

Mediatization and organizing in the public, private and civic sectors

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Background

Media – in all their different forms – are shaping most aspects of our life. Most obviously, this is done by selecting what information to consider “newsworthy”. The way that media depict their subject of scrutiny deeply influences our interpretation of events and actors, and thereby importantly shapes our actions. Because of this influence, media are therefore sometimes called the fourth branch of government. Media are, however, important in many other ways. Our consumption of media influences how we set priorities, how we define our identities: in short, it influences how we see ourselves. This identity-shaping effect of media is relevant to both individuals and organizations.

These observations are not new, and media researchers have much to say about the processes in and consequences of our mediatized world. The ubiquity of media influence is, however, not as well understood among other researchers. An organizational scholar would, for instance, have a difficult time to explain how media influence contemporary organizations. This is surprising as it is quite obvious that business corporations, hospitals, universities, schools or political parties put media at the top of their priority lists. There should therefore be much that we as organizational scholars can and should do.

A particularly important question to study is what happens inside and between organizations when they adapt to the working routines, preferences and values that dominate the media. Such adaptation goes far beyond the establishment of a media relations unit; they format and time their reports to fit media routines (ref er tidigare studie), when they re-organize their strategies around a “media strategy” (ref) and when they employ individuals in leading positions for their contacts with and ability to handle the media. Adaptation to the workings and the logic of media has been argued to be a general societal process – a processes that referred to as “mediatization” (Couldry, 2012; Lundby, 2009). The best-known example is of political parties that have extensively adapted to a media logic in how they understand, formulate and communicate their political agendas, and in how they manage their organizations (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Mediatization also have direct effects on the way in which organizations perform other types of activities such as accounting, customer support, legal issues, human relations and management in general (ref? boken?).

In this project we investigate mediatization along two distinct but related paths: 1) mediatization as an *organizational process* that is integrated in how individual organizations and their members understand themselves, and in how they set objectives and priorities, make decisions, allocate

resources, and structure their operations (Pallas, Fredriksson, & Wedlin, 2016; Pallas, Jonsson, & Strannegård, 2014); and 2) mediatization as an *institutional process* that challenges and re-shapes existing field-level structures; that is, mediatization as redefining conditions that govern the context in which all types of social actors operate (Hjarvard 2008). By combining these two paths we seek to understand and explain how mediatization evokes changes, how these changes are organized, and what consequences these changes have on organizational behavior. Inspired by different streams of organizational research, media and communication studies, public sector governance, sociology and political science we see the empirical and theoretical necessity to gain a more nuanced and deepened understanding of mediatization as an important societal and organizational phenomenon that in fundamental ways shapes and transforms contemporary organizations.

Purpose and aim

The purpose of the project is to introduce a systematic exploration of the process of mediatization into the study of management and organizations where it has been missing (Pallas, Jonsson and Strannegård 2014). In media and cultural studies –where the concept has its theoretical and empirical foundation– mediatization usually connotes the process whereby society increasingly becomes dependent on the media and their working routines, preferences and values. This process is characterized by a duality in that these routines, preferences and values have become “integrated into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions in their own” (Hjarvard, 2013:113). However, despite the ambition to address and elevate mediatization into a societal phenomena comparable to other processes like marketization, commercialization, globalization or industrialization, empirical evidence supporting such a claim is still missing (Lunt & Livingstone, 2015). Departing from management and organization theory perspective on mediatization we therefore propose an approach where different levels of analysis are *connected and compared* in terms of underlying dynamics, prevalence, saliency, robustness and consequences as they can be observed in organizations populating different sectors of society (cf. Ekström & Fornäs 2016, Pallas et al. 2014).

More precisely, we seek to develop such a multilevel and cross-sectional approach to mediatization by studying and comparing organizations in three societal sectors: the *private, public and civic*. This approach can help us to theorize about the nature of mediatization as a phenomena cutting across, influencing and re-constructing major part of our societies (Couldry & Hepp, 2016). This opens for describing and explaining the organizational consequences of mediatization; how the rationales of media unfold and are given meaning in specific organizational contexts. The project enables a discussion of how mediatization relates to other institutional pressures and developments that permeate organizations in terms of changing administrative and relational structures, preferences, identities and practices in and between organizations within and across these three sectors.

