OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS | Communication Theory

Mediatization from within: A plea for emic approaches to media-related social change

Journal:	*Communication Theory*
Manuscript ID	COMTH-2019-143.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Epistemology, Mediatization, Media Theory, Everyday Life, Media Dependency, Media and Social Change

ABSTRACT

Based on a literature review, this paper shows that current mediatization scholarship is characterized by what Pike (1967) refers to as *etic* accounts. These accounts forward theoretical categories on media-related social change to conclude that our age is characterized by deepened and expanded media reliance. However, such theoretical extrapolation takes place not from, but at the expense of, people's lived experiences, that is, *emic* accounts of mediatization in everyday life. This paper is an attempt to insert the etic/emic distinction to mediatization research in order to develop more reflexive and composite accounts. Drawing on examples from a representative survey and qualitative interviews conducted over twenty years, the paper problematizes etic-oriented conceptions of mediatization. Emic analyses expose how perceptions of media reliance shift over time and thus underscore the need to develop research strategies that simultaneously consider the objective structures of the social (mediatized) world and subjective meaning-making structures.

KEYWORDS

Mediatization, emic/etic approach, epistemology, everyday life, media dependence, social change

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Introduction

One of the challenges of mediatization theory is to describe and validate "media-related social change". While there is a general consensus in the field that mediatization refers to a long-term (meta-)process of change, whereby activities within a growing number of social areas are adapted to and reliant on various media technologies and institutions, there are different ways of conceiving of this change. One important difference concerns how to understand the notion of "long-term"; whether to address mediatization as a modern phenomenon arising with independent mass media institutions, or relate it to a much longer history of technological progress (see Lundby, 2014a). Another – and much less discussed – difference

concerns whether to assess mediatization based on *theoretically driven analyses* of how media shape social life, or through the *lived experience* of different people. This is the distinction between *etic* and *emic* approaches to social life (Pike, 1967). Even if we focus upon relatively recent and empirically graspable alterations, for example related to digitalization, this remains a crucial epistemological issue.

In brief, while etic analyses would start out from pre-established categories and then assess their existence in the social world, emic analyses would try to grasp mediatization processes *from within*; that is, through people's own accounts of media reliance and their potential fluctuation over time and between contexts. Etic and emic approaches are not mutually exclusive, however. When studying mediatization there are good reasons to apply a multiplicity of tools and perspectives to grasp its complex nature, and to be clear about how social change is understood and empirically verified (*Reference removed*). This includes reflecting upon the epistemological nature of one's own research and how etic and emic approaches to mediatization might inform one another.

Against this backdrop, we want to contribute to the theorization of media-related social change pertaining to *everyday life*. While this focus necessarily invokes a rather short time-frame, everyday life is interesting to study

because this is where mediatization is "deeply experienced" – where media are moulded into ordinary, largely taken for granted phenomena – and where emic approaches are particularly valid. We use the term *media reliance* to refer to the condition that such moulding processes lead up to; that is, when media are not only present but also made *meaningful* in everyday life. It is our understanding that adjacent vocabulary, such as "media dependency", is more negatively biased and hence might make us blind to precisely the emic dimensions of mediatization.

If conducted systematically and over time, emic-oriented studies on everyday media reliance will generate thicker descriptions of mediatization than hitherto seen. Even though certain strands have actively promoted a social constructivist understanding of mediatization (e.g., Couldry & Hepp, 2017, Andersson 2017, Schrøder 2017, Bolin 2016), we argue there is a need for (1) more elaborated emic accounts of mediatization, especially when it comes to everyday life, as well as (2) more explicit procedures for integrating emic and etic approaches. As such, we want to specify the general call for further empirical anchoring of mediatization theory that has been raised by several commentators before us (e.g., Jensen, 2013; *Reference removed*). Emic approaches to mediatization can, we argue, bring further epistemological openness and sensitivity to the study of mediatization.

The paper starts out with an introduction to what the etic/emic distinction means and how it is related to similar epistemological terminologies, and a discussion on how mediatization research might benefit from greater sensitivity to this distinction. We then provide an overview of how this issue has been handled in mediatization research, with a particular focus on everyday life. Our overview includes three relatively recent edited volumes, altogether 64 chapters, and shows (a) that the question of etic vs. emic approaches to social change has not been sufficiently addressed (neither in these nor in any related terms) and (b) that there is a lack of studies conducted from an emic point of view. In the following parts, we explore the implications of emic approaches. We first present findings from a representative Swedish survey showing that a major portion of the population think that media technologies are *not* playing a greater role in their lives today than five years ago and will *not* become more important in the forthcoming years. While these results provoke the question of whether the social force of mediatization is actually as strong as some strands of the research literature seem to suggest, they also point to the limitations of survey data when it comes to grasping mediatization from within. Based on Pugh's (2013) view of the manifold meaning(s) of interview data and examples from qualitative interviews conducted over two decades, we then

discuss how emic approaches to mediatization, and qualitative interviews in particular, may deepen our understanding of the changing nature of media reliance in everyday life. This leads to the final part, where we propose a new direction for mediatization theory and research that is more sensitive to the etic/emic distinction.

