HSS 313: Digital Media and Democracy

Week 1

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Instructor & teaching assistant

Taegyoon Kim, Instructor

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Assistant Professor at School
of DHCSS, KAIST

PhD in Political Science and
Social Data Analytics

Myokyung Han, TA

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Graduate Student at School
DHCSS, KAIST

MBA in Information Media

This course aims to introduce the influence of digital media on democracy and to help students develop critical evaluation skills for assessing the political and social consequences of current and future ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) developments

Today's agendas

1. What do we mean by "digital media" and "democracy"?

2. Why do we care out democracy?

3. How do digital media interact with democracy?

4. Introducing major course tasks

5. (Self-introductions)

What is digital media and is not?

Content that is created, stored, and exchanged in digital form, typically using electronic devices and computer technology

The technology, infrastructure, and platforms that enable its creation, storage, and dissemination

Encompasses a wide range of content types/formats, including text, images, audio, video, and interactive elements

# What is digital media and is not?

What do we mean by "democracy"?

Two approaches to defining democracy

- Procedural views focus on *contestation* and *inclusion*
  - "Political regimes in which governmental offices are filled as a consequence of contested (& inclusive) elections"
  - Encompasses freedom of expression, participation, etc.
- Substantive views focus on outcomes produced by political regimes
  - E.g., economic equality, social justice

What do we mean by "democracy"?
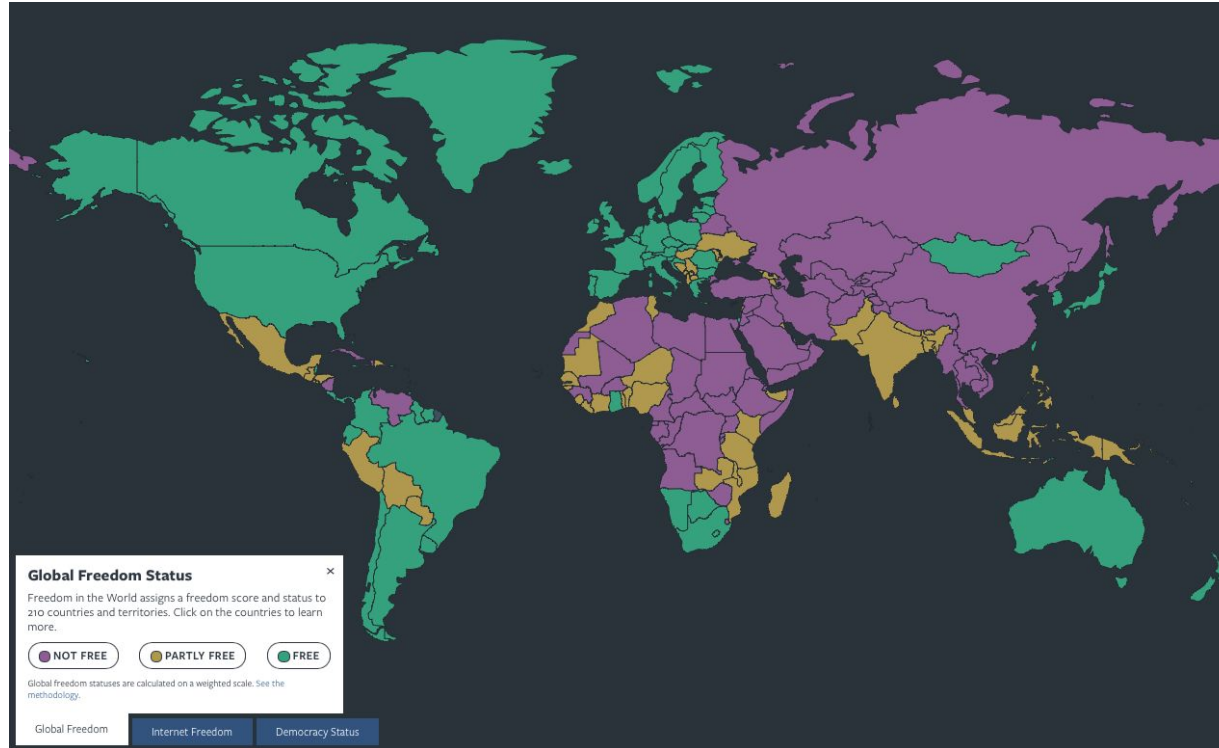
Why do we care about democracy?

Above all, democracy is inherently valuable: self-rule

- Freedom of expression/participation

- Peaceful resolution of differences

(Arguably), democracy appears to be more conducive to generating good governance than dictatorships in important aspects

- E.g., economic growth, child mortality, public health, international cooperation, etc.

How do digital media and democracy interact?

Digital media, like social media, can facilitate collective action such as protests

Photograph by Paula Bronstein/Getty

How do digital media and democracy interact?

Oftentimes, against dictators, as in the case of the Arab Spring

How do digital media and democracy interact?

On the flip side, however, dictatorships can use digital technologies for surveillance

How do digital media and democracy interact?

They even just shut down the internet

How do digital media and democracy interact?