Our choice of the private, public and civic sectors is primarily motivated by shortcomings of earlier studies: whereas studies on political and public sector organizations are relative common (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Schillemans, 2012; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Fredriksson & Pallas 2014), we still lack empirical insights in mediatization of organizations in the private and civic contexts. There is also a

theoretical argument behind the selection of these sectors. Testing whether mediatization is a process that is expressed differently in the three sectors differently helps us to theorize about mediatization as a general societal process. We also generate theoretical insights about the way in which organizations – organized and governed by distinct (i.e. sector specific) value systems, rules and practices – relate to and act upon other (parallel and partly also related) processes such as accountability, transparency, visibility (Brandtner, Horvath & Powell, forthcoming).

Structure of the project - mediatization *of, in and between* organizations

We fulfil the above discussed potential by situating the project in an analytical space between two dominant traditions in mediatization studies: a) cultural perspective that is interested in observing and understanding how mediated communication between people influences construction of social and cultural practices and discourses of our everyday lives (Couldry & Hepp 2016); and b) an institutional perspective that finds its inspiration in an assumption that media have become a semi-independent institution with own set of norms, rules, values, priorities and working routines, and that these are central in transformation of other institutions such as politics, market or religion (Hjarvard 2008). From these two traditions follows that mediatization is to be addressed as a transformative process that forms realities of individual as well as collective actors by embedding them in structural context that is shaped by and channeled through media. However, moving between the individual and societal level in studying and understanding the dynamics and effects of mediatization risks to overlook the context in which a significant (if not major) part of relations, process and activities is taking place – that is, the context of formal organizations and formal organizing (Pallas & Fredriksson, 2013). With organizations and organizing as an analytical point of departure we address mediatization in terms of changes in how organizations within the different sectors (i.e. private, public and civic) internalize and act upon taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions about how media operate, what effects media (coverage) have on organizations, and consequently also how media issues should be addressed and related to. We can here analytically distinguish between three different – but inter-related – sets of questions (or sub-projects) examining if and how mediatization has become a central aspect of governance, management and administration of contemporary organizations – namely mediatization *of, in and between* organizations.

The notion of general mediatization *of* organizations suggests that media values, preferences and working routines have become internalized across wide societal sectors influencing organizations populating these sectors in relatively similar and totalizing manner (Strömbäck 2008; Schillemans 2012). Such internalization makes organizations to devote time and resources to establishment and empowerment of specialized communication units; to acquire recognized media management competencies; to grant media activities strategic prominence by letting for instance PR and media professionals become members of senior management teams; and to focus on media visibility and presence on different media and network platforms. What becomes a crucial issue is then to understand how the rationales of media relate to - or challenge - other more traditional principles and values for organizing. The example of violating constitutional rights (such as freedom of speech, or principle of public access to official records) within the public sector by referring to a need of controlling (i.e. censoring) the messages governmental employees can disclose to the media is just one

of many examples. Another set of questions relevant in this context concerns how and to what extent prevailing or alternative general principles for organizing, structuring and understanding contemporary organizations interplay (positively or negatively) with the arguably growing mediatization, and its pressures. Literature on governance (e.g. Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006) suggests a number global candidates that can be used as a starting point for a fruitful analysis of mediatization *of* organization. Translated into research questions these are: how is mediatization to be understood in relation to ongoing scientification, individualization, marketization, democratization, rationalization, bureaucratization or politicization of contemporary organizational life? What are possible overlaps? And where is mediatization bringing in new practices, values and preferences to be studied in organizations?

