The Other Side of Mediatization: Expanding the Concept to Defensive Strategies

Daniel Nölleke 1, Andreas M. Scheu 2, & Thomas Birkner 2

1Department of Communication, University of Vienna, 1090 Vienna, Austria
2Department of Communication, University of Münster, 48143 Münster, Germany

Most research on mediatization focuses on media-related actions and structural adaptations that aim to increase media attention. However, social actors may also opt for defensive strategies and try to avoid media publicity. In this article, we conceptualize defensive and offensive mediatization strategies as complementary methods that social actors use to deal with media publicity and public attention as well as to proactively shape mediatization processes. We employ an exploratory approach to identify and systematize defensive mediatization strategies. Consequently, we contribute to a more complete understanding of mediatization and provide starting points for further empirical analyses of media-related strategies used by social actors. A secondary analysis of the data from previous research projects suggests establishing three categories of defensive mediatization strategies—persistence, shielding, and immunization—with regard to the levels of individual actors, organizations, and social systems’ routines and norms.

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Despite a number of challenges to the idea (Ampuja et al., 2014; Deacon & Stanyer, 2014), mediatization has proven itself a productive and useful concept to explain social change in terms of the growing significance of mediated communication in modern societies. In general terms, mediatization refers to a process in which media have acquired (and continue to acquire) increasing importance in social domains and for cultural practices (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016).

Corresponding author: Daniel Nölleke; e-mail: daniel.nolleke@univie.ac.at
As a result of academic debates and discourses, the concept has evolved and been differentiated into various forms. Our perspective is rooted in an “institutionalist” (Hepp, 2013, p. 616) tradition of mediatization research, emphasizing the role of the journalistic news media (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016; Marcinkowski, 2014; Strömbäck 2011; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a). Individual and collective actors experience increasing need for public attention, and since public attention is provided by the media, mediatization describes social actors’ attempts to manage media attention (Marcinkowski, 2014) and the long-term effects that come with it. In this respect, social actors take journalistic demands into account, plan their actions to arouse media interest, and by this means strive to achieve public visibility (Cohen et al., 2008). Respective studies usually investigate what we will call in this article offensive adaptations to the media (Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2011; Marcinkowski et al., 2014; Peleg & Bogoch, 2012).

According to Marcinkowski (2014, p. 8), mediatization “defines the transition from a reactive to an active way of dealing with media logic.” In this article, we argue that active mediatization is not only characterized by offensive strategies but also includes defensive strategies. Actors simultaneously open up to media and protect established structures and practices against media demands (Marcinkowski, 2014). Media publicity is perceived as both providing opportunities and presenting threats (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013). Thus, social actors do not solely strive to attract media publicity but may also adopt defensive mediatization strategies that aim to avoid media attention; for example, they might decide to create disincentives in order to shield themselves from media publicity (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013).

Even though defensive mediatization strategies are implicitly considered in various conceptualizations of mediatization (e.g., Donges, 2005; Marcinkowski, 2014; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013), the implications of such strategies have not yet been thoroughly discussed or empirically investigated. Therefore, this contribution focuses on defensive mediatization strategies and suggests further development of the mediatization concept. Crucially, we do not consider defensive strategies as being in opposition to offensive strategies; rather, we argue that defensive and offensive strategies are complementary. In fact, specific adaptations, like establishing professional media relations, can serve offensive and defensive purposes at the same time. Still, distinguishing defensive and offensive mediatization strategies helps us identify and compare different aspects of mediatization. The specific combination of mediatization strategies applied by various actors can be located on a continuum between the two extremes.

Since conceptual and empirical work on defensive mediatization strategies is lacking, we employ an exploratory approach to identify and systematize such strategies and thus to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of mediatization processes. We build our systematization on a secondary analysis of data drawn from seven qualitative studies on the mediatization of different social systems (health, judiciary, politics, science, sports), all conducted by the authors of this article.
The goal of our contribution is twofold. First, we seek to develop the concept of mediatization by distinguishing defensive from offensive adaptations. We demonstrate that defensive strategies follow the same basic rationale as offensive ones, as both aim to protect the autonomy of social systems and to increase performance. Second, we explore the significance and form of defensive strategies, thereby promoting a more nuanced understanding of mediatization. Using an inductive approach, we suggest three distinct categories of defensive adaptation: persistence, shielding, and immunization. Incorporating these strategies into mediatization theory underscores the heuristic potential of the concept and may consequently provide a starting point for further empirical research on social actors’ offensive and defensive responses to the perceived meaning of public attention in contemporary societies.

