatization or censoring them in various ways – on both subjects there is a large literature. In non-democracies a response like censorship maybe a relatively common first reaction, as a regime seek to maintain its authority. There are of course other responses, our point here is that a broader range of possible reactions to the presence of media logic need to be more fully explored.

Our fourth point relates to explaining the absence of an outcome in a situation where we might reasonably expect it to be present – namely why communicative practice does not change in situations where we presumed it would. This might seem to defy common sense, if you are interested in explaining why mediatization occurs why would you examine cases where it does not occur? However, such instances, we argue, are highly insightful. They tell us about possible constraints that might inhibit the mediatization process. If the agents of mediatization are present and the expected outcome is absent then it is important to explain this absence. Factors that retard processes are just as important as enabling factors in understanding the development of a process. These deviant cases, so to speak, may serve as an

antidote to the tendency to see mediatization as an inexorable and ubiquitous process.

Comparisons over time and space?

One of the central challenges of all process-focused scholarship is to capture and explain change over time. Mediatization is a term that, by its very structure, implies historical change: i.e. there is something or someone that is becoming ever more '-ized'. This offers a further explanation for the dissatisfaction of its advocates with the term mediation, which could be seen to emphasise the media's role in continuity (what we used to term 'social and cultural reproduction').

Most authors see mediatization processes as emerging over a long period of time. For example, Krotz sees mediatization as a long term meta-process that occurs alongside other meta-processes (2009). Kepplinger claims that mediatization in politics has been evident since 'the early days of radio' (2002: 973) but has become more acute over the recent period. Hjarvard appears to concur, describing mediatization as a 'long-term process' (2008: 14) that has gathered momentum 'towards the end of the twentieth century' (ibid: 17). In contrast, Schulz (2004) speculates that we may be witnessing the end of 'mediatization', due to the declining dominance of traditional mainstream media and the rise of 'new' media (although he goes on to offer three different scenarios that respectively confirm, ameliorate or confound such a conclusion). Hepp notes mediatization 'is a cumulative process in which the variety of media with different institutionalizations and reifications increase over time.' (2013:620-21; 2009: 143), but also argues that media change far from being linear has 'eruptive moments' or 'mediatization waves' (2013:625). He provides examples such as 'emergence of print' and 'the recent phenomenon of digitalization' (2013:625). Hoskins argues we need to conceive of two distinct phases of mediatization, the first relating to the institutionalist definition mentioned previously ('the forms, practices and experiences associated with the dominant media and institutions of the broadcast era, and particularly television' [Hoskins, 2009: 148]), the second concerning the social constructivist definition and the 'much more immediate and extensive interpenetration' of new forms of digital media (ibid.).

Hoskins seems to suggest that these different types of mediatization should be conceived of as sequential (see also Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010: 17-18), but

others would reject the neatness of this proposition. For example, Schulz expresses caution about making simple distinctions between 'old' and 'new' media and outlines plausible scenarios by which 'Big media' may consolidate their power and profitability in the new media ecology (2004: 98). Strömbäck (2008) offers an influential model for periodizing change, although he does so solely in relation to the growing influence of the media and political actors' adaptation over time. His analysis identifies four identifiable phases, which involves the growing independence of the media from political institutions, the dependence of political communicators on the media, the spread and adaptation of media logic by these actors and the final internalisation of logic by all actors in a political system. Strömbäck makes a series of reasonable qualifications about these phases, in particular that these phases do not necessarily coincide with any specific time periods but more abstractly are stages of the mediatization process. This lack of consensus about the emergence and development of the mediatization process, while unsurprising, points to the problems of speculation and the need for systematic research of historical change.

