

Media, Society and Politics
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Communication Science
Course Syllabus 2020-2021

Level: BSc
Vakcode: S_MSP
Period: 2
Credits: 6.0
Language: English

Lecturers:
dr. André Krouwel
dr. Andreu Casas Salleras

Workgroup Instructors:
Mickey Steijaert, MSc
Dirck de Kleer, MSc
Esther Schagen, MA (course coordinator)

Student assistant:
Gianni Quaedvlieg, BSc

Contact: via student assistant

Lectures (live online):
Tuesdays 13:30-15:15
Fridays 11:00-12:45

Workgroups:

Group	WG	Day	Date	Tutor	Location
Group 01	WG1	Thursday	5 November 9:00-10:45	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom
Group 01	Q&A*	Thursday	19 November 9:00-10:00	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom
Group 01	WG2	Thursday	3 December 9:00-10:45	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom
Group 01	WG3	Thursday	10 December 9:00-10:45	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom
Group 02	WG1	Thursday	5 November 11:00-12:45	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom
Group 02	Q&A*	Thursday	19 November 9:00-10:00	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom
Group 02	WG2	Thursday	3 December 11:00-12:45	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom
Group 02	WG3	Thursday	10 December 11:00-12:45	Mickey Steijaert, MSc	zoom

**Participation is mandatory for the working groups, except for the optional Q&A session on 19 November*

Exam Dates:

Exam 14 December 12:15 – 14:30 via Online Proctoring
Resit exam Tba on Canvas

Target Group: 2nd year bachelor, minor, and exchange students.

Other Information: The class will be entirely in English, including all lectures, correspondence, assessments, and assignments. Foreign exchange students are very welcome. Students are assigned to workgroups and work in teams.

Language of final exam:

The instructions for the final exam will be drafted in English, and the open questions need to be answered and completed in English. The questions and answers of multiple-choice exams will both be drafted in English.

Course goals

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to

- identify the interdependencies between the media/journalists, political actors and the public in theoretical terms;
- explain and predict, based on theory, the effects of media coverage on the behaviour of politicians and political parties and the general public (various effects on groups of users/voters from different media channels and messages);
- interpret current media-related issues in the public sphere in theoretical terms;
- explain and predict effects of media coverage via social and traditional media on society as a whole (in terms of, for example, polarisation or political participation);
- reflect on the growing economic, social and political relevance of the data industry by large media companies;
- reflect on ethical and normative aspects of current media-related issues in the public sphere and from there make recommendations to various actors (journalists, media companies or political actors).

Course content

The central issue in this course is how the media, political actors (the government, ministries, politicians, political parties, businesses, interest groups and social movements) and citizens influence each other. We address the changing media landscape (media concentration and integration), political reporting (e.g. 'Fake News' and misinformation), the mediatisation of politics (including the work of Jesper Strömbäck) and the interdependence and influence of media and politics (the so-called 'media-politics-media cycle' of a.o. Gadi Wolfsfeld).

The increasing political influence of media (companies), the increasing concentration of media ownership and the degree of pluralism of the media the media landscape all have an impact on the behaviour of politicians, and the political information that citizens receive. We are also looking at the changing media behaviour of citizens, the use of social and traditional media and the effects of 'filter-bubbles', 'selective exposure' and news avoidance. We analyse to what extent political institutions and actors depend on mass media and are formed by 'media logic'.

Important theories in sociology, communication sciences and the political science argue that socio-economic developments are of major importance for the media landscape and for political knowledge of citizens. This course will look in detail at the way in which economic and social changes affect the functioning of the mass media and thus on the quality of the democracy and citizenship.

We reflect on the role of traditional and new mass media in modern democracies from different perspectives. Some see an important role for the media as controllers of those in power (the so-called 'watch-dog' function), while others portray the media as 'lap-dogs' because they follow power and are not critical while reporting on bureaucracies and powerful companies (see e.g. the work of Noam Chomsky). President Trump sees the traditional media as enemy of the people (and of his own government). He accuses the media of biased reporting, political prejudices and lies. In the lectures we analyse to what extent this media bias exists and to what extent this affects the quality of the (political) information they provide the public.

Of course, we buzz in particular on election campaigns, especially with the American elections happening during this course. We are analysing the extent to which political campaigns are influenced by media coverage and in what way politicians are trying to influence the mass media coverage of themselves, their own party and their political opponents.

Form of Instruction:

Lectures and working groups.

All lectures are live on Zoom. Please note that recordings will only be available to students who, due to valid reasons, cannot be present during the times of the lectures. This must be requested prior to the start of the course (contact the course coordinator for this).