Offensive and defensive mediatization strategies from a systems theory perspective

Essentially, mediatization is concerned with the phenomenon that individual and collective actors within social domains—such as politics (Birkner, 2015; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008), science (Scheu, 2019a; Schäfer, 2014), sports (Birkner & Nölleke, 2016; Frandsen, 2016), and law (Scheu, 2019b; Peleg & Bogoch, 2012)—increasingly accommodate the needs of the mass media in order to gain public attention. While approaches to mediatization differ considerably in terms of assessments of “media logic” and the “object” that is mediatized (Hepp et al., 2015), the concept essentially describes a growing significance of the media for different kinds of institutional and cultural practices across numerous domains of society (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016).

At first glance, the notion of a “growing significance” seems to suggest a pushy process: media can be considered as dominating other social spheres and forcing their rules on other domains (Meyer, 2002). However, this is not our rationale of mediatization. In line with the assertion that “the idea is not that the media ‘colonize’ other social or cultural domains” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 317), scholars have introduced related concepts: the “push-and-pull- model” of mediatization (Marcinkowski, 2014, p. 11), “push and pull forces” (Blumler & Esser, 2018), and the concept of self-mediatization (Birkner, 2015; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a). In this perspective, mediatization describes individual and collective actors proactively adapting to the media in order to obtain their strategic objectives (Marcinkowski, 2014; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011). This approach is rooted in the theoretical perspective of social differentiation.

In particular, we build our framework on the assumptions of systems theory (Luhmann, 1995), according to which social systems (such as politics, economics, and science) serve exclusive functions for society and provide specific services for their environment. This approach has proven useful for the empirical study and theoretical conceptualization of mediatization processes: some groundbreaking
contributions on mediatization theory have explicitly built on Luhmann’s theory (e.g., Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016; Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014; Strömbäck, 2008). Other key works in the institutionalist tradition of mediatization research have also been clearly informed by Luhmann’s thoughts, as they highlight that (news) media and other social domains are governed by domain-specific logics (for the specific political logic see Esser, 2013; Marcinkowski, 2014; for the specific logic of the legal system see Peleg & Bogoch, 2012; for the specific logic of science see, for example, Scheu et al., 2014).

According to systems theory, social systems refer to services of other domains only if they perceive those services as relevant to their own modus operandi (Marcinkowski & Steiner, 2014). In this way, systems become interdependent on each other’s performances (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016). Such interdependencies are seen in processes like commercialization, scientification, and mediatization, the latter referring to interdependencies between social systems and the media. More precisely, mediatization occurs when stakeholders and organizations within social systems perceive media as critical in achieving their strategic objectives (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013). For example, politicians, athletes, and scientists mediatize in order to get elected (Walgrave, 2008), to win trophies (Heinecke, 2014), or to receive funding (Scheu, 2019a; Scheu et al., 2014; Marcinkowski et al., 2014). Consequently, changes within social systems are not imposed by the media but are rather the result of autonomous decision-making by actors within these systems.

Social actors autonomously respond to the media; this implies that they do not solely strive to attract but also try to protect against public attention. If media are believed to improve the performance of individual/collective actors, these actors will strive to attract media coverage by adapting offensively to media logic (Davis, 2009; Ross, 2010); however, if media are believed to impede their performance, actors will instead try to avoid media coverage and take defensive measures (Birkner & Nölleke, 2016; Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014; Larsson, 2002; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013). In practice, most social actors probably see both benefits and risks to media publicity and public attention and will therefore implement a mixture of offensive and defensive mediatization strategies. In this perspective, mediatization does not serve to either attract or avoid public attention, but rather to manage public attention in a way that is meant to maximize benefits and minimize disadvantages (D’Angelo et al., 2014; Deacon & Stanyer, 2014; Marcinkowski, 2014).

In summary, we argue that defensive and offensive adaptations follow the same basic rationale: both ultimately serve to obtain specific strategic objectives of social actors, most importantly to secure or increase performance. Some research on mediatization has already hinted at “measures (…) for shielding against media resonance” (Marcinkowski, 2014, p. 13) and at attempts “to avoid unwanted media attention” (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013, p. 350), thus referring to defensive actions and conscious non-adaptations (Donges, 2005). Still, such defensive actions and adaptations have not been thoroughly included into the concept on either a theoretical or an empirical level. With this contribution, we address this omission.
Presumed media influences and perceived media logic as mediatization conditions

From a systems theory perspective, mediatization refers to the strategies individual and collective actors within social systems pursue that take the role of media attention into consideration, with the ultimate goal of attaining strategic objectives. This perspective suggests including both offensive and defensive strategies. Below, we focus our analysis on defensive strategies and illustrate how they relate to the basic conditions of mediatization processes, such as presumed media influences and the perception of media logic. In this way, we show that defensive strategies result from similar processes as offensive strategies and are thus consistent with previous conceptual work on mediatization.

