

COM 150: Mass Media & Society
Room TBD, Tuesday and Thursday 12:30PM to 1:50PM

Instructor: Anyun Chatterjee, anyun.chatterjee@drexel.edu

Office hours: Virtual, by appointment

Course description

Media is often simply defined as a “means of communication,” but the term “media” encompasses an interwoven history of technologies, cultures, politics, and businesses. In this survey course, we will develop a deeper understanding of this relationship and how it impacts our lives.

Upon completion of this course, you will be better able to articulate:

- What media is and what its place is in your life and community
- How media technologies and usage patterns developed over time and what might come next
- Communication theories and their place in contemporary academic thought

What you will be graded on

Graded item	Description	Due date	%
Media log	Using the template on Blackboard, keep track of your media usage on any 4 days between June 30 and July 6. Submit this log along with a 1-page reflection answering the questions on Blackboard.	July 8, 12:30 PM EST	15% of final grade
Debate #1	In class, we will debate the following statement: <i>Advances in media technologies have encouraged unhealthy human behaviors.</i> Afterwards, you must submit at least 2.5 pages reflecting on what you learned for a grade.	July 17, 12:30 PM EST	10% of final grade
Debate #2	In class, we will debate the following statement: <i>College students should not use artificial intelligence in their coursework.</i> Afterwards, you must submit at least 2.5 pages reflecting on what you learned for a grade.	July 31, 12:30 PM EST	15% of final grade
Debate #3	In class, we will debate the following statement: <i>Advertising benefits companies more than consumers.</i> Afterwards, you must submit at least 2.5 pages reflecting on what you learned for a grade.	August 14, 12:30 PM EST	20% of final grade
Debate #4	In class, we will debate the following statement: <i>Advances in the media have led to weakened democracy.</i> Afterwards, you must submit at least 2.5 pages reflecting on what you learned for a grade.	August 28, 12:30 PM EST	20% of final grade
In-class responses	Up to twice during each class, you will submit a short response to a prompt. Each response is graded out of 2 points - 1 point for completion and 1 point for a thoughtful answer. 35 earned points during the semester constitutes 100% for this section.	Throughout the term	20% of final grade

Course schedule

Week of	Big question	Tuesday	Thursday
June 23	What is this class	Read: The syllabus	Read: Communication and Social

This syllabus is subject to change and was last updated on June 8, 2025.

	about?		Influence, by Gabriel Tarde (pp 277 - 294)
June 30	What is the role of media in our daily lives?	Read: E unibus pluram, by David Foster Wallace (fairly long, but a great read!)	Read: We Interrupt This Program, by Douglas Rushkoff Watch: The five filters of the mass media machine (short video)
July 7	How does media affect our behavior?	Read: Uses and Gratifications Research, by Elihu Katz Watch: Bandura's Bobo Doll Experiment (short video) SUBMIT MEDIA LOG	Read: Misconceptions, Misinformation, and the Logic of Identity-Protective Cognition, by Dan Kahan
July 14	How did humans go from cave paintings to doomscrolling?	Read: What Media Evolution Is, in <i>European Journal of Communication</i> Read: Two Hundred Years of Global Communications, from the Council on Foreign Relations DEBATE #1	Read: The Dark at the End of the Tunnel, in <i>Technology Mind, and Behavior</i> SUBMIT DEBATE #1 RESPONSE
July 21	The AI Question.	Read: The ethics of using (generative) artificial intelligence in research and science, in <i>Journal of Information Technology</i> Read: We tested a new ChatGPT-detector for teachers. It flagged an innocent student., from <i>Washington Post</i>	Read: AI is an energy hog, in <i>MIT Technology Review</i> Watch: Dark Sides of Artificial Intelligence, from <i>60 Minutes</i>
July 28	Who controls the media?	Read: What is Media Consolidation and Why Should Anyone Care, from <i>BillMoyers.com</i> Watch: Capitalism And Monopolies: How Five Companies Control All US Media, from <i>Second Thought</i> DEBATE #2	Watch: How Dropout went from CollegeHumor to media powerhouse, from <i>Fast Company</i> Watch: Sinclair Broadcast Group, from <i>Last Week Tonight</i> SUBMIT DEBATE #2 RESPONSE
Aug 4	Why are ads everywhere?	Read: A Brief History of Advertising in America, in <i>Advertising & Society Review</i> Listen: Does Advertising Actually Work? (Parts 1 and 2), from <i>Freakonomics</i> (roughly 90 minutes of podcast)	Read: Advertising Makes Us Unhappy, from <i>Harvard Business Review</i> Watch: Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse (1 hour long documentary)

