

Mediatized Rituals: Understanding the Media in the Age of Deep Mediatization

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In this article, I propose the concept of mediatized ritual as a conceptual update to media events and media rituals. With this concept, I intend to better address the ritualistic orientation that privileges an increasingly mediatized social reality constructed through algorithmic collection, processing, and (re)presentation of data and metadata by communication technologies. I argue that to understand mediatized ritual, the media must be understood not as genres or media institutions, but as (1) the technological affordance and human practices of networked access to information and (2) the social perception of tamper-resistance of information, which construct the social reality in a mediatized manner. Blockchain technology and its social nature are analyzed as an example of the utility of the concept. The sociological implications regarding rituals, trust, normalcy, and power-relationship are also discussed.

Keywords: mediatized ritual, deep mediatization, networked access, tamper-resistance, blockchain

The ritualistic aspect of human communication has long received attention from philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists, as well as communication scholars (e.g., Carey, 2009; Dewey, 1916; Durkheim, 1995; Geertz, 1957). Their theorization of rituals sheds light on how the communication of meanings—a process that is increasingly mediated—shapes, maintains, and challenges human association of diverse forms. The overall understanding is that, in human societies, we communicate through shared symbolic systems not only to articulate the meanings *of* the social reality, but also to articulate the meanings *for* the social reality (Carey, 2009).

As the concept of ritual catches media scholars' attention, "the media" start to assume a central role in the inquiries and, for analytical reasons, start to be separated from the rest of the society so that the media's roles in the construction and maintenance of society can be understood (Couldry, 2003; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Rothenbuhler, 1998). The advantage of such analyses is that they delineate the media's roles on the societal level, such as those of media events, beyond individual psychological effects. But an unintended consequence is that these analyses tend to see the media as separate and stand-alone entities against the backdrop of society. Thus, the world *in* the media is pitted against the world *outside* them. People's ritualistic orientation privileging the world in the media is conceptualized as a causal agent of other aspects of the social reality while they are indeed mutually constituted. The conceptualization of this orientation, the hegemonic (mis)recognition of the ritual power of the category of the world inside the media, only serves to demarcate the media—that is, media genres for Dayan and Katz (1992) and media institutions

for Couldry (2003)—from the rest of the society. This conceptual emphasis in media studies is largely due to the media-centric perspective that scholars assume (see Moores, 2018, for an argument for non-media-centric media studies).

As media content production is decentralized and technologies that mediate metadata instead of traditional media contents become more integrated into every aspect of mundane experiences, the contrast between things in the media and those outside it becomes less productive in allowing for understanding of how the media construct the “sacred” social reality. Therefore, we must move away from the media-centric perspective and assume the vantage point of people’s orientation toward the ritual power of everyday mundane practices and meanings that increasingly play out through technologies dealing with data and metadata.

In this article, I propose a concept that I call mediatized rituals, as an update of media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992) and media rituals (Couldry, 2003), to understand our ritualistic orientation toward a perceived social center that is increasingly constructed in a mediatized manner. In other words, I want to move the spotlight back to “rituals” from “the media” while acknowledging that the rituals are increasingly mediatized. As will be shown later, the term *mediatized rituals* in this article differs from other colleagues’ uses of it (Cottle, 2006; Sumiala, 2014), which still tend to assume a media-centric stance.

I define mediatized rituals as people’s ritualistic orientation in their mundane lives that privileges the social reality constructed through ensembles of technologies that collect, process, and act on data and, increasingly, metadata. This privileging orientation can manifest in the meanings, importance, and trust that people bestow on that reality and in the series of practices derived from the meanings, importance, and trust. I believe that the advantages of this concept lie in (1) its ability to further explicate the constitution of the rituality of the decentralized communication environment in contemporary times and (2) the ability to broaden media content to all data, such as algorithmically collected and processed metadata circulating through networked technologies, in addition to the “data” that we traditionally understand as messages or content.

Where Is the Social Center Located in the Concept of Ritual?