While traditional research on media effects is mainly concerned with individual and direct media effects, the concept of mediatization captures both structural and indirect media effects (Kepplinger, 2008; Meyen et al., 2014). Actors mediatize because they believe that managing media publicity will help them achieve their strategic objectives. Thus, media-related adaptations of social actors can be considered attempts to affect presumed media influences (Cohen et al., 2008; Gunther & Storey, 2003; Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2014; Tsfati et al., 2011), making the presumption of media influence a basic condition for mediatization processes.

In terms of mediatization theory, two aspects of presumed media effects matter. First, actors must ascribe to media the power to provide public attention, or at least attention from relevant stakeholders. Second, public attention must be perceived as a relevant resource within one’s social domain. For example, one reason politicians adapt to media demands is because they believe that their electorate is influenced by media publicity. In this case, mediatization serves as a means to gain political power. In a similar vein, sports clubs pursue media-related strategies because they might be able to influence fans and sponsors via media publicity. Here, mediatization is a means to achieve sporting success. And scientists open up to the media because they believe that media publicity influences science policy stakeholders and funding agencies. Here, mediatization serves to support the scientific pursuit of truth.

However, the presumption of media influence on relevant stakeholders does not necessarily result in offensive strategies; in fact, stakeholders might conclude that public attention (or certain aspects thereof) harms their performance. Thus, if they believe media has the power to generate public attention but perceive (aspects of) public attention to be harmful, we expect these actors to implement defensive strategies to decrease or even avoid media coverage. In this sense, political parties, sports clubs, or universities might want to evade public attention to ensure autonomous decision-making, for example. Additionally, individual and collective actors may anticipate detrimental indirect effects (or “reciprocal effects,” Kepplinger, 2007) of media publicity and act accordingly. Politicians might fear a decline of trust in politics due to populist communication styles (Aalberg et al., 2017); sports
organizations might be reluctant to alienate supporters who are increasingly hostile towards clubs’ efforts to satisfy media demands (Rowe, 2009); and decision-makers in science may perceive conflicts between media demands and scientific standards of quality (Scheu, 2019a).

Actors’ anticipations of indirect media effects are closely linked to their experiences with and their evaluations of media coverage. To start with, social actors who evaluate their media visibility as insufficient or inappropriate are more likely to engage in proactive mediatization strategies than those actors who are satisfied with the extent and quality of their media presence (Heinecke, 2014). Actors who perceive themselves as inappropriately covered can, on the one hand, try to apply offensive mediatization strategies, in order to improve their access to media publicity and to gain control over how the media represent them and their issues. On the other hand, they might opt for defensive strategies, seal themselves off, and/or try to avoid media coverage in the future.

Furthermore, the actual design of a mediatization strategy depends on individual and collective actors’ understandings of how media publicity and journalism work (Landerer, 2014; Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2014). One’s perception of “media logic” (Altheide & Snow, 1979) must be considered their orientation horizon for proactive mediatization. Obviously, “the reference point for any kind of accommodation is always one’s perception of the respective matter” (Nölleke & Scheu, 2018, p. 200). Donges and Jarren (2014) argue: “The first aspect of mediatization is perception” (p. 189). Actors develop their understanding of journalistic practices and implement their adaptations according to this understanding (Maurer & Pfetsch, 2014; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013). Both offensive and defensive mediatization strategies are aligned with actors’ perceived media logic: if actors aim to increase media attention, they take measures that comply with perceived media demands (offensive strategies); actors who want to avoid media publicity implement adaptations that oppose what they perceive as media logic and/or strengthen their own rationale against perceived media demands (defensive strategies). Thus, perceived media logic conclusively shapes media-related adaptations, whether offensive or defensive.

**Empirical approach**

In the first part of this article, we have promoted the idea of more thoroughly differentiating between offensive and defensive mediatization strategies. We have shown that defensive mediatization strategies are based on similar principles to offensive ones and thus constitute an important facet of what we understand as mediatization. We have argued that the meaning of media for different social systems is not only indicated by offensive strategies that aim to attract media attention but also by defensive measures that aim to protect against such attention.

In the second part of the article, we want to explore the significance and form of defensive strategies and thereby provide a starting point for further empirical
research on this hitherto widely-neglected facet of mediatization. Apart from very few exceptions that have also paid attention to defensive approaches (Birkner & Nölleke, 2016; Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014), research on mediatization has predominantly dealt with actors’ efforts to offensively influence media coverage and shape it in favorable ways. Hence, we take an exploratory approach to address the following question: What kinds of defensive mediatization strategies can be discerned across different social systems?

This article offers a secondary analysis of data drawn from different research projects on the mediatization of various social systems—including sports, health, judiciary, politics, and science (Table 1)—conducted by the authors of this article. By including such a broad spectrum of different social systems and actors, we aim to explore as wide a range of defensive mediatization strategies as possible. Although only one (ongoing) study explicitly differentiates between offensive and defensive mediatization strategies, all studies presented in Table 1 have collected data that also inform defensive aspects of mediatization. The studies at hand use similar theoretical and methodical approaches to mediatization, so that the data is comparable.