As for mediatization *in* organization there are both theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that we can observe differences with respect to how, under what conditions, and to what extent different parts, units and levels inside organizations give prominence and introduce media preferences, values and working routines into how specific activities and processes in organizations are coordinated, performed and evaluated (Pallas et al., 2016). Being a part of an overall media-oriented discourse in an organization does not necessarily mean that members of strategic management and representatives of other professions in organizations such as lawyers, CSR-managers, accountants or HR-personnel understand and relate to media in a same way. We can then expect different parts of organizations to adopt and adjust to the media to a varying extent and depth, and with varying consequences concerning aspects such as distribution of authority, allocation of resources, or defining priorities in type and quality of products and services offered by the organizations to their users or customers. A brief look at for instance the Swedish Migration Agency or Karolinska Institutet gives a sense of what these processes might look like. In similar vein, what does accounting mean when negotiated from a perspective of internal control, or as a way of dealing with public accountability represented and projected by media coverage – a tension nicely illustrated for example by the recent turbulence around the Swedish company SCA. Jointly, these examples suggest that studying mediatization in organizations leads to questions that include paying attention to non-media activities such as accounting, marketing, leadership, organizational behavior and others. How do for instance different professions contribute to internal negotiation about the meaning and relevance of media values, preferences and routines? What role do management structures and biographies play in this process? How are the rationales of media interfering with non-media activities in organizations?

The discussion on mediatization *between* organizations turns our attention from intra-organizational activities back to the field-level dynamics. Assuming that different types of organizations have different skills, resources, ownership/governance structures and legal conditions that help them to navigate, negotiate and even resist the pressures streaming from the general acceptance of media as central force shaping their realities, we can expect that there will be fundamental tensions in how relations between organizations representing different sectors are structured and acted upon. For instance, when hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, governmental health agencies and professional medical associations need to relate to each other – as in a context of buyer/seller-relationships, joint drug development projects and partnerships, or as a part of co-production of complex and

technologically advanced treatments – there is a need to re-negotiate how these relationships, partnerships and co-operations are understood as a part of the mediatized environment in which these forms of interactions are taking place. Two empirical observations illustrate two processes that are involved in mediatization of such interstitial spaces between organizations. The first has to do with the type of media coverage of cross-sectional activities such as welfare services (e.g. education, health care, culture, defense) or processes necessary for industry innovations (e.g. R&D, financing, regulations). The way in which media describe, explain and scrutinize these policy areas or issues creates referential framework that sets boundaries for how organizations from the different sectors compete, collaborate or simply co-exist with each other. The media not only influence what is paid attention to in relation to specific issues. They also have a significant role in how the issue at hand – and the way it has been dealt with by different organizations – is understood in relation to broader societal norms, rules and conventions. That is, media contribute to defining what constitutes an appropriate and legitimate behavior in a given context (Jonsson, Greve, & Fujiwara-Greve, 2009). The second observation addresses the specialized actors who proliferate and diffuse knowledge and ideas about how media of different kind work. These actors – represented by among others PR- and management consultants, think-tanks, professional PR and communication associations – populate the space between organizations and provide organizations not only with analysis of how to interpret the media landscape in which issues at hand are embedded. They also offer advices how to project and impose their clients' own preferences and understanding of how these issues should be addressed. Institutional line of reasoning on construction and transformation of organizational fields (e.g. Furnari, 2014) opens here for a number of questions concerning for instance the ways in which organizations are influenced by the medially framed issues around which they co-operate or compete with other organizations; and consequently, also for how organizations are actively involved in shaping practices and conditions around these issues.

Studying mediatization in organizations – sources, methods, contexts and networks

Having such an ambitious take on studying the processes and organizational consequences of mediatization *of, in* and *between* organizations requires an approach that would enable to combine detailed and local descriptions of organizational and field-level relations and activities, with longitudinal and cross-sectorial accounts characterizing the general characteristics mediatization as it unfolds in and between organizations. Whereas the former would provide a basis for a comparative discussion on the characteristics and effects of mediatization in and between organizations in the different sectors chosen for this project – i.e. private, public and civic; the latter puts the process of mediatization of organizations in the different sectors into a broader historical perspective. Material, methods and research tools used for such a project need to be able to capture both of these aspects. Thus, there is a need of a multiple methods strategy that would include both organization-specific material collected through methods such as netnography (Howard 2002), shadowing, explorative interviews and close case studies (Czarniawska, 2007); as well as methods and tools for gathering historical and field-level data from sources such as websites, text archives, audio and video databases (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). These tools included among others web-crawling and web-harvesting, social network analysis and content analysis (Powell et al., 2016).