The conceptual core behind the idea of ritual is the sacred meanings we subscribe to, what Durkheim (1995) calls “the serious side of life” (p. 386). When media scholars attempt to locate those meanings, they naturally start with the relationship between the media representation and the social center that defines the sacred meanings. Following Weber (1946), Dayan and Katz (1992) see the social center represented in media events existing outside the media and embedded in other sources of power, such as charismatic heroes, legal authorities, or traditions. Therefore, social institutions outside the media are conceptualized as the social center and left without further deconstruction because the analytical focus here is the media’s role of representing them. In fact, Dayan and Katz (1992) explicitly argue that for a media event to be perceived as legitimate, it must be organized “outside the media” (p. 11) as a syntactic formula of this media genre. Were the media to be actively involved in, rather than simply relaying, the event, the legitimacy or ritual power of the broadcast event would be suspect.

Years later, when Katz and Liebes (2007) further reflect on the decline of the social integration power of the media event genre, they cite cynicism toward social institutions as a key reason. They argue

that the reason for weakened media events lies in the weakened ritual power of the social center that the media represent, and the media genre itself is not the culprit.

To critique Dayan and Katz's (1992) uncritical view of the media and their power, Couldry (2003) proposed the concept of "media ritual." He called Dayan and Katz's media event theory a "neo-Durkheimian" approach that simply provides an account, in the modern broadcast age, of the same process as the totemic worship renewing tribal loyalty.

Instead, Couldry (2003) argues for a post-Durkheimian approach to deconstruct the power of the media themselves as the social center. He argues that the media claim to represent a sacred social center to conceal their own power in the construction of the very social center they claim to be simply representing. The social center, he argues, is a "myth of the mediated center" (p. 45). The media do a great job concealing their roles in the construction of the center with the discourses of media representation, such as the use of the term *reality television*. The concentration of the symbolic power in media institutions and the careful guarding of the power result in our ritualistic orientation privileging the world in the media. The audience members are directed to "misrecognize," and are thus oblivious to, the power of the media to construct the social center and to define the social reality for them (Couldry, 2002, 2003).

Couldry's (2002, 2003) critique of the social center as a myth constructed by the media is important in two respects. First, the concept of media rituals focuses on people's phenomenological experiences, what he calls their categorical orientations toward the worlds in and outside the media. This enables the concept of media ritual to go beyond ceremonial occasions, such as media events, to encompass a much wider set of media-related practices manifested in everyday life. Second, the concept deconstructs the social center as a myth produced by the media. This critical perspective foregrounds the power held by the media as a social institution in modern societies.

However, Couldry's (2003) critique stops at the media institution, which is itself separated from the rest of the social processes. He deconstructs the social center and puts the spotlight back on the media institution; however, he fails to further analyze what constitutes the media's power, other than saying that the symbolic power is carefully guarded through professional practices, such as journalistic gatekeeping, and through the actual physical boundaries around media studios or former production sites. This conceptualization, while deconstructing the social center, only ends up reinforcing the idea of the media being separate from the rest of the society.

Seeing the media as well-guarded institutions independent from other social processes leads to a conceptual difficulty in applying the concept of media ritual to many contemporary communication technologies. With the proliferation of interactive media and the rise of mass self-communication (Castells, 2007), participating in the world in the media by tweeting, blogging, YouTubing, live-streaming, online-reviewing, and so on, is much easier now. Then, do so many people share the social center, or the world in the media, and hence, are they all sacred now? Certainly not. I argue that the conceptual difficulty of making sense of the ritual implications of new technologies in our everyday lives with Couldry's media ritual is rooted in a unique techno-social condition, what Couldry and Hepp (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, 2018; Hepp, 2013a, 2013b) call "mediatization." In mediatized societies, the media can no longer be understood as bounded

institutions, professionally or physically, apart from the rest of the society. Rather, they are an aspect of everyday life manifested in technologies, human practices, and social meanings in all social domains.

