COMM 413W: Media and Public

Final paper directions and rubric

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Potential theories

Select a specific theory relevant to political communication that you will explore in your final paper. Many theories may apply to contexts beyond political communication, but you will want to be sure you are able to comfortably focus on the political and civic applications of this theory. Please note that "theory" means a coherent explanation of how multiple variables, some of which relate to media, are connected. Theory is not the same thing as topic. You should not be focusing on a particular type of media content or a specific outcome or political issue. Rather, you should be looking at a broad theory that relates media and other variables across a variety of contexts. The list below includes a number of viable theories. You are free to explore a different theory on your own, but obviously you will want to be sure it meets the required definition.

Possible theories:

- Agenda setting

- Priming

- Spiral of silence

- Third-person perception/effect

- Knowledge gap

- Elaboration likelihood model

- Cultivation

- Opinion leadership/two-step flow

- Communication mediation model

- Hostile media perception

- Selective exposure

Off limits:

- Framing: any theories of framing or the topic of framing as a whole may not be used for the main topic, because past experience shows the literature is too poorly structured and because examples will be given based on framing as a theory

Requirement

While the individual assignments focus on specific, narrow topics, the final paper challenges you to develop a longer, more complex argument. In this paper, you will integrate several articles from the class and your own library work and apply this material to a context of your choosing. Your final paper should be a coherent, effectively written essay that includes the following sections:

1. **Theory overview**. Summarize the theory you are describing. Explain the origins of this theory and its main predictions, drawing upon material from the scholarly literature. This should be relatively concise, focused on giving sufficient detail to show understanding of the theory and to provide context for the discussion of trends. The primary goal of the paper is to talk about how the theory is evolving and could be further expanded, not to simply summarize its basic pillars.

2. **Emerging trends**. Explain the "state of the art" for this theory — describe current trends in how people are studying this theory and what they are finding. Consider such issues as whether the theory is being applied in new contexts, whether different methods are being employed, whether novel relationships have been found, and whether clearer mechanisms explaining the tested relationships have been identified. Clearly support this discussion both with scholarly overviews of these trends as well as examples of actual research being done that represents these trends. Be fairly detailed; this section should be a major element of your overall paper, spanning multiple pages and including a minimum of 3 clearly stated trends, each illustrated with multiple studies that show examples of how these trends are emerging in the literature.

3. **Theory comparison**. Identify and summarize an additional theory we have considered this summer that provides a potential model for how to improve research or conceptualization related to your topic theory. Provide a concise description of this theory, drawing upon relevant evidence from course materials and additional articles (as necessary). Explain the specific strengths of this second theory that represent a model that researchers into your topic theory should follow, and explain why following this example would improve the conceptualization of or research into your topic theory. In essence, this section is offering an example from research into another theory to suggest a potential future trend, akin to the emerging trends listed for No. 2.

4. **Application**. Provide an explanation for how your topic theory can help understand the influence of media on a specific outcome concept or variable covered during the semester. These include, but are not limited to, selective exposure, perceptions of media bias and credibility, willingness to discuss and engage in politics, feelings of trust in people and institutions, political knowledge, general civic participation, and ideological or candidate preferences. Explain why your chosen theory can help explain this outcome variable in general terms. Then, provide an example illustrating how this theory might explain a specific example of a recent current events issue in which this variable was important and might have been influenced by media, projecting the nature of that influence as predicted by your theory. Note that it is not necessary to provide a specific study testing this relationship; the goal here is to use what prior research has shown in other contexts to make a testable prediction

about what happened in this new context. You will need some broader evidence showing the theory is applicable to the variable chosen as well as sufficient material to clearly describe the example you give, but the latter does not necessarily have to come from the scholarly literature. News coverage can be more helpful in many cases.

5. **Evaluations and future directions**. Provide an overall assessment of the current trends and recommendations for future directions for your chosen theory. That is, explain whether the theory is headed in a good direction, and what the most notable strengths are in its current trends. Beyond this, describe your recommendations for how this theory should further evolve (that is, what directions it should take), given your description of the theory in the prior sections of the paper. Offer specific recommendations, including at least one specific example of a study that could be done address the most important of your recommendations, with enough detail to show how this would advance our understanding and mirror at least some of your recommended directions.

6. **Style guidelines**. Ensure that all works cited in this essay are consistent with APA style (in-text citations within the text, and a list of references at the end). Please note: You are allowed to draw upon sources not included in your prior annotated bibliography and to omit sources included in that bibliography if they do not prove useful and are not included in your paper. However, you are expected to integrate a minimum of five outside articles, as per the bibliography assignment, and a thorough treatment of all the above elements will require using more than five scholarly references, including multiple references to course readings as well as the required outside material. Meeting the bare minimum is not a guarantee of a passing score, but does provide a reasonable starting point.

Rubric

Writing

- Needs improvement (0 points). The paper suffers from major and consistent problems with grammar, spelling, style, organization or clarity that inhibit audience understanding of the main points being offered.

- Good (1 point). The paper is effectively organized, with only minor issues in grammar, style, spelling or organization that do not significantly inhibit the clarity of the points made.

- Outstanding (2 points). The paper is written in an engaging, compelling fashion, meeting the standard for a "good" paper while also employing language in a particularly strong and effective fashion.

Evidence

- Incomplete (-1 point). The paper does not meet the minimum standards for providing evidence, offering fewer than five outside scholarly sources.