All lectures will have (two) Q&A moments that allow students to ask questions.

See the instruction manual for details of the working group sessions.

Assessment:

The final grade will consist of:

1. Written exam (85 points)
2. Debate participation and preparation – group assignment (10 points)
3. Debate report (5 points) – individual assignment

In order to receive a grade for this course:

- Students must be present (cameras on) and participate in the working groups.
- Students must participate in the team work and complete the group assignment. Students who fail to participate in the team work, will have an opportunity to submit an individual assignment (resit group assignment).
- Students must pass the individual assignment. Students who fail this assignment or submit after the deadline will have the opportunity to submit a second version (resit).
- Students must pass the exam (grade ≥ 5.5). Students who fail the exam will be given a second opportunity at the resit exam. There is only one resit.

Attendance:

Students are obliged to participate in three working group sessions. Please note that you have to switch on your camera during working group sessions, students with switched off cameras are considered being absent. These sessions will not be recorded.

Any working group absence (for illness or official university business) must be approved **in advance**. In the event of an expected absence, please send a request to your working group tutor via Canvas as far in advance as possible. Absent students are still expected to participate in the team work to complete the group assignments.

Assignments:

See the instruction manual of the working groups on Canvas for details and deadlines of the working group assignments.

Mandatory readings

- Wolfsfeld, G. (2014). Making sense of media and politics: Five principles in political communication. Taylor & Francis.
- Additional articles (see Canvas)

Every student is expected to finish the assigned readings in advance of each class meeting.

All readings are mandatory and posted on Canvas in the Module of each session.

Course schedule:

The information regarding the lectures and readings is also available per week under modules on Canvas.

	Date	Theme	Lecturer	Topic	Central Concepts in Lecture	Literature
week 1						
1	27-okt	Media and politics	AK (ALL)	Introduction: power of the media: watchdogs or lapdogs?	Power, influence, media-ownership and media-concentration, freedom of the press, commercial vs state media, power of journalism, investigative journalism, mutual dependency of journalists and politicians, Chomsky's propaganda-model, the political economy of the media, watchdog/lapdog, media bias towards the powerful, ideological hegemony	Wolfsfeld, G. (2014). Making sense of media and politics: Five principles in political communication. Taylor & Francis:-Introduction (p. 3-6) and Ch. 1 (p. 9-22) Political power and power over the media (18p.). Mullen, A. and Klaehn, J. (2010), The Herman-Chomsky Propaganda Model: A Critical Approach to Analysing Mass Media Behaviour. Sociology Compass, 4: 215-225. (11 p.).
2	30-okt	Media and politics	AK	Political control of the media	Propaganda versus journalism, standard news production, newroom procedures, newsselection, media-malaise, mediatization, politics-media-politics cycle, mediatization, indexing-theory, Watergate/scandal, media-control, elite consensus, routine news production versus non-routine news, spindoctors and pundits	Wolfsfeld, G. (2014). Making sense of media and politics: Five principles in political communication. Taylor & Francis. Ch. 2 (p. 23-44) Political control and media independence (21 p.) Blumler, J.G. (2011/2014) Mediatization and Democracy in Esser, F., & Strömbäck, J. (Eds.). (2011/2014). Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of western democracies. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 31-40 (9 blz). doi:10.1057/9781137275844
week 2						
3	3-nov	Media and politics	AK	USA Presidential Elections and the Media: the USA political landscape	Issue-ownership, issue saliency, political campaigning, personalisation of politics, political cleavages (left-right, progressive-conservative, race and ethnicity/identity, geography), surveys and polling	Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2016). Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-nots and Cultural Backlash. Harvard Kennedy School: Faculty Research Working Paper (40 p) Krouwel, A. P. M., & van Elfrinkhof, A. M. E. (2014). Combining strengths of methods of party positioning to counter their weaknesses: the development of a new methodology to calibrate parties on issues and ideological dimensions. Quality and Quantity, 48(3), 1455-1472. (16 pages) Take test: https://trump-meter.electioncompass.org/en/#/ (and analyse the candidate's issue positions)
WG	5-nov	Mandatory	See working group instruction manual			
4	6-nov	Media and politics	AK	News objectivity and bias	Bias in the news, media objectivity in reporting, truth and relativism, lapdog versus watchdog, narrative structure; story plot, medium is the message, framing, priming, media distortion and partisan news, news selection, news values, ideological bias, cultural bias and proximity-thesis, stereotyping, outgroup homogeneity	Wolfsfeld, G. (2011/2014). Making sense of media and politics: Five principles in political communication. Taylor & Francis. Ch. 3 (p. 47-70) No such thing as objective news (23 p.) Metzger, M. J. (2017) Broadcasting versus Narrowcasting: Do Mass Media Exist in the Twenty-First Century? in The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication, Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), Oxford Press (16 blz.): http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199793471-e-62
week 3						
5	10-nov	Media and politics	AK	Media, election campaigns and mass or micro persuasion	Public opinion, political/cognitive mobilisation and the media, parties and candidates, issue-positions of parties/candidates, issue ownership, infotainment and soft-news, digital data revolution, new media and political knowledge, news-avoidance, tabloidism, hard and soft news, infotainment, Oprah-effect, spiral of cynicism, selective exposure, push-polls, bandwagon effect, spiral of silence, mericanisation, attack and negative news, broadcasting vs narrowcasting,, Bradley/Shy Tory effect	Wolfsfeld, G. (2011/2014). Making sense of media and politics: Five principles in political communication. Taylor & Francis. Hfst. 4 (p. 72-94) Telling a good story (22 p.) Matz, S. C., Kosinski, M., Nave, G., & Stillwell, D. J. (2017). Psychological targeting as an effective approach to digital mass persuasion. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 114, 12714-12719. doi:10.1073/pnas.1710966114 Wu Youyou, Michal Kosinski, and David Stillwell (2015) Computer-based personality judgments are more accurate than those made by humans, PNAS January 27, 2015 112 (4) 1036-1040.
6	13-nov	New Media and politics	AC	Digital media and democracy	Media concentration, news diversity, media fragmentation/polarization, relativism, political knowledge, collective action, connective action	Van Aelst, P. et al. (2017) Political communication in a high-choice media environment: a challenge for democracy?, Annals of the International Communication Association, 41:1, 3-27, DOI:10.1080/23808985.2017.1288551 (17 pages) [chapter 1] Howard, Philip N., and Muzammil M. Hussain. Democracy's fourth wave?: digital media and the Arab Spring. Oxford University Press, 2013. (17 pages) Bennett, W. Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. "The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics." Information, communication & society 15.5 (2012): 739-768 (24 pages)