As part of our review of leading journals, we assessed the extent to which scholars utilising the concept actually sought to make temporal comparisons in a systematic way. Our results showed that, all of the 13 articles that carried out any primary empirical work on the concept discussed change over time, but the majority (7) demonstrated a 'synchronous' research strategy (Hepp, 2013: 624), that is, their research focused on a single time period (Fortunati, 2005; Jansson, 2002; Kunelius and Reunanen, 2012; Peleg, and Bogoch, 2012; Schröder, and Phillips, 2007; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; van Aelst, et al., 2008). Of the remainder that attempted a 'diachronous' strategy (*ibid.*), two studies focused on two periods (Reich, 2005; Elmelund-Præstekær, et al., 2011); one on four periods (Schulz et al., 2005) and one, five periods (Hopmann and Strömbäck, 2010). Only one study examined temporal change over a substantial time period and at a large number of temporal junctures (Kepplinger, 2002).

There may well be other diachronic studies outside these leading English language journals but we believe these results serve as a good indicator of research focus and suggest that much mediatization research depends on a presumption rather than demonstration of historical change, projecting backwards from contemporary case studies rather than carefully designed temporal comparisons.

Some theorists appear to argue this is not problematic, indeed, that any attempt at temporal comparison is a fundamentally flawed endeavour. For example, Hepp asserts that recognizing mediatization as a 'meta process' means it '...is not an empirical process in the sense that we can investigate it as – for example- a certain talk or a person crossing the street. "Meta-processes" are superior theoretical approaches describing long –term processes of change. So a "meta-process" cannot be researched empirically as a single transformation.' (2009: 140)

We have reservations about such statements, which seem to see mediatization as inexorable yet ineffable. As mediatization is a concept that presupposes historical change, scholars that invoke it cannot afford to be incurious about charting its emergence and momentum. We accept that mediatization encompasses multi-faceted and long term processes that could never be captured through single empirical exercises. Nevertheless, if the transformations are as fundamental as are claimed, sufficient temporal traces should remain to ensure that, through concerted, cumulative, empirical endeavour, a more precise historiography of mediatization could emerge. This is important because the few studies that have attempted to measure change systematically often reach more equivocal conclusions about the extent to which mediatization processes are intensifying. For example, the one study in our journal survey that made systematic comparisons over a series of temporal points - Kepplinger's study of the mediatization of German politics between 1951 and 1995 – found some evidence of a growing mediatization of parliamentary work, but did not find an upward trend across all indicators selected. A similarly mixed picture emerged in a more recent comparative analysis of two decades of election campaign coverage in Danish and German TV news. The authors concluded that the study only found evidence of mediatization in relation to 3 of its 5 measures and that the process has apparently stalled since the 1990s (Zeh and Hopmann, 2013).

This kind of evidence is important in two respects. It challenges the presumption across both 'traditions' that mediatization is a continuous and linear process (see Couldry, 2008: 375 for an earlier critique on this point). Diachronic theorizing needs to be able to accommodate the possibility of abeyance, as well as accretion and acceleration (see Streeck and Thelen, 2005). This critical distinction seems to be particularly neglected in discussions surrounding the diffuse impact of

new social media. The last decade has witnessed vertiginous declines in online platforms that were momentarily but momentarily popular, such as *Second Life*, *Friends Reunited* or *My Space*, and the future of current social media giants like *Facebook* and *Wikipedia* seem far from secure. For this reason, the abandonment of 'new' media networks and technologies should interest mediatization scholars just as greatly as their adoption.

