

## **Médias sociaux : l'extension du domaine médiatique par l'industrialisation du relationnel**

**Social media: the extension of the media field through the industrialization of social relations**

**Medios sociales: la extensión del dominio de los medios por la industrialización de las relaciones**

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### **Résumé**

L'objet de cet article est d'analyser les transformations des médias dits « historiques », les médias de diffusion, ainsi que l'apparition des médias sociaux. Nous montrerons que médias de diffusion et médias sociaux présentent une homologie, en relevant également de la catégorie « médias ». Nous définirons en premier lieu les médias par un acronyme, **MEDIATS**, traduisant l'existence simultanée d'un **M**odèle Economique, de **D**iscours, d'une **I**nstitution, d'**A**cteurs et de **T**echniques en **S**ociété. Ce faisant, les médias sociaux apparaîtront bien comme des médias, spécifiques par la mobilisation de consommateurs sous la forme de publics parfois contributeurs, organisés sous la forme de collectifs médiatisés. Nous serons alors en mesure de caractériser les mutations en cours affectant le domaine médiatique comme une extension de ce domaine, les techniques numériques en réseau permettant de mettre en place une industrialisation du relationnel. C'est bien l'ensemble du domaine médiatique et des télécommunications qui se trouve alors redéfini, par la transformation des frontières précédemment établies et la création de nouveaux services en matière d'offres médiatiques et télécommunicationnelles. Nous tâcherons alors de construire - à l'aide de représentations synoptique et matricielle - une cartographie de ces nouveaux services, qui redessinent et étendent le territoire des médias, désormais conçus comme des agencements conjoncturels.

## Mots clés

Industries culturelles, médias, médias sociaux, médias de diffusion, broadcast, réseaux

## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the transformations of the so-called "historical" media (broadcast media), as well as the emergence of social media. We will show that broadcast media and social media are characterized by their homology, while also both falling under the "media" category. We will first define the media by an acronym, M.E.D.I.A.T.S, reflecting the simultaneous existence of an Economic Model, Documents and content, an Institution, Agents and users, and Techniques in Society. In doing so, social media will indeed appear to be media of a specific type in that they mobilize consumers - some of whom are also contributors - in the form of mediated collectives. We will then be able to characterize the current changes affecting the media field as an extension of this field, with digital networks bringing about increasingly industrialized social relations. The media and telecommunications fields are then both redefined, through the transformation of previously established borders and the creation of new services in terms of media and telecommunication offerings. We will then try to construct - with the aid of synoptic and matrix representations - a map of these new services, which are redrawing and extending the territory of the media, now conceived as conjunctural (contextual) arrangements.

## Keywords

Cultural industries, media, social media, broadcast media, broadcast, networks

## Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es analizar las transformaciones de los llamados medios "históricos" (medios de difusión), así como el surgimiento de las redes sociales. Mostraremos que los medios de difusión y las redes sociales se caracterizan por su homología, que también caen dentro de la categoría de "medios". Primero definiremos los medios por un acrónimo, M.E.D.I.A.T.S, que refleje la existencia simultánea de un Modelo Económico, Documentos y contenido, Institución, Agentes y usuarios, y Técnicas en la Sociedad. Al hacerlo, las redes sociales se definirán como medios, específicos por la movilización de públicos en forma de colectivos mediados (a veces contribuyentes). Luego, podremos caracterizar los cambios actuales que afectan al campo de los medios como una extensión de este campo, las redes digitales que implementan técnicas de relaciones industrializadas en las actividades de los medios. Los campos de los medios y las telecomunicaciones se redefinen, mediante la transformación de las fronteras establecidas previamente y la creación de nuevos servicios en términos de ofertas de medios y telecomunicaciones. Luego intentaremos construir, utilizando representaciones sinópticas y matriciales, un mapeo de estos nuevos servicios, que redibujará y extenderá el territorio de los medios, ahora concebido como arreglos cíclicos.