Lecture	Date	Theme	Lecturer	Topic	Central Concepts in Lecture	Literature
week 4						
7	17-nov	New Media and politics	AC	Digital media and democratic backlash	Online censorship, online control/tracking, online hate speech and incivility, digital data revolution	King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. "Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participant observation." <i>Science</i> 345.6199 (2014). (9 pages) Theocharis, Yannis, et al. "A bad workman blames his tweets: the consequences of citizens' uncivil Twitter use when interacting with party candidates." <i>Journal of communication</i> 66.6 (2016): 1007-1031. (18 pages) Tucker, Joshua A., et al. "From liberation to turmoil: Social media and democracy." <i>Journal of democracy</i> 28.4 (2017): 46-59. (10 pages)
WG Q&A	19-nov	See working group instruction manual				
8	20-nov	Media effects	AK	Media effects: minimal effects, information bubbles and echo chambers	Mediatization; media exposure; media effects, minimal effects, long- and short term effects, issue news versus 'horse-race' en conflictnews, strong direct effects versus minimal/limited effects, framing, priming, learning and persuasion, 'Oprah-effect'	Wolfsfeld, G. (2011/2014). Making sense of media and politics: Five principles in political communication. Taylor & Francis. Hfst. 5 (p. 97-122) The media get you when you're not paying attention" + Postscript (25 p.). Bennett, W.L. & Iyengar, S. (2008). A New Era of Minimal Effects. The Changing Foundations of Political Communication. <i>Journal of Communication</i> , 58(4), pp.707-731. (23 p) (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x Mario Haim, Andreas Graefe & Hans-Bernd Brosius (2018) Burst of the Filter Bubble?, <i>Digital Journalism</i> , 6:3, 330-343, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2017.1338145 (13 p). Bright, J. (2016). Explaining the emergence of echo chambers on social media: The role of ideology and extremism. <i>Ssrn Electronic Journal</i> . doi:10.2139/ssrn.2839728 https://arxiv.org/pdf/1609.05003.pdf
week 5						
9	24-nov	Media effects	AK	Online Polarisation	Journalistic values, truth, 'Twitter-Revolutie', 'bots and trolls', psychological warfare and emotional manipulation via media, Cambridge Analytica/Facebook versus democracy, algorithms, Data revolution, information and knowledge. (human mobility) tracking and tracing technologies, psychographic profiling and behavioral microtargetting, Big Five Personality Traits, facial recognition, computational propaganda, bots, trolls and botnets, personalisation, cambridge Analytica Brexit/Trump, computer-based versus human personality judgements, digital mass persuasion, experimental studies	Narayanan, V. et al. (2018) <i>Polarisation, Partisanship and Junk News Consumption over Social Media in the US</i> . (Project on Computational Propaganda, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University). (6 p.) Marchal, N. Neudert, L-M. Kollanyi, B., Howard, P.N. and Kelly, J. (2018) "Polarisation, Partisanship and Junk News Consumption on Social Media During the 2018 US Midterm Elections." <i>Data Memo 2018.5</i> . Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda. (7 p.) Linda Riso (2017) <i>Harvesting your Soul? Cambridge Analytica and Brexit</i> , in Christa Jansohn (ed) <i>Brexit Means Brexit? The Selected Proceedings of the Symposium, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz 6-8 December 2017</i> , pp 75-87. (12 p)