### Table 1 Data Available for Secondary Analysis

| Social systems   | Focus                      | Method                                      | Data               |
|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Sports           | Aspects of mediatization   | Qualitative content analysis of autobiographies of football players | 14 autobiographies |
| Judiciary        | a. Aspects of mediatization | Interviews with judges, prosecutors, and lawyers | a. 26 interviews  |
|                  | b. Perceived media logic & mediatization |                                      | b. 13 interviews  |
| Politics         | Phases of mediatization    | Qualitative content analysis of documents and interviews with politicians and political journalists | 26 interviews     |
|                  | Perceived media logic      |                                            |                    |
| Science          | Aspects of mediatization   | Interviews with decision-makers in science organizations (e.g., universities, non-academic research, funding) | 23 interviews     |
| Health           | Perceived media logic      | Interviews with physicians, managers, and PR experts in hospitals | 9 interviews      |
| Health, Justice, Politics, Science | Perceived media logic | Document analysis, expert interviews, interviews with decision-makers | Currently: approx. 700 documents, 70 interviews (ongoing) |
We conducted a semi-structured qualitative re-analysis of the data. Since we could not build on previous work on defensive strategies, we strove to explore this facet of mediatization; hence, we applied an inductive approach. We coded all text passages that referred to the objective of protecting against or avoiding media attention. In this way, we determined the significance of defensive strategies and identified the different types of defensive strategies that are pursued. Subsequently, we grouped similar strategies in order to systematize the body of knowledge. This was achieved discursively as the participating researchers engaged in collective data interpretation.

As we located defensive and offensive strategies on a continuum, our systematization was informed by previous work on offensive mediatization efforts. Accordingly, our mediatization strategies are also located within the macro-level of social structures, the meso-level of organizations and institutions, and the micro-level of individual actors (Meyen et al., 2014). Changes on the macro-level can be accessed via characteristic programs (i.e., structures that guide decision-making processes), as well as formal and informal norms that serve as points of orientation for individual and collective actors within certain social systems. On the meso-level, we were interested in organizational and institutional structures, such as regulations, resources, hierarchies, and the interfaces of organizations to the media or the public. On the micro-level, we investigated changes concerning professional roles and the media-related behavior of individuals.

**Results**

A thorough re-analysis of our data clearly confirms our theoretical assumptions, as it points to the significance of defensive strategies as a response to the perceived meaning of media attention for social actors. Data from all projects suggest that actors do not only take measures to attract media attention but also employ strategies to protect against it. Through inductive coding, three main strategies emerged: persistence, shielding, and immunization.

**Persistence** results from conflicts that actors identify by comparing their internal processes and rationales (modus operandi) to perceived media logic(s). Actors persist in or strengthen already-established structures, regulations, routines, etc. even if they individually or collectively perceive that the media and the public would prefer if they changed. Forms of persistence occur when actors perceive a demand for media publicity and the accompanying adaptations, but consciously decide against indulging this demand because they fear that adaptations would endanger their strategic objectives.

Decisions to proactively **shield** against media demands relate to structural adaptations that are implemented even though—or precisely because—they contradict what is perceived as the logic of the media and public attention. To shield against media demands means that actors consciously implement structures in order to minimize public attention. Organizations banning employees from talking to the
media in times of crisis is an example for structures (in this case: regulations) that shield against media demands.

*Immunization* strategies are implemented to prevent dysfunctional consequences that might result from an increasing consideration of media demands within social systems. For example, while establishing media training for new staff members can be associated with offensive strategies (increasing access to media publicity), it can also be interpreted as immunization: only those who know how the media work are able to preserve their autonomy.

In the following sections of this article, we illustrate the three different types of defensive strategies and how they refer to the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of social systems (*Table 2*).

**Table 2** Systematization of Defensive Mediatization Strategies

| Level       | Strategies                                                                 |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Macro-level | Persistence: e.g., refusal to change existing evaluative criteria in the context of research funding |
|             | Shielding: e.g., differentiation between a political frontstage that is publicly visible, and an arcane backstage |
|             | Immunization: e.g., integration of high-level norms and guidelines that define legal courts’ access to publicity (truthfulness, neutrality, etc.) |
| Meso-level  | Persistence: e.g., refusal to establish PR departments and thereby change existing organizational structures |
|             | Shielding: e.g., implementation of restrictive approval procedures around media interviews |
|             | Immunization: e.g., allocation of resources within organizations to relieve decision-makers of media inquiries |
| Micro-level | Persistence: e.g., refusal to acknowledge media literacy as staff requirement |
|             | Shielding: e.g., defendants in court hiding their faces to avoid media coverage |
|             | Immunization: e.g., media training for football players to minimize the potential of negative publicity |
Defensive mediatization strategies on the micro-level of individual actors

On the level of individual actors, we identified defensive adaptations to journalistic media logic concerning professional roles and individual behavior.