- Poor (0 points). The paper includes the minimum of five outside sources, but either does not integrate material from course readings or draws upon sources of questionable validity or relevance.

- Acceptable (1 point). The paper provides at least five relevant outside sources and makes use of multiple course readings to support its claims.

- Outstanding (2 points). The paper provides many sources, both from outside the class as well as from the course readings, that clearly and effectively support the relevant claims and show a meaningful effort to locate good, appropriate resources.

Submission and formatting

- Poor (-1 point). The paper was not submitted in the correct format and via the correct means, or the paper deviates dramatically from earlier proposals without instructor approval; or, the paper was submitted after the set deadline but within 24 hours of the due date.

- Adequate (1 point): The paper generally follows formatting requirements, but does omit a small amount of important citation information.

- Good (2 points). The paper follows all formatting and submission guidelines.

Theory overview

- Incomplete/missing (0 points). The paper does not present a readily identified explanation of the theory.

- Poor (1 point). The paper provides some description of the theory, but this material is misleading, incorrect or incomplete to a degree that would cause poor audience understanding of basic elements of the theory.

- Good (2 points). The paper provides an accurate summary of the main aspects of the theory but may contain some inaccuracies, be unclear in its presentation of important elements, omit less important but still valuable aspects of the theory, or focus excessively on minor points in a way that distorts the central focus of the theory.

- Outstanding (3 points). The paper provides a clear, detailed and accurate description of the key focus of the theory, providing appropriate evidence and relevant details in a concise manner.

Key trends

- Incomplete/missing (0 points). The paper does not address trends in research on the theory in a meaningful fashion.

- Poor (1 point). The paper provides some discussion emerging trends, but this material makes claims about trends that appear inconsistent with the cited evidence or does not include the minimum of three clear trends.

- Adequate (2 point). The paper provides discussion of ongoing trends without including any major inaccuracies, but in a way that does not meet the standards of good or outstanding (including cases where the presentation of emerging trends focuses on outdated material, does not draw connections across articles, or focuses on minor issues not effectively represented by the selected evidence).

- Good (3 points). The paper notes at least the minimum number of emerging trends in research involving this theory, including at least some specific examples, but in a way that does not meet the standard for outstanding (such as situations where major themes in the literature are ignored while attention is paid to interesting but secondary ideas, or where the warrant showing how cited examples support the trend is not sufficiently developed).

- Outstanding (4 points). The paper highlights what are clearly central emerging trends in research involving the theory, and effectively illustrates these with carefully discussed examples from existing scholarship.

Theory comparison

- Incomplete/missing (0 points). The paper does not offer any discussion of how the theory compares to a distinct additional theory addressed in the course.

- Adequate (1 point). The paper provides some discussion how the theory compares to an additional theory, but does not fully meet the standard for outstanding. Factors may include insufficient or inaccurate information about the additional theory, misleading information about the topic theory in making the comparison, or insufficient logic and reasoning in describing the connection between the theories. Strong comparisons made to a theory not covered in the course could also earn a score of adequate.

- Outstanding (2 points). The paper clearly explains how the theory compares to an additional theory addressed in the course, in a way that shows a solid understanding of course content as well as the underlying theory, and that shows genuine creativity and insight into both the variable and the theory.

Application

- Incomplete/missing (0 points). The paper does not offer any discussion of how the theory applies to a course-related outcome variable, or does not include any concrete example to illustrate this application.

- Adequate (1 point). The paper provides some discussion how the theory applies to a course-related outcome variable, including a concrete example as illustration, but in a way that does not meet the standards of outstanding. Factors may include an outcome variable that doesn't clearly reflect course material, a choice of example that is not effectively explained or lacks contextual evidence, or a general lack of logic and reasoning in the presentation of material supporting this application.

- Outstanding (2 points). The paper clearly explains how the theory applies to both a course-related outcome variable, in a way that shows a solid understanding of

course content as well as the underlying theory, and that shows genuine creativity and insight into both the variable and the theory. The paper also offers some discussion of how the theory applies to a specific example relevant to the selected outcome variable that shows a clear understanding of that issue, with at least some relevant outside evidence, as well as good insights into the underlying theory.

Future directions

- Incomplete (0 points). The paper does not offer any discussion of how the theory might be further developed or tested.

- Adequate (1 point). The paper provides some discussion how the theory might be developed, reflecting an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this theory, but this discussion may be too limited in scope, one-dimensional, or disconnected from the prior argument to meet the standards for good or outstanding.

- Good (2 points). The paper provides discussion how the theory might be developed, reflecting a solid understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this theory and building from ideas elsewhere in the paper, but falls short of the standards for outstanding. Factors may include insufficient detail about how future research might be conducted, insufficient breadth of topics covered, or insufficient connection between the rest of the paper and the future directions. Papers will all these factors would be adequate, not good.

- Outstanding (3 points). The paper offers some clear thoughts about directions for improvement, and these ideas show a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory as it exists now. In addition, these thoughts address a breadth of issues, including more abstract ideas about where else the theory might be applied or how it might be redefined, as well as more concrete, applied ideas about actual changes in the methodology used to study the theory. This discussion follows logically from the evidence presented elsewhere in the paper.

Assignment Format

- Journal article adopting APA 7th edition style

- Double-space, 1 inch margin, 12 point *Times New Roman*

- 25 pages but no longer than 30 pages (including everything: tables, figures, references, appendixes)

- Papers submitted more than 24 hours after the deadline will not receive credit.