COMM 340E Communication and Media in the Digital Age

Professor: Rubén Díaz
Office: CUI-UPO
Email: rdialop@acu.upo.es
Office Hours: Any time by email; appointments
preferred to have an online meeting

Course Information:
June 2021 (online)

Course Description

This course is intended to provide an introduction to the major social, political and cultural debates affecting communication and the new media landscapes in both Spain and the US. Topics include an overview of the core concepts in the disciplines of Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, the main theories of mass communication as well as a number of critical issues in the digital age such as the attention economy, the crisis and challenges of media industries, the emergence of social media and a digital public sphere, the growing role of grassroots movements, the threatening of mass surveillance and algorithms, the perils of freedom of speech, media underrepresentation, and their overall impact on democracy, ethics and culture.

Course Goals and Methodology

The main goal of this course is to investigate the complex relationship between media and culture in a network society. From a cultural approach to communication and through the critical study of a number of recent issues and cases, students will gain a clearer understanding of the debates and trends in communication and media in the digital age.

Learning Objectives

Through this course, students will:

- Look at the central role of culture in media and communication studies
- Trace and discuss the evolution and theories of mass communication and media
- Examine the crucial role of news and media in democratic societies
- Consider the growth of digital media activism and the power of social media
- Demonstrate an understanding of the complex process of transformation of media in the digital context, and its impact on politics, democracy and culture
- Review free expression debates in the digital age, focusing on copyright issues, privacy and security issues
- Address ethical issues in media representation in a more and more visually oriented culture, focusing on gender and race
- Gain analytical, critical, and new media skills

Technical requirements

This online course requires access to your own computer (desktop computer or laptop preferred, since tablets, Chromebook and cell phones may not meet this online platform

requirements) and a high-speed Internet Service Provider. A webcam and a headset (preferred) or microphone for your computer is recommended and may be required.

You should be proficient in the following:

- basic computer skills
- email management
- sending and receiving attachments via email
- using a web browser
- finding resources through search engines
- using productivity applications such as Googledocs and Google Slides
- using educational technology such as: Kahoot, Blackboard Collaborate, or Zoom
- familiarity with creating PDF files and submit them on Blackboard
- the ability to be self-directed in learning new technology skills (e.g. access to support to learn necessary skills for Blackboard, or a step-by-step video tutorial)

For technical problems with Blackboard, please contact Jorge Pascual (jpasdia@acu.upo.es).

Required Texts
There is no textbook required for this course. Therefore, students are not expected to purchase any material. The instructor will post the class material (Google Slides, case studies handouts, in-class worksheets, announcements, links, and any additional reading) on Blackboard, which is accessible both on campus and off campus. To log in, you need to sign in on https://campusvirtual.upo.es using the username and password you received in your orientation folder.

However, the contents of the course are mainly but not only based on the following texts:

- Benkler, Y., Farris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network Propaganda*. New York, US: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, M. (2005). *The network society: A cross-cultural perspective*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. Durham, M. G., & Kellner, D. (2006). *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Hartley, J. (2002). *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge
- Kelly, K. (2017). *The Inevitable. Understanding the 12 technological forces that will shape our future*. New York: Viking
- McQuail, D. (2010). *Mass Communication Theory*. London: SAGE
- Morozov, E. (2012). *The net delusion: How not to liberate the world*. London: Penguin.
- Nagle, A. (2017). *Kill all normies: Online culture wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the alt-right*. Winchester: Zero Books.
- O'Neil, C. (2016). *Weapons of Math Destruction*. London: Penguin Books
- Peirano, M. (2019). *El enemigo conoce el sistema. Manipulación de ideas, personas e influencias después de la economía de la atención*. Madrid: Debate.
- Perse, E. M., & Lambe, J. L. (2017). *Media effects and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Taylor, A. (2014). *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age*. Metropolitan Books, , USA.

- Tüfekçi, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.

Course Requirements and Grading
Online Sessions (20%)
The instructor will hold both synchronous and asynchronous sessions each week. Discussions will be encouraged at all sessions. This portion of the final grade will therefore be assessed according to the students' previous work and reflections about the provided material. Students are thus required not only to attend all of these sessions but also to participate by asking and answering questions with relevant basis (text-based and not just random personal experience and background), engaging in discussions and conversations with classmates, and questioning information presented and discussed.

Discussion Board (20%)
Discussion boards are essential for instructor and students to interact, reflect, and exchange ideas as part of the teaching and learning process. Every unit will be further discussed in a specific discussion board that will be managed by the instructor. Students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the topic of discussion through critical thinking, higher-order thinking, and uniqueness of contribution. Likewise, students are expected to contribute to community building through collaboration and connection with other students, using proper netiquette and mechanics of writing, and keep timeliness and participation with posts/replies.

Critical response essays (20%)
During the course, students will be asked to write 4 critical response essays. These essays are two-page critical response essays concerning each of the documentaries/films we will watch along the course. Each essay will comprise 5% of the final grade.