The second reason why temporal comparisons are valuable is because they can alert us to areas of historical continuity as well as change. For example, there is a growing literature upon the mediatization of warfare, whether in relation to the increased salience attributed to communication and media planning in the prosecution of conflict or the ways in which the new digital media technologies have penetrated, restructured, diffused and globalized military conflict. According to Harris: 'Since the 1980s war has changed and the role of the media has become of increasing importance, both to the military and to the government...The playing out of war in the public sphere is one of the major developments of modern warfare' (2008: 132). In this new environment, the media are seen to configure conflict as well as communicate it. For example, in a review essay on the mediatization of warfare, Denis McQuail speculates that a 'reverse effect' may be becoming more apparent, in which the media, 'free to roam the world and report its ailments' can now influence considerably the formulation and presentation of state policies 'especially by way of public pressure for action to remedy some apparently intolerable situation' (2006: 115). In our view, claims about the recent mediatization of war risk underestimate the extent to which these factors were appreciated and accommodated in pre-mediatized eras, and often had decisive political and ideological outcomes. To give just one example, the destruction of the market town of Guernica by German bombers in April 1937 in the Spanish Civil War caused an immediate international furore and has since become 'a symbol of everything hateful about Fascism, a turning point of history' (Knightley, 1975: 205). What is also often not appreciated is that it was a media event and would never have had this symbolic resonance were it not for the chance proximity of international journalists on the scene, who witnessed the immediate aftermath and were able to cable their reports on their return to Bilbao. These reports sparked an immense, intense, international propaganda war, which directly involved senior editors, journalists, diplomats and eventually governments. One can even detect acknowledgement of the significance of the media's role in

Pablo Picasso's famous depiction of the attack (Deacon, 2008: 29-32, 178-179). In sum, Guernica offers a classical example of the media exerting a 'reverse effect' as well as a sophisticated and widespread recognition of the power of the media to frame political and public perceptions. It reveals that the Mediatization of war has more of a prehistory than seems to be supposed within much of the recent literature.

Alongside this need to develop more rigorous temporal comparisons is an accompanying need to incorporate spatial comparisons. There has been some illuminating work done on this (see Zeh and Hopmann, 2013; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011 and Maurer and Pfetsch, 2014) but more multi-country studies on mediatization are needed if we are to understand fully the drivers and inhibitors of these processes across countries.

A concept of no difference?

We have already commented upon the portability and varying definitions of the mediatization concept. Krotz sees this as an advantage, observing that mediatization helps us think of specific events and developments as belonging together (2009: 25) but we suggest this is problematic because of the important role concepts play in empirical research. According to Giovanni Sartori concepts are not just labels they are also 'data containers' (1970: 1039). Mediatization, although a process, can also be seen as a container in which observations can be collected. However, such containers need to be well defined if they are to exert 'discriminatory power' and perform more than 'allusive function' (ibid.). While some might argue that mediatization is sensitizing concept, in our opinion such concepts are more blinding than guiding. The imprecise application of the term 'mediatization' means it resembles what Sartori calls, a universal concept of no difference, a container in which different things can be placed. In part this might explain its success: it travels well, scholars working in different areas of communication and media studies and beyond can use it, the down side is we cannot distinguish between occurrences of mediatization. Mediatization, to use Sartori's words, is something akin to the 'the Hegelian night in which all the cows look black (and eventually the milkman is taken for a cow)' (1970: 1040). Sartori is not opposed to universal concepts, in fact he argues they play an important role in the social sciences, however, the aim is to design concepts that have enough discriminatory power to avoid making the unlike alike (Sartori, 1970).

Greater discriminatory power can be obtained in a number of ways. One of the main ways is by descending what Sartori calls the 'ladder of abstraction' (1970: 10400). Sartori posits the idea of a ladder of abstraction or 'generality' as a key component in concept design (see Collier and Levitsky, 2009). Researchers can move concepts up and down the ladder. Descent is achieved by adding more defining attributes or properties to the concept and so reducing the number of cases. Ascent is achieved by having fewer defining attributes and so the concept applies to more cases (1970: 1041). The more inclusive concept is at the top and the more exclusive at the bottom of the ladder. Sartori distinguishes between three levels on the ladder. High level concepts, Sartori argues, can be 'visualized as the ultimate genus' (1970: 1041). The medium level concept 'falls short of universality', as there are more defining attributes or properties and a greater amount of exclusivity (1970:1041). At the low level a concept is tightly defined, 'the differentiae of individual settings... is sacrificed to accuracy of connotation' (1970: 1041).