Emic vs. etic understandings of mediatization

Let us first make a statement concerning our view of mediatization. In recent years, there have been vivid debates around mediatization; what the concept means as well as its usefulness for grasping media's role in society and culture (see, e.g., Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, 2015; Hepp et al., 2015; Corner, 2018). The aim of this paper is not to reiterate or to intervene into these debates concerning the very relevance of mediatization as a concept. Our point of departure is that mediatization is relevant as a *descriptive framing*, or what Jensen (2013; following Blumer, 1954) calls a *sensitizing concept*, for addressing the many ways in which different realms of activity, in organizations as well as everyday life, get dependent on, and adjust to, media. Mediatization is thus not an explanatory concept, but refers to a "complex meta-process" of social change whose composition entails a variety of sub-processes that are differently attuned in different social settings and different media environments (Krotz,

2014). The sub-processes can include anything from the adaptation of people's love life in relation to the proliferation of dating apps to the growing propensity among politicians to use Twitter for coping with the logics of news media. What unites all such situated sub-processes is that they point to the growing reliance on mediated forms of communication, including the technologies, texts and institutional logics and/or social rituals through which mediated communication occurs. Accordingly, we may think of mediatization processes in both "vertical" and "horizontal" terms. They include the *deepening* integration of media as indispensable elements of, say, love and dating practices ("vertical mediatization"), as well as the *expansion* of such forms of dependence to more social groups and other realms of activity ("horizontal mediatization").

We believe that this relatively open characterization of mediatization – in itself an etic (albeit sensitizing) conceptualization – is one that most mediatization researchers can subscribe to. In spite of the rich body of literature on mediatization, however, there is surprisingly little debate concerning how to empirically anchor statements concerning *growing* (deepening and/or expanding) media reliance in everyday life. This is a complicated question regardless of whether we are interested in mediatization's *longue durée* or just its latest waves of digitalization and datafication (see

Couldry & Hepp, 2017). While critical commentators (e.g., Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, 2015; Corner, 2018) have pointed to the tendency in some mediatization research to speak about historical change without providing definitions of change or systematic evidence of how change comes about, there are few systematic attempts to assess how different types of evidence can move mediatization theory and research forward in this regard. One of the most important contributions comes from Jensen (2013) who pleads for mediatization as a sensitizing (as opposed to definitive) concept that needs further grounding in various real-life settings to gain validity. As given by Blumer's (1954, p. 7-8) original reasoning:

> Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look […] In other words, what is common (i.e. what the concept refers to) is expressed in a distinctive manner in each empirical instance and can be got at only by accepting and working through the distinctive expression.

While we subscribe to Jensen's epistemological point, there is also a more specific question that deserves more attention in mediatization research. It concerns the significance of people's actual *experiences* of (potentially growing) media reliance in theoretically derived claims about growing media reliance.

This epistemological dimension corresponds to the distinction between *etic* and *emic* approaches in social research. This distinction was first coined by the behavioral psychologist K. L. Pike (1967) and has since then been used mainly in subject areas like anthropology (e.g., Kottak, 2006) and comparative psychology (e.g., Berry, 1969, 1999). As given by Pike's original formulation, etic and emic approaches provide different starting-points for studying human behavior, but should not be seen as mutually exclusive:

> It proves convenient – though partially arbitrary – to describe behavior from two different standpoints, which lead to results which shade into one another. The etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system. (Pike, 1967, p. 37)

While the differences between etics and emics have sometimes led to problematic divides, meaning for instance that findings may seem contradictory or incompatible (see, e.g., Helfrich, 1999), Pike (1967) saw the two approaches as complementary, reminiscent of a stereographic picture (p. 41). While both approaches have their advantages and shortcomings, they also intersect. The etic approach is basically inescapable since every researcher must start out with some pre-assumption about

the conditions he/she wants to study – like we just did when we defined the basic tenets of mediatization. Another strength of the etic perspective is the ability to compare different empirical sources in order to generate more general theorizations. Emics, by contrast, are good for gaining a deeper sense of how socio-cultural conditions are constructed and why people do what they do and think what they think. In order to reach such knowledge, the researcher (typically a cultural anthropologist, or, ethnographer) must engage with the actual events of a lived situation and try to understand it from the viewpoint of "insiders" (using interviews and other valid data). An emic account should thus, as closely as possible, resemble the view of the actor(s) located within the particular culture or system under study (see, e.g., Kottak, 2006).

According to Pike, the richest understanding of a given social phenomenon is achieved if the researcher manages to integrate the experiences and interpretive frameworks of locally situated individuals and groups with theoretical models that are not affected by the social relations and interests of the communities under study. Other researchers have suggested similar strategies. Berry (1969, 1999), for example, advanced a three-step strategy "to understand human behavior in its cultural context" (1999, p. 165), including, first, a testing of established theories in a new setting (imposed etic);

second, an exploration of "new aspects of the phenomenon being studied in local cultural terms" (ibid.) (emics), and third, an integration of the two approaches in order to generate more complex theories with broader validity (derived etic).