This assignment is aimed at evaluating your analytical skills. It implies the understanding of the problematic, content and significance of a given subject, as well as the ability to perform critical thinking and reflect your opinion on it. The aim of critical response essay is to get familiarized with the topic/s, form your opinion (the agreement or disagreement with the author of the episode), reveal the problematic of the piece and support your claims with evidence not only from the primary source (the documentary, the episode or the film at issue) but also from the readings associated with the assignment.

These papers are to be typed, double-spaced, using black 11-point Arial font, or 12-point Times New Roman. Please abide by the deadline set by your professor. If you submit your paper after the due date, then you should expect to be penalized (5% for every working day that your paper is late). Your papers should be clear and concise using proper concepts, correct spelling, and appropriate attribution for all sources. All writing is to follow the American Psychological Association (APA) Style for citations.

Video presentations (20%)
Students are required to prepare 20-minute video presentations on two of the readings assigned. This presentation will be graded on evidence of preparation (organized presentation, presentation flows well, no awkward pauses or confusion, evidence you did your own research), content (accurate & relevant information, appeared knowledgeable about the case study and the topic discussed, offered strategies for dealing with the problems identified in the case study), delivery (clear and logical organization, effective

introduction and conclusion, creativity, relevant transitions between the different parts of the presentation, oral communication skills, well-designed presentation slides, use attractive, relevant and illustrative images), and discussion (presenter initiates questions for discussion concerning the reading, use of visual aids).

Final paper (20%)
Students will be required to write a 6-page final paper tackling a specific topic related to the field of knowledge of the course from a list of topics offered by the instructor. Students will receive feedback and direction from the instructor by both email and online meetings.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Weekly Online Meetings (20%)
- Discussion Board (20%)
- Critical reviews (x4) (20%)
- Video presentations (2) (20%)
- Final paper (20%)

Final Grade Expectations: The instructor will use the Spanish 10-point grading scale. The grades that will appear on your final transcript are also Spanish grades.

- Grade A/A- (9-10) — Outstanding performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course. The best possible grade.
- Grade B+/B (8-9) — Remarkable performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics. Next highest.
- Grade B/B- (7-8) — Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics. Indicates high average performance.
- Grade C+/C (6-7) — Fairly good performance showing an understanding of the course on a basic level. Indicates average performance.
- Grade C/C- (5-6) — Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course's topics. Lowest passing grade
- Grade F (0-5) – Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Failing grade.

Please be aware that anything below a 5 (i.e. a C- on the U.S. scale) is a failing grade. There is no pass/fail option at UPO. If you do not officially withdraw from a class by the withdrawal deadline, a failing grade will appear next to the course name. Check out the Student Handbook for the grade conversion table (some universities may use a slightly different scale).

Academic Honesty
Academic integrity is a guiding principle for all academic activity at Pablo de Olavide University. Cheating on exams and plagiarism (which includes copying from the Internet) are clear violations of academic honesty. A student is guilty of plagiarism when he or she presents another person's intellectual property as his or her own. The penalty for plagiarism and cheating is a failing grade for the assignment/exam and a failing grade for the course. Avoid plagiarism by citing sources properly, using footnotes and a bibliography, and not cutting and pasting information from various websites when writing assignments.

Learning Accommodations
If you require special accommodations, you must speak to your instructor to either turn in your documentation or to confirm that our office has received it. The deadline is June 9th. Your instructor will explain the options available to you.

Behavior Policy
Students are expected to show integrity and act in a professional and respectful manner at all times. A student's attitude in class may influence his/her participation grade.

Course Contents
UNIT 1
Communication and Media: Understanding Core Concepts
We will introduce key concepts in Communication, Media and Cultural Studies investigating how media and communication shape and are shaped by contemporary societies.

UNIT 2
Media Theories: Manipulation and the Attention Economy
We will study theories and perspectives of mass and networked communication and explore the role of media in society. We will focus on contemporary media effects theories in the attention economy.

UNIT 3
The Media Industry's Transformation
We will explore some digital trends that are reshaping the media industry. As the digital transformation of the media industry faces new challenges, a combination of demographic, consumer and technology trends is dramatically remodeling the media landscape. We will highlight major debates that the media industry is dealing with in the digital age such as the paywall debate, or the net neutrality debate.

UNIT 4
Social Media and a (New) Public Sphere: A Participatory Culture?
We will study the concept of public sphere in the context of a network society. We will approach to the notion of participatory culture and we will discuss what we are talking about when we talk about participation within the public sphere. We will also explore the growth of digital activism and the power of social media. We will argue whether we can talk about a new public sphere in the digital age. Finally, we will discuss the role of digital practitioners in our democracies.

UNIT 5
On Surveillance and Freedom of Speech in the Digital Age
Through a number of study cases (i.e. the case of whistleblower Edward Snowden, we will debate of freedom of expression in the digital age, focusing on the conflict between privacy and security.