## Palabras clave

Industrias culturales, medios, medios sociales, medios de difusión, broadcast, redes

## Introduction

It is asserted that the “historical” media are currently facing difficulties, and that the very concept of media may be short-lived. And yet, in more than a decade of existence, the syntagms “social networks” and “social media” have become established. This paper will acknowledge that a degree of maturity – for want of stability – has been reached in these socio-symbolic technologies, which are now embodied by certain dominant players (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and by some significant changes affecting the so-called “historical” media with the emergence of phenomena such as social TV, audio and visual streaming, and “pure players”. Change in the methods with which media are disseminated and consulted – often grouped together in an elusive “digital” category – must not dissuade attempts to define and clarify. To do so, this paper proposes to use a reasoned definition of the concept of “medium” as a basis for examining the extent to which social media fall under this category and to which the emergence of these so-called “social” media can be an opportunity to formulate a new and more appropriate definition of the so-called “historical” media. We will hence attempt to characterize the specific features of social media and to understand the transformations they are bringing about, particularly for the “historical” media, which we will refer to as broadcast media since they are based on the broadcasting/dissemination of audio or video productions to publics.

We will then be in a position to characterize the transformations affecting the media field as an extension of this field, since digital networking technologies are bringing about increasingly industrialized social relations. All segments of the media and telecommunications field are hence being redefined as hitherto firmly established boundaries shift and the service offerings within these segments multiply. We will hence attempt to establish a map of these new services, which are redefining and extending the territory occupied by the media.

## Media: broadcast and social

Before attempting to understand social media, the concept of “medium” must first be defined. In the field of social sciences – information and communication sciences in particular – the outcomes of research conducted over the past two decades have led to several conventional definitions. We will propose our own definition using these as a basis but giving greater consideration to the role played nowadays by social media.

## Media: a generic definition

In communication sciences, media have been defined mainly as socio-technical and socio-symbolic systems blending several dimensions. R. Rieffel thus proposes a definition with four dimensions: “a set of techniques for producing and conveying messages”, “the actual product of such techniques”, “an economic, social and symbolic organization” and, lastly, “varied usages” (Rieffel, 2005: 30). This understanding is similar to that of Jérôme Bourdon (2009: 9), who considers the media in terms of “technique, organization, content and public”. Bernard Miège, meanwhile, deems it important to address the industrial and commercial dimension of media that are closely integrated in sectors with specific value creation modes, and stresses the concept of “économie de fonctionnement propre” (“economy with a specific form of operation”; Miège, 2007: 106) involving “economic particularities”: in other words, specific features for each medium and each medium sub-type. On the basis of these definitions, which ultimately converge to some degree, we propose to define media using an acronym – a convenient mnemonic tool – in order to acknowledge the multiple dimensions involved in analyzing them. This acronym is M.E.D.I.A.T.S, illustrating the simultaneous existence of an Economic Model, Documents and content, an Institution, Agents and users, and Techniques in Society.

A medium is hence based first of all on an Economic Model, i.e. a business model striving to perpetuate a private or public organization. In both cases, resources must be consolidated in order to guarantee the medium's production (programs, publications, posts). This is the pivotal area of study in "culture industries" theory, the objectives of which include modeling the strategies and functioning of the player in this sector within segments that are organized to a greater or lesser degree. The second dimension is Documents and content. This term is adopted deliberately, since the goal is to consider content - usually produced industrially - in relation to social consumption habits. This approach to media discourse must lead us to consider "content" or "media messages" within their pragmatic dimension, i.e. in the social context in which they are consumed. This brings us to a whole series of related concepts - media productions, narratives, accounts, etc. - that have been studied extensively in the information and communication sciences field over the past few decades (cf. Odin, 2011; Lits, 2008). Thirdly, Institution refers to the professionalized organization of the medium, to be considered in terms of its political and economic rationales in relation to industrialization and the reference legal framework. Similarly, this concept refers to the forms of professionalization within the media structure. The term Agents (or media users) denotes the various categories of players that use media, presenting a two-sided market: publics on one side, and information promoters seeking mediatization - both advertisers and the parties they mediatize - on the other. The key role played by public relations in the rapid development of media access strategies - boosting the commodification of media space - must be stressed, as must the growing issue of active collectives seeking to mediatize their causes. Lastly, Techniques in Society constitutes the fifth constituent dimension of media. This dimension is growing continuously and undergoing significant transformation as a result of communication industry investment, making it the most visible one and as decisive as the other ones. Caution is required, however: these are social techniques and not dissociated from practices, and the recent boom in digitization technologies must not conceal their material and industrial dimension. High-tech media content is miniaturized and delocalized in redundant servers, but continues to exist in its material dimension. This is a significant fact for the rest of our paper, which focuses on the issue of a homology between broadcast media and social media.

### **Social media: what are their specific features?**

The next issue to be addressed is the characterization of social media, in order to understand their particularities and the features that set them apart from the so-called historical media, even though this concept is highly relative and we call it into question.