There are also obvious similarities between Pike's view and some well-known sociological epistemologies. Above all, the fusion of etic and emic perspectives resembles Bourdieu's reflexive sociology (which is not surprising given the anthropological inclination of his work). This is evident in Bourdieu's aim to overcome the gap between "social phenomenology" (subjectivism) and "social physics" (objectivism) in order to grasp the social (re)production of power relations (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992, pp. 7-11) and in his relational rather than substantialist approach to social class. We will return to this in the final part of the paper.

Another view that speaks to the etic/emic distinction is grounded theory, originally introduced by Glasser and Strauss (1967). The underlying rationale of grounded theory is that strong social theories can evolve only through an interplay between rigorous inductive research (qualitative or quantitative) and the systematic development of concepts. While there are different directions of grounded theory (see, e.g., Charmaz et al., 2018) a common denominator is that research starts out from relatively open-ended sensitizing

concepts (see Blumer, 1954; Glaser, 1978) whose broader validity and more specific properties are gradually refined through comparison with empirical data. The research process of grounded theory thus reminds us of Berry's (1999) notion of "derived etic". Still, the relation between etics and emics is not exactly the same as the relation between deduction and induction. Whereas emics, just like inductive research, refer to relatively open-ended empirical exploration, emics are *also* – and more importantly in our context – about gaining an *inside view* of *specific social conditions*, that is, a kind of phenomenological understanding. The emic researcher tries to get at the *point of view* of the human subjects whose lifeworlds he or she sets out to study. By contrast, inductive research, and thus grounded theory, may encompass almost any kind of empirical data; "whatever comes the researcher's way while studying a substantive area" (Glaser quoted in Palmer, 2019, p. 98).

To some extent, the etic/emic distinction also resembles the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic knowledge (Helfrich, 1999, p. 132). However, the etic/emic distinction does more than distinguish the particular situation (idiographic) from general patterns or causal laws (nomothetic); it is a way of articulating how the sense-making of situated subjects (emics) is related to the categorizations imposed by the scientist (etics). It is in this latter

respect, we argue, that the etic/emic distinction – or similar understandings as derived from especially Bourdieusian sociology – can inform mediatization research. Especially, general assertions of, for example, "deep mediatization" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 53-56) – a paramount example of a sensitizing concept pertaining to ongoing changes – should be further substantiated through emic analyses of how people in specific locations, life trajectories, and so forth, experience and think about media's impact in their lives now, then and in the future.

An overview of etics and emics in the mediatization literature

There are numerous publications that in different ways try to overview the field of mediatization research and identify different thematic and epistemological orientations and how they map onto other research traditions (see, e.g., Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Lundby, 2014a; Adolf, 2017; Averbeck-Lietz, 2017; Scolari & Rodriguez-Amat, 2018; Nowak-Teter, 2019). In this section, we present an overview of altogether 64 book chapters published in three relatively recent volumes on mediatization: (1) *Mediatization of Communication* (Lundby, 2014b), (2) *Mediatized Worlds* (Hepp & Krotz, 2014), and (3) *Dynamics of Mediatization* (Driessens et al., 2017). These volumes were selected to give a broad overview of how the researchers most

invested in the subject construct their claims around media-related social change, especially related to everyday life. We decided not to include books that deal specifically with fields beyond everyday life, e.g., politics (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014), or books that treat mediatization in a secondary manner, e.g., in relation to "globalized and mediatized eating cultures" (Dürrschmidt & Kautt, 2019). While our overview does not include journal articles, we believe that the picture that emerges from our assessment of these collections – which were edited to stake out the terrains of mediatization research and include the most significant voices in the field – suffices to actualize an important epistemological discussion.

Lundby's (2014b) *Mediatization of Communication* is part of De Gruyter's series of Handbooks of Communication Science. It contains 31 chapters among which one is an introduction to the field authored by Lundby (2014a) and one is a "critical afterthought" written by Livingstone and Lunt (2014). While this book represents the "handbook genre", and thus intends to outline different thematic and theoretical subfields rather than to present empirical cases, most of its chapters also leave aside epistemological issues concerning how to study mediatization. Notably, few authors reflect on whether their arguments are grounded in inside accounts or

externally/theoretically imposed understandings of media-related social change.

