Digital Politics*
MA Seminar, Winter 2022/23

Wednesdays, 14:00-15:30, IBW S103

Instructor:
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1   Course Overview

"Facebook is killing democracy!"; *"YouTube makes conspiracy theorists famous!"*; *"Everyone's now in their own online bubbles isolated from different opinions!"*. These are some common things we hear when talking about the political impacts of the ongoing information technology revolution. However, social scientists are only starting to make sense of how the rise of digitalization and social media affects politics. In this course we will review the most advanced academic literature in this area, discussing some of its most pressing topics, from the spread of fake news to the role of social media on protests, and why the most likely right answers to the three statements opening this paragraph are respectively *"Probably not"*, *"Yeah, sort of"*, and *"Nope, not at all, quite the opposite"*.

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*This is a preliminary syllabus, subject to changes before the course starts.

2 Course Requirements

- Participation in **one of the three debates** (30 pts): During the semester, three sessions will be a debate on a specific proposition related to those weeks' topic. We will form six debate teams, two to debate on each day, and each student must be part of one (and only one) team. The four groups not debating on the day will be the judges. Students will be graded based on their personal and their team's performance on the debate, based on content, presentation, and interaction. These are also the criteria the judges will use to evaluate the teams. The winning team in each day will get **3 bonus points** added to their grade. More details on the debate format are on Ilias.

- **Two reaction papers** (15 pts each): during the semester students should pick any two sessions and write one reaction paper for each. The paper should be a critical evaluation of all readings for that week, to be uploaded up to Wednesday at 13:00 of the week when we discuss those readings. Each reaction paper should be no longer than two pages. **You cannot write a reaction paper for the topic which you are debating.**

- **A final project** (40 pts). An **audiovisual presentation** (e.g. a podcast episode, an explainer video, etc, be creative) on a specific case application for one or more concepts we see in class. It should be aimed at a lay but educated audience, and based on academic literature on the topic. It should not be simply a recorded presentation over slides. This should be done in groups of 2-3 students, and the length depends on the medium - but no more than 15-20 minutes. Deadline **February 16, 23:55 CET**. On the last session (Jan 25), students will give a short presentation (7 minutes) of their final project ideas to receive feedback before the final submission.

Points are converted to final grades as follows:

Points	Grade
100–96	1,0
95–91	1,3
90–86	1,7
85–81	2,0
80–76	2,3
75–71	2,7
70–66	3,0
65–61	3,3
60–56	3,7
55–51	4,0
50–0	5,0

3   Schedule

Week 1 (Oct 12): General Introduction: The Changing Landscape of Politics

Reading:

Tucker, Joshua A., Yannis Theocharis, Margaret E. Roberts, and Pablo Barber. "From liberation to turmoil: Social media and democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 4 (2017): 46-59.

Week 2 (Oct 19): Doing Political Research on a Digital World

Readings:

Munger, Kevin. "Tweetment effects on the tweeted: Experimentally reducing racist harassment." *Political Behavior* 39, no. 3 (2017): 629-649.

Mancosu, Moreno, and Federico Vegetti. "What You Can Scrape and What Is Right to Scrape: A Proposal for a Tool to Collect Public Facebook Data." *Social Media+ Society* 6, no. 3 (2020).

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Week 3 (Oct 26): Acquiring Political information online

Feezell, Jessica T. "Agenda setting through social media: The importance of incidental news exposure and social filtering in the digital era." *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2018): 482-494.

Stier, Sebastian, Frank Mangold, Michael Scharkow, and Johannes Breuer. "Post post-broadcast democracy? News exposure in the age of online intermediaries." *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 2 (2022): 768-774.

Week 4 (Nov 2): Disinformation, misinformation, and fake news

Readings:

Gruzd, Anatoliy, and Philip Mai. Going Viral: How a Single Tweet Spawned a COVID-19 Conspiracy Theory on Twitter. *Big Data & Society*, (July 2020). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720938405

Vraga, Emily K., and Leticia Bode (2020). "Defining Misinformation and Understanding its Bounded Nature: Using Expertise and Evidence for Describing Misinformation", *Political Communication*

Week 5 (Nov 09) NO CLASS

Week 6 (Nov 16): Correcting Misinformation

Pennycook, Gordon, Ziv Epstein, Mohsen Mosleh, Antonio A. Arechar, Dean Eckles, and David G. Rand. (2021). "Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online." *Nature* 592, no. 7855 590-595.