First of all, we note that the naming of the "new", so-called "social media" - from social web to collaborative websites, Web 2.0, social networks, socio-digital networks, social media, participatory media, etc. - has yet to stabilize. There is still no shortage of terms (as stressed by Coutant & Stenger back in 2012) to designate these new content-disseminating players from a "network perspective", and all of them are "accompanying discourses" (Rebillard, 2011), a description that emphasizes their newness. The particularity of these media is that they are based on groups of interconnected users, hence the qualifier "social", implying that content is disseminated within a given network - "narrowcasting" - contrasting the undifferentiated nature of broadcasting. From this perspective, while traditional media are indeed broadcast media, social media appear rather to be viral media.

There is hence a factor connecting these concepts: a shared mythology of the collective and the collaborative. These beliefs contribute to a "creative paradigm" - a metadiscourse that defends the contribution and sharing of data by users on digital networks. While the promoters of these new media defend the creative process, P. Bouquillion and J. Matthews explain that they do so in order to legitimize the use of "helping hands" for the sole purpose of furthering the business models of the

firms concerned, [which in] this respect, in our opinion, demonstrates the ideological skillfulness of the collaborative web: drawing the outlines of a form of personal fulfillment and enrichment that directly benefit capitalist players” (Bouquillion, Matthews, 2010, p. 88).

Therefore, let us set aside these loaded concepts of collaboration, participation, contribution and creation and focus on the collective or community – in a word, social – dimension of these media, grouping their users within specific configurations described by several authors as “computer-mediated communities” (Gensollen, 2004; Rebillard, 2007).

M. Gensollen proposes to understand the originality of the communities that form and develop on the internet by placing them within a historical perspective dating back to the rural and working-class communities of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and by demonstrating the radical change brought about by the non-rival nature of the symbolic goods exchanged in the context of digital networks. In referring to Malinowski’s studies of the Kula exchange system used by communities in the Western Pacific, based on gifts and counter-gifts and resulting in forms of capital with symbolic value for the people participating in such exchanges, Gensollen strives to demonstrate the community and non-rival nature of on-line exchanges. Which does not contradict the attempts of the content and communication industries to recreate a form of rivalry by generating commercial value from the products of these exchanges: herein lies the very issue of the industrialization of social relations that this article proposes to address. M. Gensollen hence defines three types of community: experience-sharing (aiming to meet demand for innovations), file-sharing (collectively using digitized goods), and epistemic (collectively producing or contributing to goods such as freeware).

It is indeed in mediatizing “communities” that social media are inducing a shift in the conventional media model based on dissemination and distribution among an undifferentiated or targeted public. F. Rebillard reduces M. Gensollen’s classification of communities to two types - those based on experience (ideas) and those based on exchanges (goods) - and notes that computer-mediated communities are highly original, particularly in terms of the technical aspects of their material dimension: “it is precisely this second point - instrumentation of the relationship - that constitutes the specific feature of on-line communities” (Rebillard, 2007, p. 25). In making this assertion F. Rebillard contradicts M. Gensollen, whose vision of this type of community is too disruptive. He highlights several characteristics of these communities that make them comparable to “ordinary sociabilities” (idem, 30): they are influenced by the commercial rationales of marketing, and pre-existing social and socio-demographic stratifications play a significant role. In reality this attenuates the community-based character to a large extent, and social media users do indeed fall within the category of “publics”, as M. Lecolle asserts: “In contexts related to uses of the internet, publics can be equated with communities or networks. All these terms incorporate plurality and collectiveness, but not the same type of collectiveness, and not in the same way” (Lecolle, 2016). We therefore propose to name these groups with shared conjunctural interests “computer-mediated collectives” (bringing together publics who participate in the dissemination of content), a more general term that can include community-based practices (and, in some specific cases, identity-based practices) but does not necessarily do so.