The chapters are, according to our reading, biased toward etic approaches. Typical examples include Sumiala's (2014) application of Schulz's (2004) four mediatization sub-processes in the context of public death; Schäfer's (2014) combination of the same four processes with Krotz's (2007) three types of mediatization in order to systematize the mediatization of science, and Lövheim's (2014) integration of different theoretical approaches, following above all Hjarvard's (2013) institutional perspective, to chart the mediatization of religion. The chapters that come closest to the emic view are Hartmann's (2014) study of the mediatization of homing and homelessness that implicitly advances an emic approach through the concept of ontological security and interviews with homeless people; Jansson's (2014) chapter on how media technologies become indispensable in everyday life, which applies qualitative interview data to show how media reliance is experienced, and Madianou's (2014) work on mediatization processes as experienced by Filipino migrants. These chapters provide inside views to highlight ongoing social transformations but do not discuss how this type of evidence may be linked to theoretical models of long-term change. A more extended historical perspective, but without ethnographic sources, is found in Fornäs' (2014) chapter on

the mediatization of popular culture, which problematizes whether the stage of digital mediatization is actually to be conceived of as an intensification of mediatization compared to earlier stages (graphic, print and audiovisual mediatization).

The book also contains two chapters that resonate with emic approaches but without dealing with everyday life; Strömbäck and Esser's (2014) overview of the mediatization of politics, which includes empirical evidence of how elite-decision-makers perceive of the influence of media, and Bogoch and Peleg's (2014) chapter that deploys interview statements from Israeli judges to highlight the mediatization of the legal system. In several other cases, authors discuss media-related changes that directly pertain to the experiential realm without presenting any actual inside view. This goes for, among others, Auslander (2014) who discusses mediatization in terms of "multiselfing" (p. 512) through an analysis of Lady Gaga's music videos; Ess (2014) who analyses the mediatization of selfhood from a philosophical perspective; Hoskins (2014) who discusses the mediatization of social memory through a media ecological approach, and Knorr Cetina (2014) whose chapter outlines the mediatization of human interaction through a theoretical account of the so-called synthetic situation. In his overview of the field, Lundby (2014a) highlights theoretical, epistemological as well as methodological aspects

of mediatization research, including, for example, the above-mentioned distinction between sensitizing and definitive conceptualizations. However, neither he nor Livingstone and Lunt (2014) in their mapping of future research challenges addresses the question of emic vs. etic approaches (or, similar epistemological accounts).

The second book, *Mediatized Worlds*, is edited by Hepp and Krotz (2014a) and contains 18 chapters including an introduction by the editors and a concluding afterthought by Schofield Clark (2014). The volume, according to the editors, introduces a notion of "mediatized worlds" based on social phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, and intends to "ground mediatization research better in an everyday perspective" (Hepp & Krotz, 2014b, p. 9). The editors also state that the study of mediatized worlds means "researching empirically in what way their communicative construction is shaped by various media" (p. 8). These statements seem to call for an emic approach. There is, however, no mentioning of whether the everyday perspective on mediatized worlds should also include an engagement with how people experience or perceive of (potentially growing) media reliance. As Schofield Clark (2014, p. 310) observes in her concluding chapter, most of the contributors to this volume embrace an inductive approach, which means that they try to explore new theoretical avenues for mediatization research and open up new vistas for

future explorations of mediatization. Yet, this inductive orientation, which also rests on a sensitizing conceptualization of mediatization, does not converge with an emic approach. There are in this volume just a few examples of inside views.

The clearest example of an emic approach is provided by Storey and McDonald (2014) in their study of the mediatization of romantic love relations. The chapter includes numerous examples and accounts (in the form of interview extracts) of how ordinary people sense that networked media have changed their love life. The authors also start out from a relatively open-ended conceptual agenda. Another example is Peil and Röser's (2014) study on the mediatized home, which applied "ethnographic household portraits" (p. 239) to analyze the domestication of media. This approach included a panel study conducted with 25 German couples in 2008-2011, which made it possible to observe certain short-term changes in the mediatization/domestication balance. At the same time, the chapter is governed by theoretical presumptions (e.g., concerning domestication) that align with etically oriented research. The same goes for Hepp, Berg and Roitsch's (2014) chapter, which develops the theoretical notion of "mediatized subjective horizons of communitization" based on a rich variety of qualitative data (interviews, diaries as well as drawings), and Christensen's (2014) work on mediatization and

cosmopolitanism, which applies a combination of Bourdieusian field theory and social phenomenology to explore people's engagement with new media technologies. The analytical procedures of these chapters can be described as an etic-emic-etic sequence (cf. Berry, 1999). With these exceptions, the book deals with mediatization processes largely through theoretical considerations that only partially "hit the ground" (cf. Couldry, 2014), and where people's experiences of media reliance are rarely addressed.

The last book in our overview, *Dynamics of Mediatization* (Driessens et al., 2017), contains 15 chapters including an introduction by Driessens and Hjarvard (2017) and a conclusion "charting the road ahead" by Bolin and Hepp (2017). The book is sprung out of the ECREA temporary working group "Mediatization", which became a permanent section of ECREA in 2016. In this book, about half of the contributions can be described as theoretical investigations into the dynamics of mediatization, for instance, concerning the historical relations between "musicalization" and mediatization (Pontara & Volgsten, 2017); the expansion of media museums as a sign of converging processes of mediatization and "musealization", and the theoretical dimensions of the mediatization field as such (Adolf, 2017). A few of the theoretical chapters also reflect on the lingering challenge to specify the nature of media-related change, for example when it comes to the mediatization

of the automobile (Miller, 2017), and the need to account for social agency as an integral part of mediatization processes, for instance in terms of structuration (Perusko, 2017) or "audiencization" (Schrøder, 2017).

