PLSC 597: Media, Social Media & Politics

Fall 2021

Wednesday 2:00–5:00

Graduate Seminar
Penn State University

Instructor

Professor: Kevin Munger
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Office hours: Schedule by email (usually Thursdays 1-3pm)

Course Overview

This seminar covers recent and classic empirical research on the relationship between "the media" (broadly understood) and politics. The modern study of mass media influence originated in the 1940s and spans several social science disciplines. As we will see, the paradigms developed in the early years of that research program continue to influence scholars today — as well as to be debated and critiqued. Some of the canonical questions we will explore include the power of media messages to persuade; the extent to which media diets are ideologically slanted; and the role of new information technologies and social media on societal pathologies such as mass polarization.

It would be impossible to adequately cover all aspects of media research even in a comprehensive survey course. As such, this seminar will focus on relatively recent work that is quantitative in nature (although not exclusively so), but we will also strive to remain grounded in foundational works. Some important pieces are left off under the assumption that Political Science students have been exposed to them in other courses.

Prerequisites

Many of the readings will be difficult for those who have not taken at least one semester of graduate statistics.

Course Components and Grading

- **Precis:** You will be expected to complete the readings and submit a 350-500 word reading response paper by midnight on Tuesday before each session. This is a useful commitment device for everyone involved, and helps me understand what people are interested in. (20%)

- **Participation:** Given the above, please be prepared to contribute meaningfully to the discussion. Active participation is critical to the seminar format! (10%)

- **Literature review:** You will submit a roughly 10-page review of literature on a specific topic. It should critically summarize the state of the empirical research in a specific area and could potentially be useful in the development of your final paper. (20%)

- **Research paper:** Your 25-page final paper may involve original data collection, a replication and extension of previous work, or analysis of existing data. All topics must be cleared with me in advance. Papers should follow APSA style guidelines. (50%)

Books

We will read multiple chapters of many books for this course. If you're interested in this topic, these are worth purchasing, but I'll make scans of all of the readings available on my website.

Required Syllabi Statements

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION STATEMENT Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/disability-coordinator). For further information, please visit the Student Disability Resources website (http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/). In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See documentation guidelines at (http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/guidelines). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES STATEMENT Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation. Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS) (http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/): 814-863-0395 Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses (http://senate.psu.edu/faculty/counseling-services-at-commonwealth-campuses/) Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400 Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY/REPORT BIAS STATEMENT Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Consistent with University Policy AD29, students who believe they have experienced or observed a hate crime, an act of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents as outlined on the University's Report Bias webpage (http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/)

Schedule

August 25: Intro, Preliminaries

Klapper, Joseph T. 1957. "What We Know About the Effects of Mass Communication: The Brink of Hope."

James Beniger, 1993. Communication–Embrace the Subject, Not the Field.

September 1: The Medium is the Message

Karl Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* ch 1-2,

    5-8.

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* ch 1-3

Mcluhan on Deutsch

Munger, Kevin and Andy Guess and Eszter Hargittai, 2021. Quantitative Description of Digital Media: A Modest Proposal to Disrupt Academic Publishing

September 8: Time

Bennett, W. Lance and Shanto Iyengar. 2008. "A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication."

Kevin Munger. 2019. The Limited Value of Non-Replicable Field Experiments in Contexts With Low Temporal Validity

Kevin Munger, Temporal Validity

David Karpf. 2012. Social Science Research Methods In Internet Time

David Karpf, 2019. Two provocations for the study of digital politics in time

September 15: Recent History

Neil Postman, *Technopoly* ch 1-4.

James Beniger, *The Control Revolution* ch 1, 8.

Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, ch attached.

September 22: Positivism, Media Effects

Hovland, Carl I., Arthur A. Lumsdaine, and Fred D. Sheffield. 1949. *Experiments on Mass Communication.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction, Chapter 2.