The Decentralized Social Center in the Deep-Mediatized Society

The concept of mediatization has been proposed to explore the increasingly intertwined relationships between communication technologies and all kinds of other social processes (Hepp, 2013b; Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2009; Schulz, 2004). Early mediatization arguments focus on the increasing transformation of other social processes according to a media logic (Altheid & Snow, 1979; Hjarvard, 2008; Schultz, 2004). Later, with scholarly caution against a media-centered perspective (Couldry, 2008), mediatization is increasingly conceptualized as a "metaprocess" (Hepp, 2013b, p. 46) that encompasses the reciprocal relationship between media-communicative change and sociocultural change. This conceptualization is similar to how we understand other metaprocesses, such as urbanization, globalization, commercialization, and so on, as forms of social changes that intertwine with changes in other social processes. The urban, the global, and the commercial are not conceptualized as stand-alone entities, but only as discernible patterns that constitute, and are constituted by, what happens in various social domains—so should "the media" in deep-mediatized societies be understood. If it is difficult to apply the concept of media ritual—that is, people's ritualistic orientation toward the categorical difference between the world in and outside the media—to new media technologies that blur the traditional boundary between the inside and the outside, maybe *the media*, or the myth of the mediated center, that receive people's ritualistic orientation should not be conceived as a stand-alone institution.

Instead, media ritual should be considered as mediatized ritual, a cultural orientation that privileges a social reality increasingly constructed through mediatized social processes that encompass not only media communications, but also material conditions, symbolic meanings, and social practices in various social processes.

Doing away with the separation of media from other social processes and reorienting the concept of ritual toward mediatized social processes are especially necessary considering that nowadays, the sacred "social reality" is not only constructed by the information (data) transmitted through communication technologies such as traditional media content, but also increasingly constructed by metadata, which are delinked from the specific acts in isolated social processes and then algorithmically aggregated, processed, and (re)presented. Couldry and Hepp (2018) call this stage of mediatization "deep mediatization" (p. 7). Only by replacing the idea of reified media with dynamic metaprocesses of mediatization that play out differently in various social domains in our everyday life can we make the ritualistic orientation toward the media applicable to today's media communications environment.

The perceived social center is in fact a constructed social reality hanging in the web of various social processes that are increasingly mediatized, and our (mis)recognition of that social center is ritualistic.

Characteristics of the Mediatized Construction of Social Reality

Ritual theories, including media rituals, usually attend to society-wide meanings, practices, and social organizations. If the media have decentralized into the fabrics of everyday life to construct a social

reality in the deep mediatization, investigating society-level mediatized rituals will basically involve every aspect of everyday life. However, Hepp and Hasebrink (2018) argue that even though the society as a whole undergoes mediatization as a metaprocess, mediatization plays out differently in various social domains. Therefore, a specific social domain is a good starting point to understand the mediatized ritual within it, even if the specific communication technologies, people's social practices related to these technologies, and the shared meanings they subscribe to are not immediately generalizable to other domains.

In this section, I argue that for a sacred social center to be constructed and perceived as such in a deep-mediatized social domain, the communication environment of this social domain should have two characteristics: networked access to, and perceived tamper-resistance of, information about the social reality. Both characteristics, as I will explain in the following, contribute to the social actors' (mis)recognition of the sacred status of the constructed social reality, at least within a certain social domain.

Networked Access to Information

Networked access to information for those who are connected through their uses of an ensemble of communication technologies in a social domain can give rise to shared meanings. The meanings here are not necessarily specific semantic understandings, but frames of relevance (Couldry & Hepp, 2018). Schutz (1970) defines relevance as "the importance ascribed by an individual to selected aspects of specific situations and of his activities and plans" (p. 321). What's more, according to Schutz (1970), relevance can be socially imposed. For individuals to share a common relevance, Schutz, in his phenomenological analysis of social relations, argues that there must be interpersonal involvement in the same time and space. This interpersonal involvement gives people a "we-relationship" (p. 322) and a shared orientation. However, in larger social domains, especially in highly mediatized societies, experiences of others become increasingly indirect and inference based. Therefore, shared relevance-frames in various social domains increasingly rely on actors being connected through communication technologies that not only relay, but also algorithmically process and (re)present, information.