### **Social media compared to broadcast media**

In adopting this approach it is easier to perceive the specificity introduced by social media, i.e. the constitution of computer-mediated collectives consuming content produced both by players in the culture and media industries and by people participating in such collectives and disseminated by digital networks. The sudden arrival of new economic players and new communication systems has engendered these “new media” that are now termed “social media”. Since the early 2000s a number of publications in various social science fields and a number of professional players in the

communication sector have attempted to define them, in most cases by means of a classification process. The typologies thus combine several criteria, depending on the analysts' centers of interest. Following a rapid survey of these works, we identified three main sorts of typology aiming to organize all the social media/networks into a coherent presentation, mostly in the form of matrices:

- **Functional:** these presentations, usually produced by study and consulting players in the field of digital communications (see [in French] [www.harrisinteractive.fr/news/2015/12022015.asp](http://www.harrisinteractive.fr/news/2015/12022015.asp), consulted on 22/11/2017; and [fredcavazza.net/2017/04/18/panorama-des-medias-social-2017/](http://fredcavazza.net/2017/04/18/panorama-des-medias-social-2017/), consulted on 22/11/2017), focus on the functions of social media and networks, from the perspective of their strategic uses: conversation, sharing, collaboration, etc.
- **Socio-pragmatic:** these classifications, the most widespread in academic circles on account of the work carried out by researchers in the fields of information and communication sciences and sociology (Coutant, Stenger, 2012, p. 78; Cardon, 2008, p. 124), strive to combine a description of the socio-technical systems with the practices to which they give rise, by constructing use-related polarities (friendship/interest, content/self, real/planned, being/doing); these matrices can also introduce genealogical variables and highlight the “originating structures” of such social media: forums, blogs, wikis and networks (Merra, 2013, p. 152).
- **Linguistic:** well established in the field of language sciences, the typology developed by D. Maingueneau (Maingueneau, 2014, p. 90) defines social media genres and presents them using a tree structure, broken down into three main forms of textuality: conversational, planned, or browsing-based.

These classifications make an undeniably valuable contribution highlighting the newness of social media, which are based on the constitution of collectives and the mediatization of exchanges. From a socio-technical standpoint such media indeed appear to be formalized systems blending editorialized exchanges between individuals (Chantepie, Le Diberder, 2010, p. 64) and diversified content stemming from multiple contributions, a term that is more appropriate than “User Generated Content”, which pre-supposes a purported active “reader-author”, whereas producing original remains a “socially discriminated activity” (Rebillard, 2007, p. 47). This brings us to a limitation with these typologies, whose focus on the analysis of systems, practices and/or content results in two omissions:

- **socioeconomic variables:** what funding models perpetuate the services dispensed by social media? Are they similar to those that perpetuate broadcast media? And what are the consequences, for economic models, of the constitution of computer-mediated collectives as new types of public, some of which are now also contributors?
- **technical and industrial variables:** the matching and curation techniques (Mesguich et al., 2012) rolled out by information and media players now form a decisive technical and industrial backdrop for social media by directing their uses for blatant value-generating purposes that information and communication researchers are striving to define (Bullich, 2016)

Social media and broadcast media are hence homologous. Both of them – the boundaries between the two being fluid – fall under the “media” category, and not merely because they disseminate editorialized content. The business models of social media are influenced by rationales similar to those affecting broadcast media (see next section), and are based on a permanent organization and specific sociotechnical systems and the mobilization of consumers - publics who, in some cases, are contributors and organized into computer-mediated collectives. Broadcast media and social media

are also participating in the emergence of a “new media field” whereby “the media are tending in most cases to bring all aspects of interpersonal communication under their control” (Miège, 2007; 2015, p. 124- 127).

### **An expanding media field: the industrialization of social relations driven by “digital” technology**

The expansion of the media field that we propose to examine is underpinned by the industrialization of social relations. Identified as early as 2002 in the context of on-line sports news, the “social relations industries” are based “on methods for producing social relations services and marketing/distributing them between web users as well as between web users and informational, communicational and cultural content providers” (Collet and Papa, 2002, p. 10-11). The services developed by these social relations industries have expanded constantly since then, with the on-line marketing strategies of the early 2000s becoming the foundations of a major industrial sector that is generating new media and affecting the traditional (press and audiovisual) broadcast media.

### **In favor of an ajustable definition of media: conjunctural arrangements**

There should be no illusions about the rapid emergence of social media. The rapid changes brought about in their day by the arrival of the mass commercial press and the audiovisual industry - radio and then television - significantly shifted the balances between the prevailing media systems (Miège, 2007, p. 107), with implications at each of the five levels of our definition of media (ME.D.I.A.TS). A socio-historical approach to media teaches us that these are recurring processes that must be observed at broad scales - both social and temporal (Lafon, 2017).