Asimovic et al. 2021. Testing the effects of Facebook usage in an ethnically polarized setting

Sides, Vavreck, Warshaw, Working paper. The Effect of Television Advertising in United States Elections.

Coppock, Hill, Vavreck, 2020. The small effects of political advertising are small regardless of context, message, sender, or receiver: Evidence from 59 real-time randomized experiments.

September 29: No Class, APSA

October 6: Polarization and Civility

Jaidka, Zhou, Lelkes 2019. Brevity is the soul of Twitter.

James Fallows, 1996. "Why Americans Hate the Media"

Prior, Markus. 2013. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16:101–127.

Westwood, Sean, Shanto Iyengar, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, and Neil Malhotra. 2018. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

October 13: Media Consumption and Selective Exposure

Sood, Gaurav and Yphtach Lelkes. 2018. "Don't Expose Yourself: Discretionary Exposure to Political Information." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Available here: `http://gsood.com/research/papers/selexp.pdf`

Guess, Andrew, Benjamin Lyons, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2018. "Avoiding the Echo Chamber About Echo Chambers: Why Selective Exposure To Like-Minded Political News Is Less Prevalent Than You Think." The Knight Foundation.

Buntain, Cody et al, 2021. YouTube Recommendations and Effects on Sharing Across Online Social Platforms.

Bail et al. 2018. "Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(37): 9216–9221.

October 20: Digital Prejudice

Paluck, Elizabeth Levy. 2009. "Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict using the media: A field experiment in Rwanda." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96(3): 574–587.

Matias, J. Nathan. 2019. Preventing harassment and increasing group participation through social norms in 2,190 online science discussions.

Lajevardi, Nazita, 2021. The media matters: Muslim american portrayals and the effects on mass attitudes

Siegel, Alexandra et al. 2021. Trumping Hate on Twitter? Online Hate Speech in the 2016 US Election Campaign and its Aftermath

October 27: Is Social Media Driving Us Apart?

Settle, Jaime. 2018. *Frenemies* chapters 1-4.

Boxell, Levi, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2017. "Greater Internet use is not associated with faster growth in political polarization among US demographic groups." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(40): 10612–10617. (skim)

Chris Bail, 2021. *The Social Media Prism* ch TBA

November 3: Quantitative Description

Guess, Andrew, Kevin Aslett, Joshua Tucker, Rich Bonneau and Jonathan Nagler. 2021. Cracking Open the News Feed: Exploring What U.S. Facebook Users See and Share with Large-Scale Platform Data

Guess, Andrew, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2020. Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election.

Munger, Kevin and Jospeh Phillips, 2020. Right-Wing YouTube: A Supply and Demand Perspective

Hosseinmardi et al, 2021. Examining the consumption of radical content on YouTube

November 10: Media Economics

Hamilton, James. 2004. *All the News that's Fit to Sell: How the market transforms information into news.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1, 7

Hindman, Matthew. 2018. *The Internet Trap: How the Digital Economy Builds Monopolies and Undermines Democracy* Chapters 1-4,8.

Usher, Nikki. 2014. *Making News at the "New York Times* Chapters Intro, 1, 5.

Munger, Kevin, 2020. All the News that's Fit to Click: The Economics of Clickbait Media.

November 17: Emerging Platforms

Ventura, Tiago et al, 2021. Connective Effervescence and Streaming Chat During Political Debates

TikTok

ETC

November 24: No Class, Thanksgiving

December 1: Protests

Pablo Gerbaudo, *The Digital Party* ch 2,4,8-10

Zeynep Tufecki, *Twitter and Tear Gas* ch TBA

Shugars et al, 2021. Pandemics, Protests, and Publics: Demographic Activity and Engagement on Twitter in 2020

December 8: Research Presentation

Academics, and grad students in particular, tend to avoid presenting work before it is extremely polished. This has some advantages, but we neglect to develop our skills at both presenting and discussing work in progress.

This week, each person will give a short presentation based on their working paper, with another person serving as discussant.

December 15: Final Papers due to my inbox by 5pm