Traditional mass media such as newspaper or television can certainly be considered as providing people with networked access to information that facilitates connections among them, framing shared meanings and cultivating common social practices in a social domain or even in an entire society. Consider the media event of a presidential inauguration that is broadcast live for free; the sense of sharing the media representation in real time by the social members imposes a frame of relevance on the represented social reality and the identity meanings articulated by the representation. In deep mediatization, however, people join the networks in social domains through communication technologies ranging from blockchain mining to installing a smart speaker at home. The access to not necessarily the same piece of information, but rather the same processes, or algorithms, of collecting, processing, and representing information, imposes a frame of relevance on a social actor's personal experience and phenomenologically *objectivates* it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) as a mediatized social reality.

There are two caveats in the understanding of "networked access." First, "networked" access to information in no way means open access, which denotes being free from technological, financial, and legal barriers (Suber, 2012; Willinsky, 2005). With more and more sophisticated communication technologies

becoming the infrastructure of social domains in the deep-mediatised society, being networked-in is no longer as basic as turning on the radio or talking to the neighbors. It is increasingly predicated on one's financial ability and technological know-how, in addition to his or her social position within established institutions. Therefore, specific mediatised rituals could manifest in specific social groups instead of the entire society. In this way, groups could be privileged or marginalized by the deep-mediatised social reality.

Second, actors' networked access to information means not only receiving it, but also contributing to it. Actors constantly "give off" (Goffman, 1959) meta-information about their communicative practices. Information in daily communications, such as search results or prices of online merchandise, is in turn contingent on the information given off by this actor and many other connected actors in the network. In such ways, social reality is not media content in the traditional sense, but notification of interested news based on previous browsing history, advertisements based on credit history, traffic route suggestions based on surveillance of locations, and comparing calories burned during exercise with friends, and so on. This raises ethical questions such as discrimination, the right to be forgotten, and the actors' motivations in the construction of the social reality. Consequently, the mediatised rituals, compared with media events and media rituals, could be under much heavier influence of commercial motivation and state surveillance, which further influence who are networked-in and who are excluded.

The Tamper-Resistant, Hence "Authentic," Information

In addition to the networked access to information that objectivates individual actors' experiences as a social reality, in deep mediatisation, for a ritualistic orientation toward the mediatised social reality to arise, the communication environment in a certain social domain also needs to cultivate a sense of tamper-resistance or absence-of-manipulation of that social reality even though actors are now actively participating in its construction. As Poggi (1993) puts it, the act of signifying meanings must be separated from the meaning itself.

This separation to foster the sense of tamper-resistance in mass media representations has been theorized in various ways. Journalists' ritualistic objectivity as a professional norm has provided the assurance of tamper-resistance for news readers in the mass media age (Schudson, 2001; Tuchman, 1972). The branding discourse of "reality" in reality television is another example of constructing a sense of tamper-resistant and authentic representations to conceal media's active construction of the social center (Couldry, 2003; Murray, 2004). The media production principle of constructing a bystander's perspective, for example, with over-the-shoulder shots in television, also helps the audience to experience "overhearing" without intervening in the reality they witness (Cui, 2018; Scannell, 1991).

In media events, a necessary syntactic formula to convey the sense of tamper-resistance involves the events being planned outside the media. Dayan and Katz (1992) argue that media events are produced by specialists of the outside broadcasting (OB) units. The studio simply serves as intermediary between the OB specialists and the audience. The point of separating the studio and the field is to construct the perception of separating a media institution's involvement from the actual articulation of the "serious side of life" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 386) by the sacred social center.

In Couldry's (2003) media rituals, the careful guarding of the boundary between media institutions and the outside world is also an effort to fend off contamination of the media's self-proclaimed integrity in representing social reality and the ability to provide the audience the access to the social center. The distinction between the world in and outside the media is effectively signifying the resistance to any potential tampering with the sacred inside from the profane outside.