Three chapters can be described as emically oriented. One of them is Andersson's (2017) outline of a bottom-up approach to mediatization starting out from the textures of everyday life. The other two chapters are grounded in empirical work conducted in political settings rather than everyday life; Orchard (2017) presents a study of the relations between journalists, politicians and press officers in Chilean politics based on interviews about perceived power-relations, and Garland (2017) deploys interviews with former civil servants and journalists in the UK to discern how relations of dependency have altered since the 1990s an onwards. Garland's chapter is the only one in the book that shows how emic data, that is, empirical accounts from inside a social system (Pike, 1967), can be used to illuminate processes of media-related social change. Interestingly, it is written from a perspective that is more institutionalist than social constructivist and deals with the transformations of politics and journalism rather than everyday life.

In conclusion, our review of key volumes on mediatization shows two important things. First, there are few accounts of

how inside experiences of media-related social change are to be joined with theoretical models and conceptualizations of mediatization. Second, only a minor share of the 64 chapters apply inside empirical data and/or emic approaches to support arguments concerning the mediatization of everyday life. This is not to dismiss any of the above-mentioned contributions to our field. But we see a risk that the overall lack of emic accounts will foster an inclination in mediatization research to emphasize change (as suggested by the very concept) without making justice to the various, complex ways in which life changes with media (to the extent it does) and how people actually feel about it. Building on these earlier works, we want to contribute to the epistemological discussions on mediatization by presenting and discussing two methodological approaches that in different ways try to grasp mediatization from within: a survey study and ethnographic interviews.

A discrepant view of mediatization

We will now turn to survey data in order to problematize the view provided in most of the mediatization literature. In an on-going project called *[Title removed]*, we developed different ways of using surveys to measure everyday media reliance in Sweden. In a postal survey conducted by the SOM Institute (Society Opinion Media) at Gothenburg University in fall 2016 and an online survey conducted by Kantar Sifo in

spring 2019 we asked the following three questions (amongst many others):

(1) There are many media in our everyday lives, such as, newspapers, radio, television, computers and mobiles. On the whole, how important do you think media are in your life today?

(2) In your experience, were media more or less important in your life five years ago?

(3) Do you think media will be more or less important in your life in five years?

These questions were formulated not in order to provide any precise "truth" or measure as to whether people are "in fact" getting more or less reliant on different media, but to get a tentative idea of whether people *think* that their lives are getting more or less reliant on media (implicitly taken as ensembles of different technologies) over time. While this is not a situated investigation of how people in different settings feel about media in their lives, which would call for other methods than survey research, our approach can still be understood as emic in that we asked people about their own perception of change. Also, the survey method has the advantage of enabling insights into how experiences of mediatization are socially structured (according to class, age, gender, geographical location, etc.).

> > INSERT TABLE 1 HERE <<

Regardless of the different sampling and data gathering techniques applied in the two surveys they resulted in similar patterns. When it comes to the *present* condition, a majority (more than 50 percent) of the respondents in both surveys found media to be very important in their lives (values 6 or 7 on a scale from 1 to 7). In the SOM survey, however, there was a larger share, 35 percent, stating the highest level of importance (7) than in the other survey (see Table 1). When it comes to experiences of *change*, there are indeed more people thinking that media will be more important in their lives in the forthcoming five years (16 percent in both surveys) than people stating the opposite, that media will be less important (8 and 14 percent in the two surveys, respectively). There are also more people thinking that media are more important today than five years ago (28/32 percent) than the opposite (9/12 percent). There is thus little support in this material for advocating the "end of mediatization", or to profess that people's felt media reliance in everyday life would decrease. Still, it is worth considering what it means that the *most common thing to state*, as shown in Table 1, is the experience of everyday media reliance remaining stable. A majority of our respondents (61/54 percent) state that media were as important five years ago as they are today. An even greater majority

(74/67 percent) of the Swedish population think that media will be as important in five years as they are today.

There are of course demographic and other social factors playing into the statistical pattern. If we look at the overall experience of media reliance, older people find media to be more essential in their lives than younger people. Experiences of *growing* media reliance, by contrast, are more common among younger people, and among those who have access to a greater number of digital media devices and platforms. Men are somewhat more inclined than women to state that media are becoming more important in their lives. There are also statistically significant correlations between experiences of growing media reliance and media-related lifestyle practices, such as, online shopping, social media use and film watching.