The most obvious solution to the lack of discriminatory power is to descend the ladder, provide a definition which has more attributes and more potential falsifiers. Mediatization could be moved down to a mid-level general concept with some inclusiveness but fully operationalized with carefully selected indicators able to increase differentiation from other processes. This would have the added advantage of eliminating 'concept leaping' from micro observational findings, usually in case studies, all the way up to the top of the ladder to the catch-all universal concept of mediatization by passing any intermediate concepts. Others have called for more middle- range explorations (see Drotner in Lundby, 2009b) but there is little evidence in the existing literature that this task has been addressed seriously.

Alternatively, scholars can leave mediatization as a universal concept but develop a series of additional concepts at lower levels of abstraction, in other words, construct a family of connected concepts along the ladder. Strömbäck and Esser (2014), for example, propose three sub-dimensions to news media logic: professionalism, commercialism and media technology. Schulz (2004) identifies four sub-concepts of mediatization: extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation. Each of these might also function as a medium level concept. Indeed, he notes his aim is to 'reconstruct the mediatization concept in order to probe its implicit suppositions and its heuristic value' (2004:88).

However, one important point needs to be made about keeping mediatization as a universal concept. Sartori observes it is vital that such concepts are empirical universals with discriminatory power and not pseudo-universals. Pseudo-universals are concepts without boundaries that perform an 'allusive function'. Empirical universals, in contrast, have 'at least one relatively precise (attribute)' (1970:1042). This discriminatory power can be achieved by saying what a concept is not. In contrast, a concept defined without negation has no boundaries. 'A concept qualified by negation may, or may not be found to apply to the real world; whereas a non-bounded concept always applies' (1970:1042). Mediatization is currently a pseudo universal that needs to become an empirical universal. We need to know what it is not. Unless we can differentiate between the changes in communicative practice involving the media that are instances of mediatization and those that are not then it will remain a pseudo-universal and researchers will discover the process everywhere.

Sartori's approach is not without its problems (see Goertz, 2006), but it points to fundamental flaws with the way mediatization is currently constructed and highlights the importance of concept design. It could be that some scholars do not want to descend the ladder and carefully operationalize mediatization, preferring the comfortable generality of the world of no difference. In our view, the failure to develop discriminatory focus will mean that 'mediatization' remains little more than a tag which will inevitably mean that misgathering occurs and confusion reigns.

Conclusion

In this article we have identified some of our concerns regarding the use and conceptualisation of mediatization. In summary, they point to three areas of concern, the first has to do with assumptions about power and causation; the second, relates to researching historical processes and the third concept design. The way mediatization is currently understood is too simplistic for a number of reasons. It is an account of change that driven by a narrow set of causal variables - the mass media and/or ICTs - which are seen as powerful enough on their own to bring about change over time. As we have argued, there is a tendency to see these agents of mediatization as both necessary and sufficient to bring about change in all contexts. The role of non-media factors in jointly influencing changing communicative practice is largely overlooked. What is missing, we argue, in this media centric narrative of

change is a full appreciation of joint sufficiency. Further, we argued that current research tends to focus on too narrow a set of outcomes and has overlooked the absence of mediatization in contexts where the causal conditions are present and we would reasonably expect it to occur.

In relation to theorising and researching change over time, we noted a number of outstanding issues. While most authors see mediatization as a continuous process emerging over a long period of time there is little consensus on when it started and some even suggest it might have ended. There is clearly a need for more diachronous research demonstrating rather than presuming historical change, indeed, the diachronous research that has been done seems to show mediatization may well be an erratic process. Our final criticism focused on the value added of concepts in the research process. Useful concepts allow us to discriminate, poorly designed concepts, in contrast, make the unlike alike. What light does mediatization shed on the process of social, political and cultural change? As a concept of no difference we suggest very little. What is the value added of this concept currently defined? In the survey of the literature on mediatization mentioned earlier, we asked a simple question, if you removed the word mediatization completely from each article how many would still make sense? The answer was in the vast majority (75 out of 93) it would not make any difference. The danger here is that if these issues are not addressed, mediatization, instead of illuminating our understanding of social, political and cultural transformation, will serve to confuse, leading to a morass of conceptually muddled research in which mediatization is all things and everywhere.

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