However, as I argued earlier, in contemporary mediatized societies, the average audiences do have access to the media through producing user-generated content and data. If many people have access to the construction of the social reality in the media, that reality is wide open to attempts of manipulation. The authenticity and ritual power of that reality are at risk of suspicion or even collapse.

In a deep-mediatized society that is characterized by relaxed access to media institutions and distrust toward established professional and cultural norms, I argue that people are increasingly resorting to technologies in the mundane details of everyday life to ensure the sense of a tamper-resistant social reality that the media technologies constantly (re)present.

One new technological affordance to help achieve this perception of tamper-resistance is what DuPont (2017a, 2018) calls the "notational" nature of communication technologies. These notational technologies, which include most forms of digital technologies, can give identities to "abstracted entities." DuPont argues that previous technologies of representation, including radio and television, were based on resemblance between the reality and the representation, which lacks coherent normative grounds for what constitutes good or loyal resemblance. In other words, a social reality through resemblance-based representation is "conventional and mutable" (DuPont, 2017a, p. 637). Therefore, the tamper-resistance of the representation must derive not from the representations themselves, but from the credibility of the media institutions.

Digital representations, on the other hand, are based on notations instead of resemblance. The performance of notation relies on (1) a notational scheme composed of tokens that are "disjoint" and "finitely differentiated" (DuPont, 2017a, p. 644) and (2) a notational system that is a superset of notational schemes based on semantic rules. Therefore, notational systems are semantically disjoint and finitely differentiated so that originally indistinguishable entities are perceived as distinct through notations. DuPont further argues that many modern digital technologies can be considered "notational" because the properties of the objects of notation can be abstracted away through the notation scheme and notation system to form a "new, artificial identity" (DuPont, 2017a, p. 645). He sees contemporary computers as "a socially constructed and ultimately arbitrary, yet reliable and positive, test for compliance between the material performance and the intended notation" (p. 645). Because of the rigid rules in the notation systems using tokens in the notation schemes, a person can be abstracted into a sequence of genes or a data set of locations, browsing history, purchasing behaviors, friend lists, and so on; both are systems of notation and abstract entities with unique identities that can be, on one hand, objectivated or considered tamper-resistant, and on the other hand, controlled and managed. Substituting notational technology for the credibility of social institutions seems to be increasingly resorted to in the deep-mediatized society to prop up the credibility of the social reality constructed by powerful institutions.

Jointly, the characteristics of networked access to information and the perceived tamper-resistance of information in a social domain give rise to the ritualistic orientation privileging this deep-mediatized social reality that is technologically objectivated and perceived as authentic and sacred for the actors who are networked in.

In the next section, I analyze blockchain technology as an example of a specific social domain with a sacred social reality constructed through mediatizing processes that are characterized by the networked access to, and perceived tamper-resistance of, information.

Blockchain as an Example of the Mediatized Ritual

After the stellar rise of the cryptocurrency prices in 2017, and their dramatic fall after that, applications of blockchain technology have proliferated into many social domains, ranging from medical record management (Zhang, Schmidt, White, & Lenz, 2018) and financial transaction processing (Swartz, 2018) to smart contract recordation and execution (DuPont, 2017b), and copyright authentication (Baym, Swartz, & Alarcon, 2019). Why would people pay thousands of dollars for a digital coin that is but a few lines of computer code? Why would people consider contracts signed and recorded in the blockchains to be authentic and notarial? Why do we trust news stories whose shares and revisions can be traced in the blockchain records? In other words, why are blockchains considered an authentic representation of social reality? What is the basis of our ritualistic orientation toward the sacred reality *in* the blockchain?

In January 2009, a group or individual under the name of Satoshi Nakamoto created the first Bitcoin using the open-source software that Nakamoto detailed in a white paper released a few months earlier (Nakamoto, n.d.). Some enthusiasts in the cryptography community started to implement the software and “mine” Bitcoins in a decentralized peer-to-peer network. Today, despite the extreme volatility of its value, Bitcoin has a market capitalization in the hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars.