There are good reasons to follow up these findings in longitudinal studies to discern whether the experience of mediatization is foremost a "youth phenomenon", a transitory state of mind tied to identity formation, or if a different demographic pattern might evolve in the future. Our intention here, however, is not to delve deeper into the underlying statistics of felt media reliance in different groups. The question we should ask is of a more epistemological nature. It concerns the somewhat ambiguous relation between our findings and mediatization theory. Why is it that most people do not

experience that media are becoming increasingly important in their lives? And if experiences of growing media reliance are mostly to be found among "media-savvy" youngsters – which seems logical also given arguments around datafication and deep mediatization – how come that older people to a greater extent state that media are very important in their lives? We argue that there is a need for more in-depth emic approaches in mediatization research to get at these questions, in combination with longitudinal research that can capture the changes in how people experience and relate to media in everyday life. In the following section, we demonstrate the value of emic approaches in mediatization research by considering a specific methodological framework for interpretative analysis – the one proposed by sociologist Allison J. Pugh (2013).

The qualitative interview as an emic approach to media-related social change

The research interview has been criticized for merely reflecting what people want to reveal about themselves instead of capturing people's motivations (see, e.g., Sølvberg & Jarness, 2019). In defence of in-depth interviewing, Pugh (2013) provides a sober examination of what interviews can and cannot tell us about culture. In resonance with Pugh's call for more reflexive interpretative analyses, we also argue for

the importance of not taking emic statements about media-related change at face value and for the necessity of considering the specific contexts in which statements are made. In order to argue for the benefits of emic approaches to mediatization, it is particularly worth attending to the four kinds of interview-derived information that Pugh identifies: *the schematic*, *the visceral*, *meta-feelings and the honourable dimension*.

In order to flesh out our argument and illustrate Pugh's framework, we will bring in excerpts from qualitative individual and group interviews that were conducted by two of the authors of this article. The interviews were performed in Sweden during a period of 20 years (1996-2015), within the scope of two interrelated projects: *[Title removed]* and follow-up project *[Title removed]*. The majority of the interviews, around 60, took place between 1996 and 2004, whereas another 35 interviews were conducted in 2015. Thus, all in all, about 100 interviews were carried out. Both sets of interviews aimed to scrutinize the role of media in everyday life. Due to lack of space, this article presents excerpts from these interviews without much reference to their broader context. However, we believe that the generated data – spanning as they do over two decades – are useful for illustrating how one can make sense of emic statements concerning media-related social change. As a "side-effect",

the illustrating data also hint at what further emic-oriented *and* longitudinal research could tell us about media-related change, including variations in how users experience the role of the media in everyday life. We will particularly highlight what the multi-layered meanings of qualitative interviews may add to an emic understanding of mediatization.

Pugh's *schematic* dimension acknowledges the well-known but important fact that interview data reveal more than the spoken word. Respondents' use of language as well as non-verbal cues reflects the frameworks through which they understand the world. We must therefore analyse *how* people answer questions – not only *what* they say. It includes how language is constructed, and what this tells us about people's experiences of their own media use. This can be exemplified by an interview from 1997, in which a woman in her 40s articulates how she reads and relates to the local newspaper (compared to the national one):

> I: What do you read in [the local daily paper]?
>
> R: Quite the same [as in the national newspaper], but as it is local it is different things that catches your attention. It can be things that have curiosity value or proximity value. Not so much advertisements. My husband is better at that.

This woman says she reads the local newspaper in the same way as she reads the national one. But by "inventing" concepts such as "proximity value" and "curiosity value" she also reveals that she considers local news less important than national or international news, and that such news need to add other values besides the sheer information they provide. She hence must legitimize – for the interviewer and potentially also for herself – why she still spends time reading it. This formulation reveals how people sometimes underplay the role of (certain types of) media in their lives, which also gives a clue as to why our survey data showed relatively "moderate" signs of growing media reliance.

The *visceral* kind of information in interviews inhabits "an emotional landscape of desire, morality and expectations", which is communicated through non-verbal cues, such as sighs, facial expressions, laughter or pauses, as well as through unresolved contradictions, silences, unfinished sentences and similar expressions (Pugh, 2013, p. 50). This dimension is evident in one of the interviews from 1990s where Jeanette, a 25-year-old woman tries to explain why she reads so many fantasy books:

> R: I read almost all the time. I read just before you came (laughs). So, it's like…as much, and as often as possible. […] It is because you…you…walk into the book so to speak,

> you kind of disappear into the book. You follow the flow. I mean, I don't say that I have never been crying for something that happened outside of a book, kind of, but it's… It carries me away so much. Almost too much. It's sounds so silly when you try to explain….

It is obviously emotional for Jeanette to explain how she can spend so much time on a media practice that others consider a waste of time. The way the interview reveals her struggles to balance societal norms with her devotion to fantasy literature uncovers the strategies she has developed to balance her reading with other (more highly valuable) things she feels she *needs* to do in everyday life (such as to study). The interview thus shows how media saturation and reliance often constitute a difficult-to-grasp undercurrent in everyday life.