Humprecht, Edda, Frank Esser, and Peter Van Aelst. "Resilience to online disinformation: A framework for cross-national comparative research." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25, no. 3 (2020): 493-516.

Week 7 (Nov 21): Double session: Data-driven campaigning

NB! This week will be a double session on exceptionally on Monday at 18:30!

On Monday **Nov. 21**, at 18:30, we'll get together to watch the documentary "The Social Dilemma" (2020) and have a discussion about the movie afterwards. This will be a 3-hour session, and will make up for the seminars on Nov. 09 and Nov 21.

There will be no seminar on Nov 23!

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Readings:

Kefford, Glenn, Katharine Dommett, Jessica Baldwin-Philippi, Sara Bannerman, Tom Dobber, Simon Kruschinski, Sanne Kruikemeier, and Erica Rzepecki. Data-Driven Campaigning and Democratic Disruption: Evidence from Six Advanced Democracies. *Party Politics*, (April 2022). https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688221084039

Zarouali, Brahim, Tom Dobber, Guy De Pauw, and Claes de Vreese. "Using a personality-profiling algorithm to investigate political microtargeting: assessing the persuasion effects of personality-tailored ads on social media." *Communication Research* (2020): 1-26.

Week 8 (Nov 30): Policy and Regulation

On this session we have our first debate. The topic is:

> *Government officials who are considered to violate social media networks'*
> *terms of service by posting misinformation or hate speech should have*
> *their accounts suspended.*

Readings:

Florian Saurwein & Charlotte Spencer-Smith (2020): Combating Disinformation on Social Media: Multilevel Governance and Distributed Accountability in Europe, *Digital Journalism*, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2020.1765401

Kreiss, Daniel, and Shannon C. McGregor. "The arbiters of what our voters see: Facebook and Googles struggle with policy, process, and enforcement around political advertising." *Political Communication* 36, no. 4 (2019): 499-522.

Week 9 (Dec 7): Polarization and echo chambers

Barber, Pablo, John T. Jost, Jonathan Nagler, Joshua A. Tucker, and Richard Bonneau. "Tweeting from left to right: Is online political communication more than an echo chamber?." *Psychological science* 26, no. 10 (2015): 1531-1542.

Asimovic, Nejla, Jonathan Nagler, Richard Bonneau, and Joshua A. Tucker. "Testing the effects of Facebook usage in an ethnically polarized setting." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 118, no. 25 (2021).

Week 10 (Dec 14): Radicalization

On this session we have our second debate. The proposition is:

> *The rise of social media has contributed to the increasing success of radical and extreme parties in Europe in recent years*

Readings:

Hosseinmardi, Homa, Amir Ghasemian, Aaron Clauset, Markus Mobius, David M. Rothschild, and Duncan J. Watts. "Examining the consumption of radical content on YouTube." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 32 (2021): e2101967118.

Bernardez-Rodal, Asuncion, Paula Requeijo Rey, and Yanna G. Franco. "Radical right parties and anti-feminist speech on Instagram: Vox and the 2019 Spanish general election." Party Politics (2020): 1-12.

Week 11 (Jan 11): Social Media and Authoritarian States

Readings:

Gohdes, Anita R. (2020). Repression technology: Internet accessibility and state violence. *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(3), 488-503.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. "How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression." *American Political Science Review* (2013): 326-343.

Week 12 (Jan 18):

On this session we have our third debate. The topic is TBD
Readings:
TBD

Weeks 13 + 14 (Jan 25): Presentation of final projects

This session is dedicated to presentations of the final projects, and will likely go longer than the usual 1h30. If you have a class immediately afterwards, let me know and your group can present first.

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