Behind Bitcoin and all cryptocurrencies is the blockchain technology that makes them essentially a decentralized peer-to-peer and cross-validating public ledger system. The name *blockchain* comes from the fact that the interested information—medical, financial, legal, and so on—is recorded in blocks of digital records, and each block also refers to the block generated before itself. At a certain time interval that depends on the blockchain system, a new block is generated with a unique hash, a cryptographically determined text string based on the information the current block records and the hash of the previous block (many blockchain networks also have a mining mechanism to reward users who verify the records). When a new block is being generated, the information it records is broadcast to the entire network. Users will independently verify the recorded information through a cryptographic calculation. In the verification process, the information, including the hash of the previous block and the new information recorded in the current block, will be used to calculate a unique hash value for the current block. Modifying any information will result in a different hash for the current block, leading to a failed verification that rejects the modified information. What’s more, the hashing verification is done redundantly throughout the network; therefore, it is calculated that for someone to successfully manipulate the decentralized verification process, or the hash calculation process, this person has to control a very large percentage of the entire computing power or cryptocurrency asset (depending on the blockchain system mechanisms) in the network to validate the

manipulated transactions and reject the authentic records. In large blockchain networks, this is believed statistically unlikely to happen.

The hashing and blockchain mechanisms explained in the preceding paragraphs are effectively algorithmic measures to guarantee the “networked-access of information” and “tamper-resistance of information” for all parties in a blockchain network. Because all the transactions and hash values of the previous and current blocks are broadcast in the entire network, the network algorithmically or, as will be discussed later, institutionally (De Filippi & Wright, 2018) guarantees the access of information. Meanwhile, the consensus through the distributed verification of the notational blocks of information confers the sense of tamper-resistance to the reality created in the blockchain network. In other words, even though it is technologically possible for someone to control enough computer power to override the other users and authenticate tampered records—in fact, this is quite possible now with the concentration of mining pools (DuPont, 2018)—the discourse regarding the tamper-resistant hashing mechanism frames most users’ ritualistic understanding of the blockchain technology as a viable means of access to the “authentic” social reality.

The blockchain technology, in essence, is a social domain constituted by human users; computers; network hardware; software codes; practices of transacting, recording, verifying, and mining; and the cultural understanding of its networked and tamper-resistant nature, all rolled into one trusted or “real” social reality. The actors, both human and nonhuman agents, are connected through media technologies to form a network. In this ensemble of media technologies, from smartphones and desktops to specialized mining computers, from the specific blockchain software systems and cryptocurrency wallet apps to blockchain-enabled music players or logistic tracking sensors, social practices emerge and sediment around the recording, broadcasting, and confirming of block information. The information accessible to the entire network, perceived as tamper-resistant as it circulates through the network, provides a shared meaning, or frame of relevance, to all users. Thus, traditional money, contracts and ledgers, and so on, as Georg Simmel (1978), argues, have gradually transformed from material objects into functional institutions that, I argue, are increasingly constituted by communicative technologies today. Reality is increasingly constructed by “nothing but the pure form of exchangeability” (Simmel, 1978, p. 138) in deep mediatization.

Discussion: Trust, Normalcy, and Ritual Power

In this article, I intend to provide a conceptual update of media events and media rituals with what I call mediatized rituals, defined as people’s ritualistic orientation in their mundane lives that privileges the social reality constructed through ensembles of technologies that collect, process, and act on data and metadata. With this conceptualization, we hope to avoid reifying the media into a rigid media genre such as media events, or media institutions such as in media rituals, in order to better make sense of the contemporary social life as mediatized social processes in which communicative technologies are seamlessly weaved into the fabrics of everyday mundanity. I believe that the concept of mediatized ritual provides three conceptual advantages in media sociology inquiries.