The interviews conducted in 2015, in a largely different media landscape, hold numerous examples of how people frame their uses of social media. An excerpt from a conversation among working-class men in their 50s about how to manage and (more explicitly) decrease their number of Facebook friends serves to illustrate how the visceral dimension of interview data can reveal what certain everyday media practices in a highly digitalized culture *feels like*.

> L: …no matter how I try [no to be detected], people find

me. Even though I don't have a [profile] picture or anything, but they seem to "well, that must be him", and they send [me] a friend request. But then I realise that, no… ah, they check in on their yoga course every Tuesday, and "I don't care about your yoga course every Tuesday". Or, "now we're kind of having a nice Friday night". No, I don't care about your nice Friday night. Off they go! I just state that, no, I don't need this person, even close to me. Get rid of them. (Laughs)

I: Okay so you just unfriend them. Is that easy for you, or…?

L: Yes, when they show that side of themselves, that they just keep posting all these things. Then I'm not interested and they simply have to face it.

B: Do they get a message about it…or?

L: I don't know and I don't care. (Laughs)

What these men say about unfriending acquaintances and colleagues in their networks is content-wise prompt and clear, but *the way* they talk and laugh in the conversation can be interpreted as an uncertainty as to what is acceptable behaviour on social media. Playfully, the respondents try out how their personal social media morale fits with the others'.

Meta-feelings capture "how we feel about how we feel" and provide insights into discrepancies between "how someone feels

and how they feel they *ought* to feel" (Pugh, 2013, p. 51). They comprise indeterminate notions of wright and wrong, repulsion, pride, or resigned acceptance of the way one feels.

In our interviews from the 1990s, meta-feelings were, for example, expressed in accounts of discomfort about media dependency, particularly in relation to television. Especially upper middle-class respondents tended to both relate their own media practices to certain cultural ideals and to *reflect upon their own way of reasoning*. Helena, a chemical engineer in her late twenties, told in the interview that she had given her television set away to her parents because she felt it "didn't give her anything". Reflecting on her relation to what she apprehended as a societal norm, she said:

> My life was never enriched by watching TV shows that are just entertainment packed with commercials. I don't know… I never felt I learned anything. Not that everything has to be so damn productive but it wasn't even fun, kind of, it was just a way of killing time.

In our interviews from 2015, similar ways of talking about one's media use were much rarer. Throwing the TV set out or giving the media away was never discussed as an option, since, at this point in time, digital devices were simply too personal and intertwined with everyday life practices (albeit

various media resistance tactics did appear in the discussions about how one lived and *should* live). A gender-mixed group of art students constantly laughed when talking about how social media interfered with how they spent their time.

> L: (laughs) Yes, but, Tumblr's infinite scroll thing, you just sit down and… it just loads more and more, it never ends! […]
>
> E: Ah…yes! (All laugh)
>
> L: You just sit like this [shows a fictive mobile phone in her hand]. The absolutely worst is if you do that and after a couple of hours you come back to where you have already been. Then you get, or *I* get this *really guilty feeling*, kind of. Like "I've been checking Tumblr, this is no good. Now you go out and *do something*!" (All laugh)

The constant joking about social media in this group shows that concerns with media reliance change shape over time. These students humorously tell – not without a certain kind of pride – that they are addicted to social media, while simultaneously expressing awareness about their own ambivalent feelings as well as about other peoples' (judgemental) attitudes.

The last of Pugh's categories, which is to some extent present in all the others too, bring forward how interviewees present

themselves *honourably*. This aspect refers to interviewees' tendency to present themselves in the most favourable way, thereby also potentially revealing what is perceived as honourable behaviour in their cultural context. Our data contain many examples of honourable accounts in relation to ideas of legitimate media use. The data from the 1990s are particularly rich on statements about the problematic role of television in everyday life and how the passivity of TV viewing must be balanced by other activities. Interviewees typically constructed television as a "time thief", stealing time from other, conceivably more important, duties (cf. Steiner, 1963; Hirsch, 1992, *reference removed*). One respondent, a father, described how "family norms" made it socially difficult for him *not to watch* the Friday family shows even though he disliked them. To deal with this feeling of media dependency, he had developed strategies to make the TV night more comfortable – such as bringing an instrument to the TV-sofa:

> It's hard for me to just sit still and consume, I prefer to add something more. I turn the sound up and play with it, quietly of course, so that the others can still hear.

By telling how he multitasks in front of the TV, this respondent displays his role as a devoted family man while also articulating an honourable practice of media resistance

(cf. Syvertsen, 2017). In other words, he legitimizes his experienced "passive" media use by adding a more "productive" practice to it.

In the interviews conducted in 2015, interviewees also presented themselves as honourable media users, however in a different manner. Notably, the spatial organisation of (increasingly mobile) media was a far more important part of the media routines presented in the interviews compared with the 1990s. Respondents described how they had introduced spatial rules to maintain a respectable life-structure, such as "no mobile phones during dinners", "no digital devices in the bedroom", or "regular walks without the mobile phone" (*reference removed*).