Persisting in pre-mediatised behavior can be seen in self-reports of interviewees and autobiographical data. Interviewees from all social systems considered in this study report ignoring interview requests, shirking media training, and generally refusing to meet the demands of journalism and the mass media. They persist in authentic behavior—that is, behavior that corresponds with their traditional roles in their specific systems. The drive for persistence on the micro-level is motivated by an individual’s self-conception, their orientation to authenticity, and their apprehension of a potential loss of personal authenticity and integrity resulting from media affinity. A respondent from the field of scientific research stated, “Some try to cooperate more intensely with the media and to influence politics. I am not interested in this, because I’m a researcher.” Respondents persisting in pre-mediatised behavior tend to refer to “black sheep” (university vice-president, Germany) in their domains—colleagues who, from their perspective, risk their reputation and the reputation of their peers because they engage in offensive mediatization strategies.

What is more, persistence also seems triggered by conflicting role expectations that can be experienced on the micro-level. In this context, a politician reflects on the negative consequences of media visibility for his private life and decides to protect his privacy by not adapting to media demands:

Don’t ever open up about your private life. (…) Once you open up privacy, once you cooperate with the yellow press, you do home stories (…) you will have your whole life in the public.

Compared to persistence, shielding is a more active strategy. Shielding indicates active measures of protection against media attention. This can be observed in individual behavior like defendants in court literally shielding their faces, lawyers advising their clients to “only enter the court after the press has left” (lawyer), or politicians using back doors to avoid the press. Some famous sport stars report engaging in similar behavioral strategies to avoid media attention. In his autobiography, Michael Owen (2004) reported that after a bad performance he sought a “hideout.” His family joined him “so that they could avoid being doorstepped by reporters” (p. 245). Similarly, Lukas Podolski (2014, p. 212) discusses protecting his private life against media attention.

In one of the studies subject to our re-analysis, legal documents were analyzed—including 27 guidelines for the German legal system, covering a timespan from the early 1950s to the present. Here, we also found evidence for shielding in the context of professional roles. For example, the Bavarian guidelines state that media requests must not be forwarded to judges or prosecutors working the cases at the heart of the requests (Bayerisches Justizministerialblatt, 2014). The guidelines for North Rhine-Westphalia also shield judges from media demands by excluding having to
inform the media from their professional role (Richtlinien für die Zusammenarbeit mit den Medien, 2015).

We see immunization as adaptations that serve to immunize against the anticipated dysfunctional long-term effects of mediatization. As a member of the Committee on Education, Research and Technology Assessment put it: “You have to adapt to media logic without violating your own criteria.” Therefore, it does not seem surprising that many offensive adaptations also contain elements of immunization. For example, implementing media training can be regarded as part of the mediatization of “structures of interpretation” (Scheu et al., 2014) and cognitive structures on the micro-level. While this is surely true, a more nuanced perspective reveals that media training may simultaneously serve both offensive goals—such as optimizing access to media publicity—as well as defensive goals—such as providing staff with media literacy to enable them to understand the mechanisms of journalism and public attention, because only then will they be able to defend against dysfunctional external influences. A physician who is head of a hospital department reflected:

We do provide media training for our staff because we want to stay out of the head-lines. We want the media to report about us, but we do not want negative headlines.

The processes of persistence, shielding, and immunization are often engaged in simultaneously and overlap. Therefore, it is possible to interpret the shielding of North Rhine-Westphalian judges (Richtlinien für die Zusammenarbeit mit den Medien, 2015) as immunization as well. By removing the norm to inform the media about current affairs in the professional role of a judge, the guidelines also immunize this profession from the dysfunctional long-term effects of mediatization of increasing time pressure and acceleration.

**Defensive mediatization strategies on the meso-level of organizations and institutions**

Defensive mediatization strategies on the meso-level can be conceptualized as adaptations concerning resource allocation within organizations (e.g., growing budget for PR professionals in charge of the organization’s media communication), restructuring of hierarchies (e.g., increasingly close collaboration among management and heads of PR), and adaptations of regulations (e.g., establishing protocols for approving interviews with journalists) (Table 2).

Persistence on the meso-level occurs when organizations deliberately decide to keep structural changes to a minimum. For example, some of our interviewees were skeptical about the increasing responsibilities and resources of PR departments; instead, they reported that their organizations minimized media-related expenses. In this regard, the president of a non-academic research institution claimed:
We act rather reluctantly. We also work on scientific projects that are rather political—for example, nuclear disposal zones. We won’t talk to the media about such sensitive issues at all.

