

Media Logic(s) Revisited

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Media Logic(s) Revisited: Modelling the Interplay between Media Institutions, Media Technology and Societal Change. Edited by Thimm, C., Anastasiadis, M., Einspänner-Pflock, J. (2018). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-3319657554
294 pages

When the theoretical concept of *media logic* was developed by David L. Altheide and Robert P. Snow (Altheide & Snow, 1979), it was a different, perhaps simpler media world. Newspapers, radio and television ruled the roost, each occupying a specific, often institutionalised place within society. Social order was informed and guided by the media-at-large. It would take the later disruptive effects of online communications and the Internet to make major societal and media waves and changes arguably more significant than their radio and television forerunners.

This media logic was described as a form of communication, a process in which media present and transmit information, with elements including the various media (*forms*) and the *formats* used by the media. Altheide and Snow (1979) stated that formats partially consisted of ‘how material is organised, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behaviour, and the grammar of media communication’, to be a ‘framework or a perspective that is used to present as well as interpret phenomena.’

More recently Altheide (2016) noted that some ‘unfortunate misinterpretations’ of media logic needed to be corrected and clarified, as well as some revision of the concept to revitalise it especially within areas such as political communications. This edited collection of 13 chapters may act as a timely companion to Altheide’s observation, promising new approaches to the media logic concept taken from presentations at the ‘Media Logic(s) Revisited: Modelling the Interplay between Media Institutions, Media Technology and Societal Change’ conference in September 2015.

The reader is promised insight from the fields of communications, media, political science, and sociology, with contributors including Stig Hjarvard, Friedrich Krotz and even David L. Altheide, who critically reflected on the idea of media logic in light of current developments and the strong cultural embedding of media in various social contexts.

First, a couple of grumbles. It took time before the book was published and it cannot be said that to harmonise the texts for the benefit of the sequential reader. This is just a little bug-bear for this reviewer, since as a collection it feels disjointed and of variable quality, despite containing many interesting and valid chapters, plus a few that could have been if they had been more readable and accessible. The stilted writing style felt to degrade slightly what could be a critical work, perhaps making it less accessible to some readers – not only professionals and students, but also academics – who might have also benefited from its knowledge.

The book is essentially divided into two parts, firstly theorising media logic, before broadening out into a mixture of theoretical and empirical approaches to

media logics as seen within different societal contexts. A valuable, concise introduction into media logic(s) is presented, acting as both a basic overview of the topic as well as a deeper corraling and presentation of the book's chapters.

Appropriately the first of the theoretical chapters is authored by Altheide, offering a valuable introduction to the media logic topic and considering the so-called *media syndrome* and *reflexive mediation*. Increasingly we 'are not just programmed but are a programme – or at least parts of one or more – and guide and evaluate our social performances in popular culture terms and criteria, most of which, reflect the mass media as well as social media,' states Altheide (p. 12), who calls this a media syndrome, a 'prevalence of media logic, communication formats, and media content in social life.' Raising an interesting and persuasive argument (based on the analysis of the coverage of some major news stories) that we can have 'a lot of news, but little understanding of the world and each other' (p. 14).

Altheide believes that our social condition reflects our media condition because of 'the organization, structure, and use of the mass media and media logic' (p. 14). Changing media forms and technologies are part of the broader transformation of contemporary life, and mediation is just one element of media logic that provides 'order and meaning' to the mass communications process and its subsequent consumption and usage. We (society) are caught, notes Altheide, in a 'perpetual and rapidly evolving media wave breaking toward the edge, a vortex that is guiding and defining our experiences and changing how we think of ourselves and others' (p. 11). Real-world examples are provided, such as crime re-enactment television programming that

has transformed into mass voyeuristic edutainment ('low-budget re-enactments of horrific crimes slathered in sexual goo, a kind of "murder porn," being shown in 100 million homes in 157 countries' /p.13/). Can there be a problem if even the animated comedy programme South Park had an episode where characters were concerned about their parents viewing 'the vile and despicable trash (...) on cable television' (ibid.)?