At this broader scale of observation, spanning several decades, it becomes obvious that an “expansion of the media field” (Miège, 2007, p. 105 et seq.) is taking place. Lying at the intersection between networks, portals and media, this expansion is also described by B. Miège as the consequence of a “communication mediatization process” progressing continuously over a long period of time and going far beyond the boundaries of the media (idem, pp. 79 et seq.). In this respect, we caution against an inevitable reduction of the concepts of “media” and “mediatization”, to avoid exacerbating the polysemy of these words. We deem it more appropriate to reserve the concept of mediatization for the action of “putting in the media” (broadcast or social) and to use a different word to refer to communicational exchanges other than those taking place via media, irrespective of their level of technicality.

Ultimately, the extension of the media field through the industrialization of social relations seems to be a two-fold process:

- in the case of broadcast media: the addition of social relations services (e.g. creating accounts to obtain exclusive, premium or additional services) and digital techniques that are renewing their offering (pure players, on-line audiovisual media, media services offered on platforms such as YouTube channels, Spotify playlists, etc.) as well as the means of accessing such services (ability to consult broadcast media on-line via the web or dedicated applications, catch-up TV, podcasts, on-line press archives, etc.);
- in the case of networking platforms (telecommunications in the broader sense and socio-digital networks): diversification of on-line messaging services proposing media content that has been re-editorialized by users with assistance from algorithms (Facebook, Twitter), editorialization of exchanges, comments and recommendations in the canonical format used

by forums (discussion threads) or in the renewed formats of micro-mediatization (profiles, e.g. Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat).

The common thread linking all these correlated developments is the fact that computer-mediated collectives are considered in the industrialization and commodification strategies of industrial groups in the media and communication sectors. We can now propose a unified definition of media based on the homology between broadcast media and social media, before presenting a framework for analyzing the extension of the media field towards social relations (a field historically occupied by the telecommunication industries). A definition of media must therefore be based on an open and ajustable understanding of the concept of medium that can be adapted to the context of the current changes. As F. Rebillard asserted, a medium must hence be viewed from a dynamic perspective, enabling it to be compared to the configuration concept proposed by Elias (Rebillard, 2007: 129). We will hence define a medium as being a conjunctural arrangement of five constituent dimensions: Economic Model, Documents and content, Institution, Agents, and Techniques in Society. On this basis, we propose an updated version of the “overview diagram positioning the ICTs” designed by B. Miège in 2007 (Miège, 2007, p. 230).