Another example is the ongoing debate about changing the current regulations of the German legal system to allow for TV cameras to record/broadcast legal procedures. A judge in one of our interviews was aware of media demands for video material and a growing public interest in criminal prosecutions but argued for keeping the existing procedures in place:

I believe it’s absolutely adequate that the German law does not allow cameras in courtrooms. Otherwise, you would completely lose sight of our work’s purpose.

It appears that persistence in organizations coincides with a high level of autonomy of organizations. A study on the mediatization of German research policy that was also included in our data sample (Scheu et al., 2014) showed that organizations that refuse or minimize structural adaptations often hold rather strong positions within the policy constellation. Interviewees from these organizations reported that their organizations occupy relatively influential positions, that they are taken seriously by other stakeholders within the constellation, and that they are financially independent. What is more, these actors also stressed that they had no interest in influencing others via mass media (Scheu et al., 2014).

The strategy of shielding is also applied on the meso-level. Collective actors may shield themselves or members of their staff against media publicity. They may implement non-communication strategies and specific regulations that prevent staff from answering media requests. David Beckham, for example, described how his team Manchester United decided to avoid the media after an incident in the locker room:

There was no big fuss about what had happened in the dressing room after the game. It was quiet and the boss really calm about it all. He just said that none of us should speak to the press. (Beckham, 2003, p. 82)

This example shows that shielding as a type of defensive strategy relates to media logic. The football team considered how the media works and consciously decided not to serve those demands. In a similar vein, a hospital manager described another aspect of shielding, as connected to potential crisis:

In times of crisis, we want to be the ones who inform the public. We want to prevent some camera crew cruising around and reporting things in a way that we don’t want them to.

In this perspective, shielding serves to control media publicity.

Adaptations of organizational structures that serve to immunize against dysfunctional effects of mediatization seem quite common, even though they are rarely referred to as such. These adaptations primarily include the establishment of PR departments, the allocation of resources to media-related tasks, and the regulations concerning responsibilities and processes with regard to public communication. Such adaptations are often discussed in mediatization research (Marcinkowski et al., 2014; Scheu et al., 2014), but usually no distinction is made whether they
serve offensive or defensive goals. Our data suggest that most of the mentioned strategies can serve both offensive and defensive objectives.

For instance, PR departments not only increase media attention and handle media publicity; they can also be regarded as structures that relieve other functional units within organizations as well as immunize actors within organizations from dysfunctional influences. In one of the interviews with actors from the legal system, a lawyer mentioned potential problems around legal principles such as impartiality or objectivity, which could arise “if judges themselves would have to provide information and communicate with the media. Therefore, it makes sense to have PR professionals as intermediaries.”

This statement is supported by an analysis of 27 media guidelines for German judicial authorities, including documents from eight federal states. While also including offensive mediatization strategies, the guidelines focus mainly on defensive media-related regulations that immunize legal procedures. Passages within these guidelines regulate (for example) at which point during legal procedures the media must be informed, or how the judicial authorities have to handle erroneous media reports. The guidelines introduce approval procedures for journalistic interviews and delegate the responsibilities of dealing with journalism and media publicity. As stated in most of these guidelines, the media contacts of judges must be coordinated with the respective press/media departments in advance.

**Defensive mediatization strategies on the macro-level of programs and norms**

We approach the macro-level of social systems via two proxies: programs and (informal and formal) norms. Both programs and norms can be described as manifestations of more abstract concepts. For example, the legal system as a social domain is concerned with justice; however, the concept of justice manifests itself through the program of law, as well as through such norms as fairness and the presumption of innocence. Programs and norms serve as points of orientation for organizations (meso-level) and individual actors (micro-level) within the domain or system. Hence, adaptations on the micro- and meso-level (discussed above) must be interpreted in relation to the macro-level. For example, the restrictions on certain professional roles from contacting media professionals, the protection of personal rights in the legal system, and the allocation of reputations in science by way of peer-reviewed publications concern not only structures on the micro- and meso-level, but also relate to the core functionalities of the respective social systems (macro-level).

Persistence on the macro-level involves social systems maintaining or strengthening established programs and norms, even though adaptations toward media logic promise advantages (albeit mostly short-term ones). This is the case for a department head of a funding organization, who claimed, “even though some people might be able to convince the media that bad research is in fact good, it remains
bad. And we won’t fund bad research.” Various interviewees from research funding and the domain of science claimed that traditional procedures for ensuring scientific quality are not being challenged. However, here we encountered limits in the data: self-reports seem rather problematic when it comes to investigating the macro-level of mediatization. Other interviewees challenged the quote above and claimed to observe rather troubling offensive adaptations to media logic that were committed by German funding organizations, which (among other issues) might lead to misallocation of resources (see also Marcinkowski et al., 2014).