Altheide also describes a *media spiral* - 'the pattern of messages informed by information technology that affects the work by journalists, on the one hand, and how these are related to the work and perspective of people involved in planning events' (p. 19). As Altheide says, the media spiral is formed by the role (and advancement) of information technology within the media space. He notes how story types effectively snowball through being reported, promoted, repurposed, shared and amplified, and, furthermore, that social media is shifting the foundation and efficacy of mass communications. This segues neatly to a chapter concerning the theoretical border between mediatisation and media logic. The author Friedrich Krotz states that there are many conceptual and application differences, particularly based on media types. Krotz investigates mainly the influence of television on political communication in the 1970s and 1980s through the different lenses of mediatisation and media logics. This challenging, well-researched read is particularly valuable for its analysis of how the changing media market impacts political communication and for questioning of how the use of logic may be misleading and thus inappropriate.

A subsequent chapter by Stig Hjarvard could have ideally appeared before Krotz's, setting the scene with a consid-

eration that media logics may have for social interaction and with a broader conceptualisation of media logics as a part of mediatisation. Hjarvard notes that newer forms of media, such as the internet and mobile phone, have 'not replaced mass media, but rather added to the complexity of the overall media environment,' (p. 64) which has 'wider implications for the ways in which both big societal institutions (e.g., the political system) and smaller contexts of civil society work'. There has been a growing acknowledgement, adds Hjarvard (*ibid.*) that the media not only change communication, but also change the relationships between people and organizations and conditions the ways people usually communicate and interact with each other in different contexts.

Furthermore, Mikkel Fugl Eskjær, aiming to increase the plurality of media logics, passionately argues for the reinterpretation of media logic and mediatisation concepts by viewing them through systems theory and the notion of structural coupling. The theoretical discussions are then sustained by an illuminative case study concerning the mediatisation of six Scandinavian NGOs, observing how they integrated media logic into their communications. Such pairing of re-consideration of the concepts and empirical case study – a practice that would have enhanced other parts of the book as well – successfully strengthens the message of the chapter.

Contextualised challenges distinct languages and are forming their own grammar in a specific environment' (p. 123). Based on this notion, Thimm argues that we need media grammar literacy that would help media users to understand 'the pragmatic force of the media in use, that is, understanding the use of pro-

duction variables within each medium' (*ibid.*).

Interactive media is central to Thimm's argument, although it was suggested that such grammatical instances may be transferrable to other media and even common life, since 'technology and user cultures have become interwoven, that datafication has led to new business models, and that, with data as new currency, new economic and political powers have come into existence' (p. 129). One very visible example of this transferrable media grammar could be how the Twitter hashtag can be used verbally in speech to effectively show sarcasm, underline a point or show affiliation, just as deployed on the Twitter platform itself (Bamman & Smith, 2015; Zappavigna, 2011).

These explicit theoretical considerations are rounded off by a meta-analysis, examining interdependencies between different media systems and structures, logics, and participants, but this unfortunately suffers from less-accessible language and convoluted, stodgy formulation.

Thereafter, various authors in the subsequent chapters consider different empirical and theoretical approaches to media logic. Amongst the issues raised are the importance of mediality for analysing media logics, social media logics conceptualised as network media logic, and perception analysis of media logic. Empirical examples included in the studies range from showing how even democratic states exercise a media monopoly over certain 'document media' such as bank notes and identity documents (ch. 8) or how traditional categorisation of subjects, often between 'friend' and 'foe' in conflicts is increasingly difficult due to a diverse media marketplace (ch. 12), to, on the contrary, how even

media principles may exist in an algorithm-powered digital world (ch. 13).

The book is rounded off by a techno-philosophical approach-led discussion of digital media, suggesting that comprehension of human life has been simplified and normalised to algorithmic processes due to big data, and thus it may eventually affect how we view and participate in societal activities.

This powerful, engaging conclusion to a diverse range of chapters included in the volume is its main value that abundantly offsets the deficiencies in accessibility and readability.

References

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