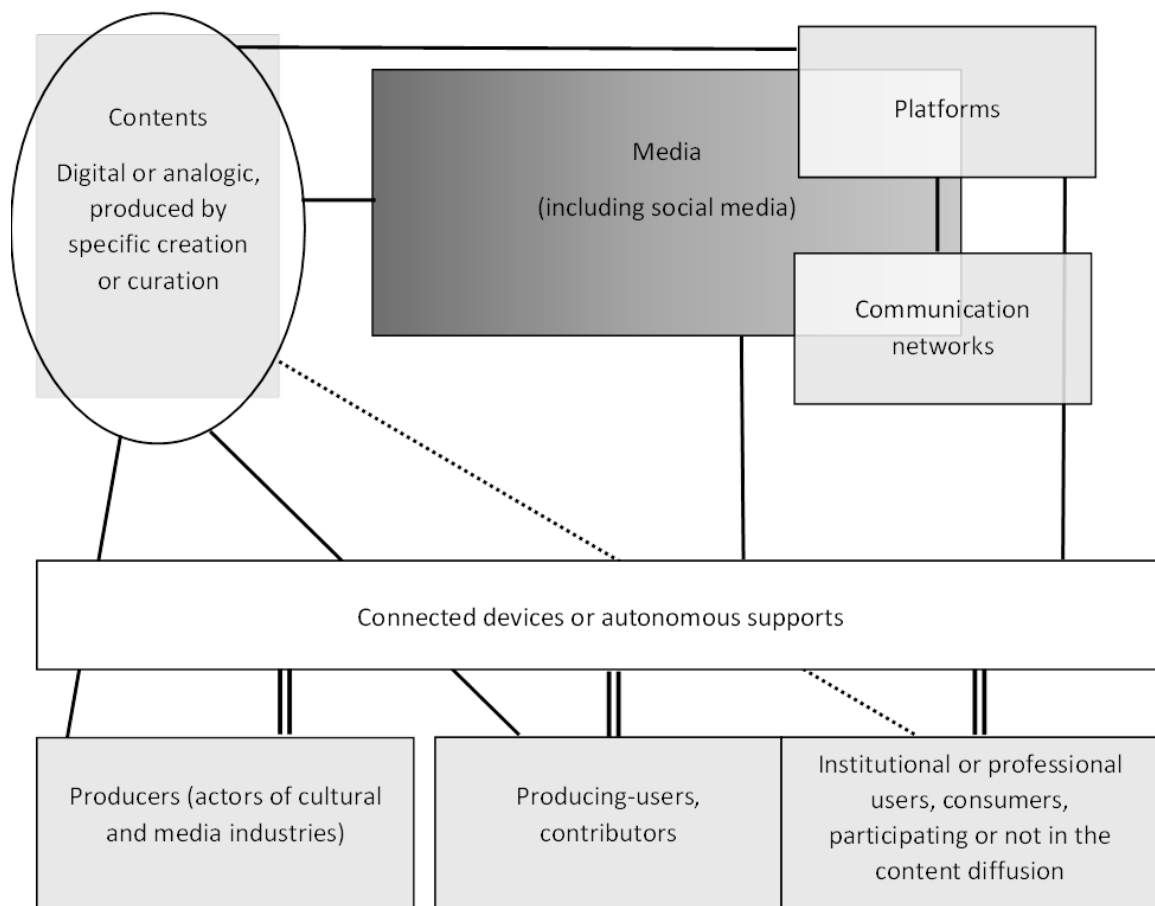


Figure 1 - Overview diagram of the media field

The advantage of this type of diagram is that it presents all the constituent dimensions of media (underscored), while acknowledging the changes brought about by the rapid growth of social media in the media field. The media system is now being expanded by new content generated by a wider variety of players than in the previous system, which was centered on the broadcast media.



New professional contributors (such as content farms) are aggregating content, while users who are semi-professional or looking to become professional are contributing to production. The various publics and computer-mediated collectives are finally playing an active role in the system through their consultation and sharing practices, which are fuelling new editorialization techniques. The techniques themselves are also changing, with screens now being used both to consult and to produce content,

whether original (photographs, comments, articles, etc.) or derived (copies, captures, screening, etc.). But the fact remains that the changes are taking place and practices are shifting rapidly and far from being stabilized. Lastly, it should be noted that the rapid growth and transformation of digital communication networks and platforms is severely disrupting the broadcast media, which are developing strategies to adapt to this new context by being both competitive and complementary. The Modipic project (named after the French acronym for Differentiated Mobilizations of Platforms by the Culture Industries) led jointly by GRESEC, LabsIC and Labex ICCA is focusing specifically on these relationships.

### **Media, social media: proposal for a matrix**

As stated earlier in this paper, the context of socio-technical and industrial changes that began in the early 2000s is prompting the broadcast media to incorporate network functions and engendering multiple forms of mediatization related to telecommunication networks. These changes reflect the strategies of the industrial players who, in this field at the intersection between culture industries and communication groups, are seeking new means of capturing the “central function” (Bouquillion & Combès, 2007 p. 17). In other words, for industrial groups this involves controlling the dissemination and distribution of content in order to capture the various forms of value that it generates.

These changing strategies, coupled with the development of infrastructure now based on digitization techniques, have multiple consequences. In the case of the broadcast media, the integration of digital techniques is leading to a pseudo-dematerialization resulting in further industrialization and new offerings such as streaming and on-line media. In the case of the communication industries, the search for the central function is resulting in technical and industrial strategies for controlling the generation of value from new content: processes for turning material into content (stabilizing labile streams), aggregation (the role of platforms), scripting for communication or dialogue (forums, comments), micro-mediatization (profiles), etc.

It would seem that the methods used by broadcast media are undergoing such a profound transformation and that socio-digital networks are growing at such a rate that the very concept of “medium” could be called into question (Moeglin, 2012, p. 159). But this is not the case. In reality these transformations reflect the current expansion of the media field to encompass the social media, whose very nature is based on the industrialization of social relations. To consider all the media in a summarized manner, we propose to follow on from the work of P. Moeglin (Moeglin, 2010, p. 11) and classify them in the form of a matrix rather than a typology. This matrix combines the remuneration methods that predominate in the media sector (direct vs. indirect) and the technical and industrial choices inherent to providing content, ranging from a form of organized durability involving publishing content or storing it on servers to a form of lability that is also organized, whereby messages sent via networks are deleted as soon as they have been read (as is the case, for instance, with Snapchat, which stores videos and photographs on its servers but makes them inaccessible once they have been read). This latter distinction has some similarities with the media classification formulated by H. Innis without necessarily sharing its conclusions and implications, since durability refers to time-biased media and lability refers to space-biased media (Innis, 1951).