To further narrow down our focus, the project is thought to be conducted in three steps - each representing one of the analytical orientation introduced above – i.e. *of*, *in* and *between*. Each step will include a number organizations representing the private, public and civic sectors – i.e. sectors with different and distinct forms of ownerships, principals and rationalities that govern actors' behavior, values and preferences (Esping-Andersen, 1990). To be able to isolate and systematically study the dynamics, prominence, robustness and consequences of mediatization across different levels of analysis and across the different sectors, we concentrate our efforts to organizations that provide education and primary health care. More specifically we pay attention to specific type of organizations across the three sectors – elementary and upper secondary schools (education); and health centers (primary care). The selection of organizations to be studied is mainly oriented towards the Swedish context. But, as similar projects on mediatization are been developed also in Norway, Denmark, Germany and Netherlands we will be able to include relevant data from studies conducted by our colleagues in these countries (see below for the international networks that member of the research team are members of or associated with).

Time plan

2018 – Main activity: gathering and quantitative analysis of available documents (newspaper coverage, websites, social media accounts, strategy and policy documents, annual reports, etc) to assess mediatization *of* organizations with the given fields – i.e. education and health. These documents cover period 1998-2018. The material includes representative and statistically robust selection of organizations and relevant material.

2019 – Main activity: gathering and qualitative analysis of material collected through interviews, ethnographic observations of selected organizations and their activities to understand mediatization *in* and *between* organizations. Based on a previous step the material includes at least six case studies (a school and a health center within each sector).

2020 – Main activity: Comparative analysis of the gathered material. Reporting and publishing

Access

The members of the suggested research project have long experience of conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies on organizations within the three sectors – private (Edenius, Fredriksson, Jonsson, Pallas,), public (Fredriksson, Jonsson, Pallas,) and civic (Edenius, Kvarnström). More importantly, several of members have been also involved in research that has been focusing on the targeted fields – i.e. education (Jonsson, Pallas) and health (Edenius). Taken together, the research group possesses theoretical, empirical as well as methodological knowledge and skills that are necessary to be granted access not only to background information about these fields, but also to specific organizations that can be included in our project.

The role of project members

The project is led by Associate professor (promotion to full professorship expected in March 2017) Josef Pallas that has studied mediatization of organizations over the last ten years. Josef has been involved in several successful and productive research projects financed by among other The Swedish Research Council and Jan Wallander's & Tom Hedelius' foundation. He has extensive experience

from conducting qualitative studies where interviews and ethnography are used as a primary method. The composition of the team reflects the different aspects and parts of the project that require skills in multiple methods counting from content analysis, archive research, social media data harvesting, interviews and observations. The project participants also represent different disciplines and theoretical orientations including management and organizational studies, media and communication studies, journalist and information systems research. Altogether the background and experience of the project members ensure necessary theoretical and methodological depth. The members of the research team are well established within their fields (both nationally and internationally) and they are well anchored in the strong research traditions at the Department of Business Studies, Uppsala University and The Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg.

Networks and international collaborations

The characteristics of the project presuppose extensive co-operation and co-ordination with scholars from different disciplines – including fields such management and media studies, sociology as well as political science and history. In other words, it presupposes possibilities to further develop existing and build new networks of scholars interested in research on mediatization that cuts across many empirical as well analytical and theoretical traditions. Members of this team participate in number of international networks and collaborations such as “Mediatization of Culture: The Challenge of New Media” financed by the National Research Council for Culture and Communication and Mediatization section at the European Communication Research and Education Association as well as research networks on mediatization at Oslo University, Bergen University and University of Amsterdam. We also collaborate with our colleagues from Utrecht University and their international project “Calibrating Public Sector Accountability – an international survey”. Magnus Fredriksson and Josef Pallas are also running an own project *Management structures and mediatization of governmental agencies - translations and consequences* as a part of a special research project on democracy and public governance financed by the Swedish Research Council (Särskild satsning på forskning om demokrati och offentlig förvaltning).

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