An analysis of the media guidelines for judicial authorities might provide a more valid illustration of persistence on the macro-level. The data suggest a growing awareness of the dysfunctional effects of mediatization, and the more recent guidelines in our sample contain passages that supposedly strengthen established judicial norms. For example, the 2015 guidelines for North Rhine-Westphalia strengthen the judicial aim of potential resocialization of prisoners against the public interest of being informed about ongoing trials, and they include instructions for advising media representatives about acceptable reporting in accordance with established judicial norms:

The media shall be advised not to report in any way that would undermine the impartiality of the legal court, witnesses and experts or in any other way to impair researching the true circumstances. The media should be made aware of the fact that defendants are being held innocent until their legal conviction. (translated from Richtlinien für die Zusammenarbeit mit den Medien, 2015, §8)

Shielding on the macro-level entails adaptations that protect programs and norms or isolate them from potential media influences. Here, too, the nature of the available data mostly allows for indirect hints at the nature of various shielding processes. One aspect of shielding at the macro-level is the informal norm of distinguishing between a publicly-accessible frontstage and an arcane backstage. A number of our interviewees from different social systems referred to this norm (although, once again, self-reports of interviewees do not provide the most valid information). At the same time, various interviewees observed a recession of arcane areas within their respective domains. For example, the scientific system is challenged by increasing demands to “leave the ivory tower” and engage with a broader public. Thus, new scientific norms, connected to the need for public legitimation and the public engagement of scientists, are shifting the traditional division of frontstage and backstage.

Strikingly, legal actors observe attempts to shield participants from public attention on the macro-level of programs. A lawyer explicitly referred to his impression that judges try to exclude the public from legal proceedings: “In a lot of cases, I get the impression that the public is excluded (...) so that legal actors can muddle along without any media attention.”

Media guidelines available for judicial authorities provide further information about shielding on the macro-level. The guidelines from the early 1950s draw a line between frontstage and backstage. Even though judicial authorities respect their
duty to supply information to the media, they also determine exceptional causes (e.g., Justizministerialblatt für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1954, §4), conceal legal procedures from public scrutiny until decisions are final (e.g., Presserichtlinie des Sächsischen Justizministeriums, 1995, §4), and advise reservation considering certain information (e.g., Justizministerialblatt für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1974, §6). Similar passages are still common in more recent guidelines.

Finally, immunization defensive strategies require adaptations of programs and norms that protect the core functionalities of social systems from the dysfunctional effects of mediatization. This can be illustrated by the need for media guidelines, their establishment by organizations in social systems (e.g., judicial authorities, political parties, universities, hospitals), and their further refinement over time. Media guidelines not only regulate offensively dealing with media and media publicity but also contain rules and regulations that serve to immunize the inherent logic of the respective social systems against media logic. As stated in some preambles of judicial media guidelines, these guidelines serve to “secure the constitutional function of independent jurisdiction which might conflict with the right to information of the press” (translated from Richtlinien für die Zusammenarbeit der Justizbehörden mit den Medien, 1991, p. 57). In contrast to the media guidelines in the judicial system, media guidelines of political parties rarely include defensive measures on the macro-level, almost exclusively focusing on offensive adaptations that serve to increase media publicity.

Even though the analysis of documents from other social systems is still ongoing at this point of our study, our first results hint at remarkable discoveries considering defensive mediatization strategies on the macro-level of programs and norms. At this point, we suggest explaining these differences in relation to the specific needs for public legitimization of certain social systems and their dependencies on other social systems. For example, legitimization in the domain of (democratic) politics is gained by public elections; the judiciary is legitimized by legal procedures; and the scientific system is much more dependent on politics than the judiciary.

**Discussion**

In this article, we took a closer look at mediatization, drawing a distinction between offensive and defensive adaptations to media logic. By paying particular attention to defensive strategies, we strove to expand the understanding of mediatization by identifying a new aspect of adaptation. We highlighted that mediatization does not necessarily mean that social actors willingly submit to media demands in order to achieve media publicity; mediatization essentially describes the management of media attention according to a system’s strategic objectives (Marcinkowski, 2014), which means it also entails defensive strategies. Hence, differentiating offensive from defensive mediatization strategies strengthens the concept of self-mediatization (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014b), underlining that adaptations to media
logic are active responses to perceived meanings of media publicity for the system’s performance.

Even scholars that conceptualize mediatization as an active “pull” process have tended to focus on strategies aimed at attracting media attention (e.g., Landerer, 2014; Meyen et al., 2014), and so far, defensive strategies have been widely neglected. In this article, we have tried to demonstrate that both offensive and defensive adaptations can be conceptualized as legitimate aspects of mediatization. Both are based on social stakeholders’ conscious assessments of the relevance of public attention to social systems’ modus operandi, stakeholders’ perceptions of media influences, their past experiences with the media and media publicity, and their understanding of media logic(s). Therefore, for a more complete understanding of how news media indirectly shape and change the structures of social systems, defensive adaptations must be considered as well.