Aug 11	What do modern media companies want from us?	Read: How Cambridge Analytica Sparked the Great Privacy Awakening, from <i>Wired</i> Read: How Much Is Your Private Data Worth — and Who Should Own It?, from <i>Insights by Stanford Business</i> DEBATE #3	Read: The Attention Economy, from <i>Berkeley Economic Review</i> Watch: Self Esteem in the Age of Social Media (1 hour long panel discussion) SUBMIT DEBATE #3 RESPONSE
Aug 18	How do we take control of our media environment?	Read: How The American Media Landscape is Polarizing the Country, from <i>The Pardee Atlas Journal of Global Affairs</i> Watch: What We're Missing in the Fight Against Misinformation, by Dietram Scheufele	Read: Media overload is hurting our mental health, from <i>American Psychological Association</i> Read: What the Luddites Really Fought Against, from <i>Smithsonian Magazine</i>
Aug 25	What do you think about the role of media in your daily life now?	Read: Your media log from July 8th Read: Your previous three debate responses DEBATE #4	SUBMIT DEBATE #4 RESPONSE

Course policies

Participation policy - Students are expected to come to class having done the reading and ready to ask questions. While there is no “participation grade,” you will not get your money’s worth if you are distracted, unprepared, asleep, disruptive, or otherwise non-participatory.

Late policy - Written submissions are due by class time (i.e. 12:30 PM EST), on Blackboard, on the day they are listed. I will not accept late submissions unless I receive an email by 5pm the preceding day explaining when you expect to complete the assignment. This policy exists because life does happen, but I reserve the right to not accept late submissions from a student who abuses this policy.

Formatting policy - All submissions must follow these requirements to be graded:

- At least 2.5 pages, not including reference page: 1 inch margins, 12pt Times New Roman font, double spaced
- Have a left-justified single-spaced 4-line header on the first page with the following information: Your name, the class name, the date, and a title which encapsulates the gist of the paper (i.e. not “Essay 2”)
- Make an argument - not just a summary of what you learned but an actual defended point based on your thoughts around the course material
- Contain distinct paragraphs of at least 3 sentences each, with clear introduction and conclusion paragraphs
- A reference page with citations in APA format (this requirement is waived for the media log)

In-class discussion policy - The discussions in class may take a controversial turn from time to time. As college students, you should be able to hold space for disagreements and challenging opinions. In these discussions you are expected to only critique ideas, and never the person putting them forth. Any personal attacks or harassment will not be tolerated, and will be grounds for being asked to leave the class.

Personal computing device policy - The use of personal computers and phones in-class is expected and encouraged for note-taking, using search engines, accessing reading, and other activities relevant to class participation. However, habitual non-academic device use (e.g. texting, shopping, gaming, browsing social media, listening to music using headphone/earbuds, etc.) is grounds for being asked to leave the class. Additionally, I reserve the right to revert the class to a no-technology policy if there is habitual abuse of the existing policy.

Artificial intelligence policy - The use of artificial intelligence to produce, review, edit, or otherwise alter any part of your submissions for this course is grounds for a failing grade for that assignment. Students are recommended to use either Google Docs or Microsoft Word with “track changes” enabled in case AI usage is suspected. Additionally, it is *highly discouraged* to use artificial intelligence in the aiding of completing any readings. This policy has more to do with the hopes that students get their money’s worth, and additionally we will debate the role of AI in the college experience on July 29.

Plagiarism policy - All submitted work must be independently conceptualized by the submitting student. Any words or ideas borrowed from another person must be cited in proper APA format. Failure to provide appropriate attribution, or any attempts to pass off another person’s work as your own is grounds for failing the course and referral to the appropriate office. This policy is never up for debate as it is a foundational one in academia. Don’t plagiarize.