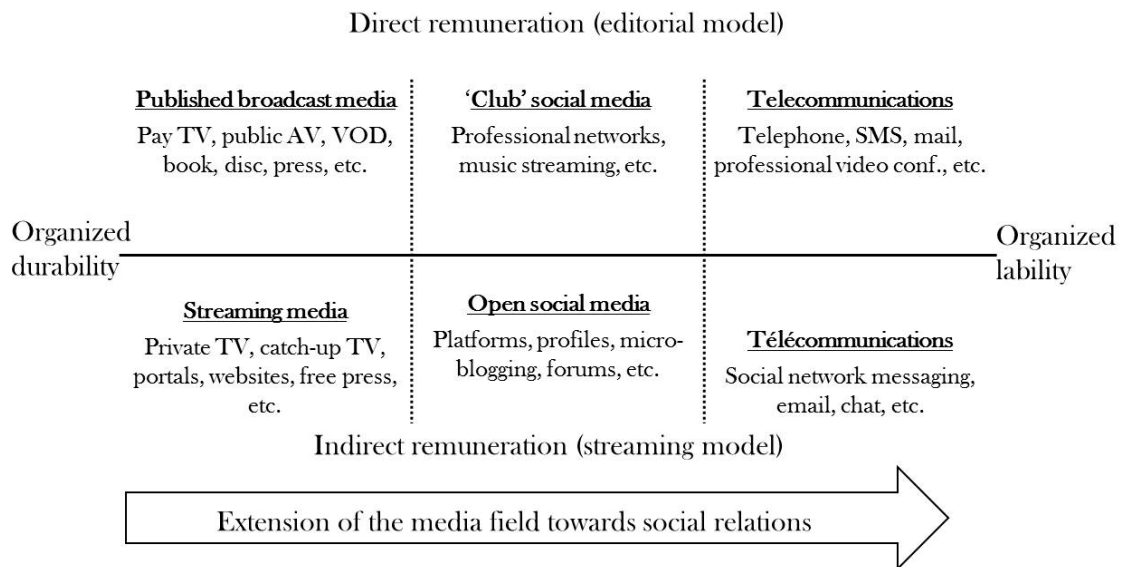


Figure 2 - Media / Networks Matrix, the extension of the media field

This matrix positions the social media more accurately, clearly indicating them as media on account of the existence of editorialized content provided in the framework of a business model. Admittedly, this content is no longer necessarily provided on a scheduled basis as was the case with the audiovisual media, but rather on the basis of constant updating made possible by “info-mediation” techniques. Moreover, the output of these social media tends to be in short formats (e.g. the brief format of YouTube videos or tweets), personalized (e.g. profiles, Facebook or professional networks), or in comment form (e.g. the prototypical case of the forum, which has now spread across all the social media). This last example, that of comments, is no doubt one of the major innovations (along with micro-mediatization) of social media, in this respect espousing a major trend in television and its reality show formats of the 2000s, as demonstrated by Yves Jeanneret, who asserts that an area of research on the culture industries “could focus on an attempt to understand how the discursive and symbolic productivity of triviality is nowadays exploited as a means of generating value” (Jeanneret, 2008, p. 240-241). Lastly, it should be pointed out that a matrix of this type is not intended to provide an exclusive categorization, since communications and media groups are nowadays developing strategies for setting up services corresponding to traditional media, social media and socio-digital networks at the same time.

### Conclusion: in favor of a dynamic understanding of media

We proposed in this paper to discuss a homology between broadcast media and social media. This homology became obvious to us over the course of our analysis, since broadcast media and social media have similar characteristics underpinned by the coexistence of the five constituent dimensions mentioned above. That being said, the extension of the media field towards social relations raises new questions to be addressed in a media analysis, as well as new socio-political and socio-economic issues. The possibilities now offered by communication networks are profoundly overhauling media formats and dissemination methods, while audiences - whether publics or computer-mediated collectives - remain central to the capture strategies rolled out by the culture and communication industries. Renewed and transformed by their extension towards the social relations industries, the media are thus contributing just as much to the collective and industrialized construction of societies.

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