The honourable dimension has led many to criticize the scientific value of research interviews. However, if we recognize this dimension as information in itself about *how it feels to live with the media at different points in time*, the interviews become valuable emic tools for grasping both how people cope with media technologies and the social norms attached to them *and* the broader cultural understandings framing such negotiations. Such tools are vital to qualify statements regarding media-related social change beyond (longitudinal) survey data.

If we relate the interview snippets presented above to the larger debate about the mediatization of everyday life, we find that people have for more than twenty years experienced a deep media saturation in their everyday lives. But we also find that the experience of media reliance shifts over time. Whereas respondents in the earlier interviews talked about media reliance largely in terms of activity and passivity in relation to *media content*, respondents in the follow-up interviews also voiced more complex concerns with the *entanglement* of humans and *the media as technological artefacts* and the *interference* of technologies in daily life. The way in which this qualitative shift unfolds through inside accounts – implicitly as well as explicitly – says something important about the limitations of etic-oriented approaches; notably the risk of conceiving of mediatization in a too "mechanical" way that blinds us to the manifold layers of human experience.

While our empirical examples illuminate the volatile nature of mediatization processes, the argument put forward here is mainly epistemological in nature. The quotes serve to exemplify the benefits of qualitative interview data as part and parcel of a composite emic-etic approach to mediatization. Here, Pugh's (2013) categorization provides an analytical tool for getting behind interview statements to grasp the ambiguities of human experience. As such, the four categories

should be handled with great reflexivity on behalf of the analyst, which also means that they should assist us in discovering how socio-cultural factors play into our own theoretical presumptions (etics) about mediatization.

Conclusion: Toward emic-etic mediatization research

This paper has been an attempt to insert the distinction between emic and etic research approaches to emphasize the importance of composite accounts of mediatization. As we have shown, current mediatization scholarship is mainly characterized by what Pike (1967) refers to as etic accounts. These accounts forward theoretical, oftentimes sensitizing categories on media-related social change to conclude that our age is characterized by deepened and expanded media reliance. This evokes expectations also on how it feels to live with media. At worst, etic accounts of mediatization mirror the researcher's "scholastic illusion" (Bourdieu, 1990a). A lack of grounded, emic-oriented analysis may lead to mistaking the "things of logic for the logic of things" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 49). We thus invite scholars of mediatization to further ask, with Bourdieu: "what does the fact of thinking within a scholastic space, an academic space, imply? What does our thinking owe to the fact that it is produced within an academic space?" (Bourdieu, 1990a: 380). What, in other words,

are we missing by not to a greater extent penetrating the lived experiences of mediatization?

In drawing upon examples from both a representative survey and qualitative interviews conducted over twenty years, we have problematized the etic-oriented conception of mediatization as a dominant process of deepening and expanding media dependence. The emic view provided here suggests that mediatization, when approached through interviews as *perceived* media saturation and reliance, is constructed differently by different actors at different stages in history (let alone that the time-span of our study is relatively short). The value of emic accounts in mediatization theory and research will thus grow as we continue to gather first-hand material from different sites.

Pike (1967), it should be noted, formulated the distinction between emics and etics to illustrate their complementary nature. Granted, the emic approaches advanced in this paper are not without their shortcomings – not even in accounting for contemporary transitions. If we consider Deuze's (2011) claim that we now live "in the media" rather than "with the media", it is not surprising that most people do not consider the media to have become more important today compared to five years ago, as our survey data suggest. How can we rely on lived experiences if those experiences are shrouded by the

deep integration and naturalization of media in our daily lives? How can we expect people to account for media change if we are at a point in the history of mediatization when media have become taken for granted, close to invisible? This is where etic perspectives should complement emic ones. Future research must be able to both explicate and categorize *actual* deepening and expanding media dependencies (etic dimension) *and* get at the *experiences* that account for them (emic dimension). Such a symbiotic strategy (see Berry, 1999) can only be realized by simultaneously considering the objective structures of the social world, such as increased presence of, and reliance on, media, and subjective meaning-making structures (cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). We call, thus, for mediatization scholars to besides providing more longitudinal research also account for the stereographic picture that the combined emic-etic perspective affords. Doing so requires qualitative *and* quantitative, inside *and* outside perspectives on everyday media reliance.

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Table 1: Experiences of media reliance – present, past and future (percentages)

	SOM 2016	Kantar Sifo 2019
PRESENT		
Media are *very important* in my life today (7 on a scale 1-7)	35	18
PAST		
Media were less important five years ago	28	32
Media were as important five years ago as they are today	61	54
Media were more important five years ago	9	12
Don't know	2	2
FUTURE		
Media will be less important in five years	8	14
Media will be as important in five years as they are today	74	67
Media will be more important in five years	16	16
Don't know	2	4
Answers	1692	3902

Note: The SOM study was conducted as a postal survey in fall 2016, including a national sample in the ages 16-85 years. The Kantar Sifo study was conducted as a web-based survey in spring 2019, directed to a representative panel in the age span 18-90 years.