Including defensive strategies does not only expand our understanding of mediatization, but also narrows it. From our perspective, it is important to firmly relate offensive and defensive strategies to reactions based on conscious assessments of news media’s relevance to the performance of actors and social systems; otherwise, the concept of mediatization becomes an arbitrary catch-all idea (Livingstone, 2009). Thus, mediatization does not include changes related to other external influences (e.g., legal or economic considerations) or to internal developments.

Our suggestion to distinguish offensive and defensive mediatization strategies has significant implications for empirical mediatization research. By realizing that social actors also pursue strategies to avoid media visibility, we can truly identify the whole range of indirect structural media effects that mediatization theory intends to apprehend. We have argued that offensive and defensive mediatization strategies are complementary: actors implement both types, and specific adaptations can simultaneously serve offensive and defensive purposes. To identify how news media affect the modus operandi of diverse domains in society, one has to examine how actors combine defensive and offensive strategies. In other words, news media’s meaning for social systems can only be assessed by taking into account the whole continuum between defensive and offensive adaptations.

By differentiating persistence, shielding, and immunization and by locating these strategies at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, we offer a way to operationalize defensive mediatization strategies that may serve as a guide for empirical mediatization research. Of course, in practice, different strategies (offensive and defensive, as well as different types of defensive) may overlap and even be applied in parallel. Hence, as in any systematization, our differentiation of strategies on different analytical levels serves a primarily analytical purpose and could provide a starting point for empirical analyses of mediatization strategies. As our systematization is based on an explorative secondary analysis, we do not claim that it is complete; very likely, social stakeholders implement more defensive strategies than those we have identified. Again, this contribution ideally serves as a starting point for further analysis of media-related strategies within social systems, which might give us a more complete
understanding of how social stakeholders respond to perceived meanings of media attention in contemporary societies.

The distinction between offensive and defensive mediatization strategies not only allows for a more complex assessment of mediatization within a particular social system, it also offers new opportunities for comparative mediatization research. The complexity and validity of comparative mediatization research—across social systems, countries, cultures, and time periods—will increase if defensive strategies are included in the research design. For example, it appears that U.S. politics are more strongly focused on offensive mediatization strategies than political systems in other Western countries, such as Germany. However, within Germany, our findings suggest that the political and the judicial systems have developed different strategies to cope with news media attention. While politicians seem to primarily use offensive strategies toward the media—even at the risk of dysfunctional consequences for the political system itself—the judiciary in Germany strongly relies on defensive strategies and focuses on autonomy from the media.

These types of findings lead to questions for future research—for example, the potential of defensive mediatization strategies to minimize (potentially) dysfunctional developments in social systems that generally implement offensive strategies of mediatization. This could be applied to politics (e.g., rise in populism, increasing voter disenchantment) or science (e.g., oversimplification of findings, misallocation of resources).

The differentiation between offensive and defensive strategies not only has implications for research on mediatization efforts in social systems like politics, sports, and science: it can also contribute to research on news media itself, which can be considered the point of reference for mediatization (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013). In that sense, journalism research can benefit from an extended concept of mediatization that incorporates defensive adaptations. The expanded concept helps us to assess the importance of news media in societies and to understand and predict why and how social stakeholders from different systems engage in media-related efforts to influence favorable coverage.

Currently, the framework is mainly applied to offensive adaptations. However, the meaning of journalism for other social domains is not only characterized by an openness toward media demands, but also by efforts to protect against media influences. Hence, just like offensive adaptations, defensive mediatization strategies hint at the meaning of journalism. What is more, the inclusion of defensive strategies can help us understand and predict why some stakeholders do not make themselves available as journalistic sources and work to elude journalism. Hence, the differentiation between offensive and defensive mediatization strategies offers insights into the importance of news media in modern societies and explains the media-related behavior of stakeholders who do not strive to increase or attract media publicity.

Of course, our approach to this aspect of mediatization has limitations. We mostly recoded already-existing data consisting of self-reports and interviews, which limits our interpretations and calls for validation (for example, by document
analysis). However, this contribution does not seek to conclude but rather to start theoretical discussion and empirical assessment of defensive mediatisation strategies. In this article, we have promoted the idea that mediatisation entails a mix of offensive and defensive mediatisation strategies. It is this combination of defensive and offensive strategies, on different levels and across diverse domains of society, to which future research should pay particular attention. With this contribution, we strive to advance the theoretical understanding of mediatisation and to facilitate research on the entire spectrum of mediatisation strategies and the meaning of media attention in contemporary societies.

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