Digital media can help people learn and spread important information about society and politics, increasing political knowledge and participation (e.g., voting)

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

How do digital media and democracy interact?

However, in the digital era, a proliferation of harmful content, including misinformation, abounds in many different forms

How do digital media and democracy interact?

AI technologies for content recommendation embedded in digital media platforms can create echo chambers and polarization
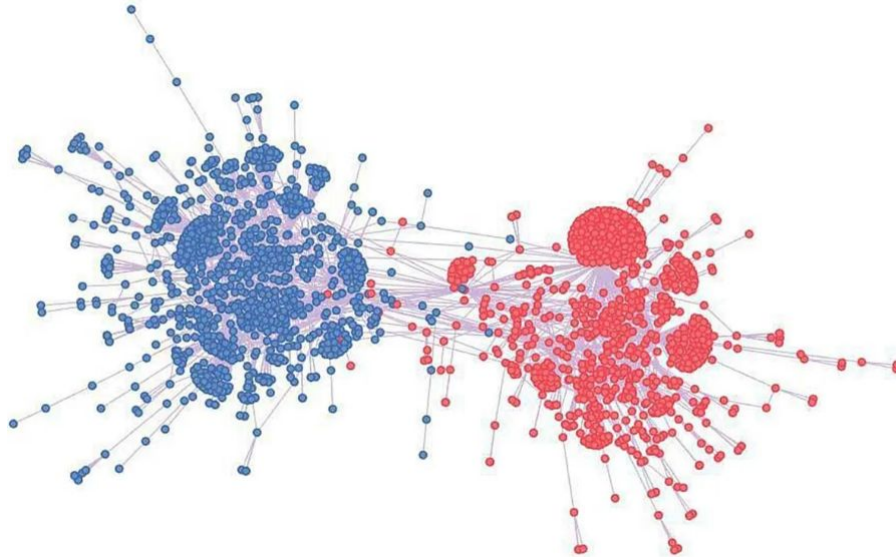
How do digital media and democracy interact?

In extreme cases, digital platforms are abused to spread propagandas against minority groups such as Rohingya in Myanmar

Major tasks

Attendance + individual case studies + team project

No examinations

Major tasks

Major tasks

1. Attendance (10% of final grade)

   - When you arrive in class, make sure to check in with the TA

   - 5–20 minutes late: "late" (-0.5) & 20 minutes or more: "absence" (-2)

   - You can miss up to two classes without losing grade

Major tasks

2. Readings / response memo (25% of final grade)

- Make sure to read the assigned reading (no need to fully understand)
- Rather, bring your questions and thoughts to class
- Write a response memo (approximately a paragraph) that focuses on:
  - What argument(s) is made?
  - Do you agree? Does it make sense?
  - Why? Any criticisms or thoughts?
- Should me emailed to the instructor in PDF by 4PM on Monday
- Reading materials are subject to change

Major tasks

3. Case presentation (30% of final grade)

- Two individual presentations (approximately 10 min each)
- Here a "case" refers to an empirical manifestation of a particular phenomenon
  - Control of online messaging → Censorship of Telegram in Myanmar
  - Not necessarily an "event"

Major tasks

3. Case presentation (30% of final grade) (cont'd)

- Each presentation should cover the following
  - Why the case matters
  - Summary of the case
  - What the cases tells about the arguments/theories discussed in the Tuesday class

Major tasks

3. Case presentation (30% of final grade) (cont'd)

- Slides should be emailed in PDF to the TA (instructor cc'd) by 8AM on the day of the presentation
- Please sign up for presentations on this [Google Sheet](#)
  - Two presentations cannot be in the same week
  - As soon as you decide on what case to focus on, put a one-sentence summary of the case next to your name.
  - Avoid a similar content to those who have already signed up

Major tasks

4. Final presentation (35% of final grade)

- Students will be divided into several teams (of about five students)

- Each team will select a country (no overlap with other teams' choices)

- Identify as many themes as possible (e.g., protest, censorship, inter-group violence, etc.)

- Analyze the country in terms of the identified themes

Major tasks

4. Final presentation (35% of final grade) (cont'd)

- Milestones
    - Proposal (Oct 26)
        - 15 minutes (including Q/A)
    - Final presentation (Dec 5 & 7)
        - 25 minutes (including Q/A)
    - Final paper (Dec 14)
        - 4,000–6,000 words (you can add appendices)
        - Should be emailed to the instructor in PDF

Other logistical matters

Office hours

- Either Tue/Thu 10:15–11:00AM

- Or by appointment (email me)

Late Submission Policy:

- A penalty of 10% for each day beyond the due date

Plan for the warm-up weaks (the next three classes)

8/31 Thu

- Overview of substantive themes

- Introducing media consumption analysis

    - We ourselves are the consumers and producers of digital media

    - Let's audit ourselves for a week in terms of key themes explored

      in the course and discuss

Plan for the warm-up weaks (the next three classes)

9/5 Tue

- What is social science research?

    ○ Correlation and causation?

    ○ How to read social science research?

- Team assignment

Plan for the warm-up weaks (the next three classes)

9/7 Thu

- Media consumption discussion

- Team project ice breaking