

DIGITAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY (18611)

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Sylvain Parasio

Professor of Sociology
sylvain.parasio@sciencespo.fr

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The digital transformation affects and questions the functioning of democracy. The reshaping of the media landscape, the emergence of new forms of activism, the growth of discussion spaces, all of this raises many concerns, particularly related to disinformation and polarization.

This course proposes to explore these major issues both from recent social science research, and from the more classical theories developed by the social sciences long before the rise of digital technology. For example, the theories of media reception forged in the 1970s are useful for understanding what is at stake today in the relationship of citizens to information circulating on social media. This course will therefore provide analytical tools, with the aim of grasping in depth the dynamics of the digital transformation of the public space.

COURSE VALIDATION

The validation process and workload will be discussed with all the students during the first session. My suggestion is that the validation be based on the following elements:

1. Class participation (+ 1 point)

- You are expected to be actively engaged during the course and to intervene regularly to enrich the collective discussions.
- For most sessions, the **reading** of a book chapter or article is required. This is important work, and you are expected to have read it carefully. The quality of collective discussion depends on that.

2. Oral presentation of a research paper (individual assignment, 40%)

Once during the semester, each student will prepare a **presentation** on a document that will be assigned at the beginning of the course. The presentations will last a maximum of 10 minutes and will answer 3 questions provided in advance ([in this document](#)).

However, due to the high number of students, not everyone will be able to speak during the course. Those who do not speak will provide the slides of their presentation, which will be graded.

For each session, 3 students will be asked to present a research article or a book chapter in front of the class:

- A first student will present the required reading.
- For a few texts, a second student will present the same required reading, answering specific questions
- A third student will present the complementary reading.

In the course's shared folder, you will find a [table with all the papers and questions](#).

3. Group research (collective assignment, 60%)

In groups of 4, **students will investigate** a media organization, an activist organization or any other organization that uses digital technology (web, social media, artificial intelligence), using sociological methods (interviews, observations, or digital corpus). Throughout the semester, you will conduct your investigation in groups (elaboration of the subject, identification of the field of investigation, bibliographical research, writing the final digital report, etc.).

Deadlines:

September 27: prepare a “note of intent”, describing (1) the object of your investigation, (2) your research question, (3) the methods and fields of investigation, (4) a selection of bibliographical references. A one-page note should be enough.

October 18: submit some empirical material you have collected so far (an interview, a corpus, etc.) and the outline of your analysis.

December 12: the date on which you will send the paper on your group research.

Attendance, Academic honesty and plagiarism

The same rules apply in this course as in the rest of the program. Class attendance is mandatory. All the same, no form of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be accepted during this course.

WORKLOAD

- For most sessions, the reading of a book chapter or article is required. This is important work, and you are expected to have read it carefully. The quality of collective discussion depends on that.
- Throughout the semester, you will conduct your investigation in groups (elaboration of the subject, identification of the field of investigation, bibliographical research, writing the final digital report, etc.).

COURSE ORGANIZATION**Session 1 – Introduction**

Friday, September 2, 2:45-4:45pm

Session 2 – The Social Stratification of Digital Media

Friday, September 9, 2:45-4:45pm

Key concepts: homophily; social stratification

Required reading:

1. danah boyd (2014), “Can Social Media Resolve Social Divisions?” (Excerpt from *It’s complicated: The social lives of networked teens*).

Complimentary reading:

2. Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook (2001), “Birds of a feather: Homophily in Social Networks”.

Session 3 – The Domestication of Digital Technologies

Friday, September 23, 2:45-4:45pm

Key concept: Domestication

Required reading:

3. Ignacio Siles et al. (2019), "The Mutual Domestication of Users and Algorithmic Recommendations on Netflix"

Complimentary reading:

4. Pierre Bourdieu (1965), "Photographic practice as an index and an instrument of integration"

September 27: Deadline for submitting a two-pages note, in which each group presents (1) the media, mobilization or any other initiative that will be investigated, (2) a research question, (3) methods of investigation, (4) a short bibliography.

Session 4 – Group investigative projects (1/2)

Friday, September 30, 2:45-4:45pm

No required reading.

Session 5 – Influence on Opinions

Tuesday, October 4, 12:30-2:30pm (please note, new room: building H (28 rue des Saints-Pères) room SV)

Key concepts: social networks, collective representations

Required reading:

5. Christopher Bail (2019), "Assessing the Russian Internet Research Agency's impact on the political attitudes and behaviors of American Twitter users in late 2017".

Complimentary reading:

6. Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (1955), Excerpt from *Personal Influence - The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication*.

Session 6 – Receiving the Media

Friday, October 7, 2:45-4:45pm

Key concept: Reception

Required reading:

7. Celeste Wagner and Pablo Boczkowski (2019), "The Reception of Fake News: the Interpretations and Practices that Shape the Consumption of Perceived Misinformation"

Complimentary reading:

8. Stuart Hall (1977), "Encoding/Decoding"

Session 7 – Algorithms and Cultural Bubbles

Friday, October 14, 2:45-4:45pm

Key concepts: Habitus; Cultural practices

Required reading:

9. Massimo Airoldi (2022), Excerpt from *Machine habitus. Toward a sociology of algorithms*.

Complimentary reading:

10. Pierre Bourdieu (1979), "The Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles".

October 18: Deadline for submitting some empirical material collected so far (an interview, a corpus, etc.) and the outline of your analysis.

Session 8 – Group investigative projects (2/2)

Friday, October 21, 2:45-4:45pm

No required reading.

Session 9 – Digital Activism

Friday, October 28, 2:45-4:45pm

Key concepts: organization; bureaucracy

Required reading:

11. Jen Schradie (2019), "Bureaucracy's revenge and the Organization of Digital Activism"

Complimentary reading:

12. Daniel Kreiss, Megan Finn, and Fred Turner (2010), "The limits of peer production: some reminders from Max Weber for the network society".

Session 10 – The Production of Journalistic Facts

Friday, November 18, 2:45-4:45pm

Key concept: epistemologies

Required reading:

13. Lucas Grave (2016), "Deciding What's True". Excerpt from *Deciding What's True - The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*.

Complimentary reading:

14. James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser (1998), "The Intimate Interdependence of Fact and Value" (Excerpt from *Custodians of conscience. Investigative journalism and public virtue*).

Session 11 – Algorithms and the Labor Process

Friday, November 25, 2:45-4:45pm

Key concepts: Labor process

Required reading:

15. Katherine C. Kellog, Melissa A. Valentine, and Angèle Christin (2020), "Algorithms at Work: The New Contested Terrain of Control".

Complimentary reading:

16. Michael Burawoy (1982), *Excerpt from Manufacturing Consent. Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism.*

Session 12 – Group research presentation

Friday, December 2, 2:45-4:45pm

December 12: Deadline for submitting your group research paper.
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REFERENCES

Bail, Christopher (2021). *Breaking the social media prism. How to make our platforms less polarizing.* Princeton University Press.

Benkler, Y., Faris, R., and Roberts, H. (2018), *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*, Oxford University Press.

Boczkowski, Pablo J. (2021). *Abundance. On the experience of living in a world of information plenty.* Oxford University Press.

Cardon, Dominique (2019), *Culture numérique.* Presses de Sciences Po.