10	27-nov	Media effects	AK	Fake news, media and polarisation	media personalisation, search algorithms, Network society (Castells), high-choice media environment, supply and demand for politically relevant information, media concentration, news diversity, media fragmentation/polarization, relativism, political knowledge, collective action, connective action, junk news, polarisation, information bubble, Big-N data, datafication of political campaigning, segmentation, influencers, political persuasion, political behaviour, digital dystopia (algorithmic discrimination), structure versus agency	Prior, M. (2013). Media and political polarization. <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> , 16, 101-127. doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-100711-135242; (25 p.) David M. J. Lazer, Matthew A. Baum, Yochai Benkler, Adam J. Berinsky, Kelly M. Greenhill, Filippo Menczer, Miriam J. Metzger, Brendan Nyhan, Gordon Pennycook, David Rothschild, Michael Schudson, Steven A. Sloman, Cass R. Sunstein, Emily A. Thorson, Duncan J. Watts, Jonathan L. Zittrain (2018) <i>The science of fake news</i> . <i>Science</i> , 359 (6380), 1094-1096. (3 p. = 2 p) Plus Lazer et al (2018) <i>Supporting Materials</i>
week 6						
11	1-dec	Populism and polarisation	AC	Fighting Fake news	information processing, motivated reasoning, preference-incongruent information, backfire effect, crowdsourced judgements, implied truth effect	Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. "When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions." <i>Political Behavior</i> 32.2 (2010): 303-330. (22 pages) Pennycook, Gordon, and David G. Rand. "Fighting misinformation on social media using crowdsourced judgments of news source quality." <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</i> 116.7 (2019): 2521-2526. (13 pages) Pennycook, Gordon, et al. "The implied truth effect: Attaching warnings to a subset of fake news headlines increases perceived accuracy of headlines without warnings." <i>Management Science</i> (2020). (6 pages)
WG	3-dec	Mandatory	See working group instruction manual			
12	4-dec	Populism and polarisation	AK	Globalisation, populism and Euroskepticism	Individualism, populism, authoritarianism, nationalism, (hard and soft) Euroskepticism, welfare state retrenchement, inequality, the squeezed middle	Prooijen, J.-W. van, & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Overclaiming Knowledge Predicts Anti-establishment Voting. <i>Social Psychological and Personality Science</i> . https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619862260 Antonucci, L., Horvath, L., Kutiyski, Y., & Krouwel, A. (2017). The malaise of the squeezed middle: Challenging the narrative of the 'left behind' Brexiter. <i>Competition & Change</i> , 21(3), 211-229. https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529417704135 Blassnig, S., Ernst, N., Büchel, F., Engesser, S., & Esser, F. (2018). Populism in Online Election Coverage: Analyzing populist statements by politicians, journalists, and readers in three countries. <i>Journalism Studies</i> , 1(20).
week 7						
13	8-dec	Populism and polarisation	AK	Polarisation, conspiracy belief and extremist mindsets	Extremism, polarisation, fake news, populism, political knowledge, complexity-reduction, conspiracy belief and cognition, information bubbles, 'echo-chamber', polarisation, 'linearity versus non-linearity/on demand media, social class and education effects (knowledge gap), socialisation, media-exposure and consumption	van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological Features of Extreme Political Ideologies. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 28(2), 159-163. Links to an external site. Prooijen, J.W. van, Krouwel, A.P.M. & Pollet, T. V. (2015). Political Extremism Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories. <i>Social Psychological & Personality Science</i> . 62, 129-138 (19 p.)
WG	10-dec	Mandatory	See working group instruction manual			
14	11-dec		ALL	Trial Exam / Response Lecture		
week 8						
15	14-dec			Exam		