First, this conceptualization helps bring to the foreground the invisible normalcy of everyday social life instead of the extraordinary ceremonial moments. Dayan and Katz (1992), by focusing on the extraordinary moments of the media representations, specifically theorize media events as liminal moments

when everyday norms are suspended, and life shifts from the "indicative mode" to the "subjunctive mode" (p. 104). Couldry's (2003) media rituals broaden this special orientation toward the media events to encompass more mundane moments in everyday life related to the world in the media. But by distinguishing the worlds in and outside the media, Couldry still grants some kind of extraordinariness to the space and time in the media and pits this extraordinariness against the ordinary world outside the media. Couldry considers the trip to a film production site a "pilgrimage" away from the mundane home and the awe at a celebrity's sudden presence a micro-moment of suspending one's mundane life. Therefore, there is still an undertone of liminality in Couldry's understanding of the media and media rituals.

In mediatized rituals, because the media are seen as embedded in ensembles of technologies, social practices, and relevance-frames in everyday life, people's ritualistic orientation toward the social reality of mediatized construction is indeed toward the mundane everyday life and toward the sense of normalcy, of ordinariness, instead of extra-ordinariness. This phenomenological stance taken in the conceptualization of mediatized rituals emphasizes "the world as it appears for interpretation to particular *situated* social actors, from *their* point of view within wider relations of interdependence" (Couldry & Hepp, 2018, p. 5). Therefore, the concept of mediatized rituals explicates how the everyday details, increasingly constructed through the collection, processing, and presentation of data and metadata, *appear to be* normal and are ritualistically perceived to be real, trustworthy, and sacred. Through this phenomenological lens, the sacred and the mundane are implicated in one, in the extra-ordinary assurance, trust and faith in the most ordinary mediatized social reality.

Second, the conceptualization of mediatized rituals also brings the focus back from the media to the communicative nature of rituals in various social processes. By focusing on mediatization as a meta-social process encompassing diverse social domains, I explicated two characteristics of the communication environment in which the ritualistic orientation toward social reality constructed in such an environment arises: networked access of information and perceived tamper-resistance of information. As I argued earlier, in the mass media age, the sense of tamper-resistance was mostly provided by institutional arrangements such as journalistic professionalism and spacial guarding of media institutions. Lately, we see a trend of shifting toward technological solutions to *institutionalize* (Lessig, 1999) the networked access and perceived tamper-resistance of information to preserve the rituality of certain constructed social reality. This is not a technological determinism argument; rather, under my conceptualization, technologies are increasingly *perceived as* the new source of legitimacy that are increasingly being co-opted by the institutional power. In fact, recent developments in blockchain are increasingly moving from open blockchains toward permissioned or private blockchains operated in-house by governments and corporations (DuPont, 2018). This new technology is then discursively appropriated to prop up people's faith in traditional institutions that capitalize on the technology. Therefore, the mediatized ritual is not a concept intended to address new communication technologies, but a more conceptually abstract way to understand rituals in the contemporary mediatized society.

Last, I would also like to bring readers' attention to the issue of power. The most powerful force may be the most mundane and invisible things that people take for granted. The phenomenological stance of mediatized rituals provides an account of how the mediatized construction of social reality is perceived, understood, and responded to. There is certainly power-relationship in the collection, processing, and

presentation of data and metadata (Mosco, 2015; Nelms, Maurer, Swartz, & Mainwaring, 2018; Pasquale, 2015) in the shaping of the self, the society, the space and time, and so on. On the one hand, the networked access to information requires much more financial ability and technological know-how to be included in the mediatized construction of social reality. On the other hand, the codes as laws are not always immediately clear to the people whose lives are subjected to the code's automation of reality construction. As in any social domain, there has been a tremendous power struggle, as seen in each source code update in blockchain networks like Bitcoin (DuPont, 2018). The concentration of assets and technologies into powerful individuals and organizations in deep-mediatized societies can very well lead to the (institutional) credibility crisis of mediatized rituals, just like what we witnessed in the Cambridge Analytica debacle. The ritualistic orientation we form toward the increasingly mediatized social reality needs to be critiqued instead of being accepted, which is the ultimate goal of theorizing the mediatized rituals.

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