

College Year in Athens (CYA)

Course: 'Mediating the Message: social media and people [in Greece]' Dr.

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Spring 2018

Created: 15 January 2018



Mediating the Message: Social Media and People [in Greece]

_ INTRODUCTION

Social Media (or Social Networks) constitute the spear of the Writable Web that is causing massive changes in traditional mediating models.

Human and institutional communication is going through tremendous changes, with individual wisdom directly competing with mass media operators.

Peer online activity and shared material create multiple instances of media experiences for users who are engaged in a constant selection process, either browsing on a homepage of an online newspaper or through Facebook posts.

The rise of social media as a new public sphere -under Habermas' perspective as well as through the Social Capital prism- has introduced new parameters and has challenged conventional theories

Traditional media, despite their heavy online investments, are challenged in terms of their role as leading intermediaries between society, institutional sources and reality. Studies have suggested that peer-shared material via deep links to websites constitute a significant point of entry for an increasing population of social network users, who tend to ignore pre-arranged syntheses of news stories on mainstream home-pages.

_ THE GREEK CASE

During the crisis years in Greece, online public dialogue has experienced a substantial growth, not only amongst people but also between audiences and established media that, increasingly see news content being put under scrutiny (even ridicule) by producers-users (or *producers*), who are particularly active online.

Traditional political forces have similar experiences, trying to keep up with developments.

During the crisis years in Greece, social media users/voters have boosted political discourse via social networks, contributing, sharing or commenting on on-going developments. At the same time, crisis at a political level has caused the disintegration of old political formations accompanied by the demise of, until then, dominant political rhetoric and messaging systems. Social media functions of mainstream politics remained in the margins of creativity, playing a minimal role amongst potential voters.

Finally, what is posing as extremely relevant is the role of social media/networks in political campaigning and civic society. 'Occupy Movements', 'Arab Spring' as well as mobilisations of the 'Indignant Movement' in Athens were both heavily influenced by users' sharing of views, call-for-action announcements, and anti-austerity discourse.

_ WORKING QUESTIONS

The rise of social media as a new public sphere -under Habermas' perspective as well as through the Social Capital prism- has introduced new parameters and has challenged conventional theories, posing questions, such as:

What is the effect of Social Nets on Social Capital?

Is there any Social Capital in Social Networks?

- To what degree, Facebook, Instagram or other popular social networks constitute public spheres?
- What is the effect of Social Nets on Social Capital? Or to put it differently: Is there any Social Capital in Social Networks?

Questions related to news representation as well as news content management also emerge:

- How Greece and the Greek crisis is depicted on Social Media?
- What is the role of people's voice and everyday online activity?
- How mainstream media react to the digital agora?
- How Greek institutional sources and major media players are keeping up with developments?

_ COURSE OVERVIEW

The first part of the course's title is inspired by a very influential book in the field of news production that has examined the influences exercised upon news making. This approach is revisited through the digital prism and the writable Web on which everyday people act as messengers of current affairs, sometimes life itself. Key changes are examined across the basic stages of news production.

The course examines how the explosion of Social Media/Networks has altered the traditional news media – audiences' relationship primarily in three areas:

1. The 'Fourth Estate' and its watchdog role in the new digital media landscape.
2. The Institutional Sources and their function in message formation and dissemination.
3. The Human Factor and its evolution amidst intense technological changes.

The Arab Spring and 'Occupy Movements' in the US and the UK are discussed in terms of the effect of Social Media/Networks in people's mobilisations and message dissemination, challenging the traditional status quo.

Finally, the course examines the evolution of Social Media in Greece and in particular during the years of the on-going economic, political and social crisis that has started in 2010, which, however, as commonly argued, has its origins throughout the period that followed the restoration of democracy in the mid-70s.

It discusses the evolution of social media in the country and the juxtaposition between traditional sources such as government, institutions and media groups and new digital media messaging systems ruled by public opinion.

_ LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- define key changes taking place in the media industry field triggered by the advent of social media;
- distinguish social media effects via major social and political movements throughout the world;
- analyse public discourse on new and traditional media platforms;
- navigate their way through Greece's media messaging system in an efficient way;
- critically evaluate contemporary rhetoric and reality regarding the Greek crisis;

_ MAIN LITERATURE

- Fuchs, C. (2013) *Social Media: An Introduction*. London: Sage
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge.
- Boyd, D (2014) *It's Complicated: the Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

_ ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Dijck, Jose van (2013) *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mandiberg, M. (ed.) (2012) *The Social Media Reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kress, G. (2009) *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge.

- Axford, B. & Huggins, R. (eds.) (2001) *New Media and Politics*. London: Sage.
- Burnett, R. & Marshall, P. D. (2003) *Web Theory: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Green, L. (2002) *Communication, Technology and Society*. London: Sage.

_ COURSE MATERIAL / SOURCES

Additional pieces of literature and informational material will be made available on the Course's page in Moodle platform.

_ TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 MEDIATING THE MESSAGE: INTRODUCTION

Jan 29
& Jan 31

Introduction to key concepts: The shift of power from mainstream media towards institutional and individual sources: people's media, online communities and institutional messaging systems.

Readings

Fuchs, C. (2013) *Social Media: An Introduction*. London: Sage (Chapter 2).

WEEK 2 MEDIA AND THE WRITABLE WEB

Feb 5
& Feb 7

Social Networks and their significance. When things changed. The medium is the message. How relevant McLuhan's perspective is in the Web 2.0 era? Agenda setting and social media.

Readings

Burnett, R. & Marshall, P. D. (2003) *Web Theory: An Introduction*. Routledge: London (Chapter 3: The Web as Communication – pp. 45-60).

Burnett, R. & Marshall, P. D. (2003) *Web Theory: An Introduction*. Routledge: London (Chapter 1: Web of Technology – pp. 7-22).

WEEK 3 **POLITICS AND CAMPAIGNING**

Feb 12
& Feb 14

Social Networks and Politics. Mainstream media activity and movements: Arab Spring, indignant movements in Europe. eParticipation and Civil Society. The Greek case.

Readings

Axford, B. (2001) 'The Transformation of Politics or Anti-Politics?' In Axford, B & Huggins, R. (eds.) *New Media and Politics*. London: Sage.

Dahlgren, P. (2001) 'The Transformation of Democracy?' In Axford, B & Huggins, R. (eds.) *New Media and Politics*. London: Sage.

WEEK 4 **THE NETWORKED 'PUBLIC SPHERE'**

Feb 21

Public Sphere and Social Capital: the past and the present. How individual and institutional sources compete in the new digital market? What is the role of social media in defining contemporary relationships? Gamification and Social Media.

Readings

Green, L. (2002) *Communication, Technology and Society*. London: Sage (Chapter 7)

WEEK 5 **THE 'NEWS FUNCTION' OF SOC-NETS**

Mar 5
& Mar 7

Social Media and digital storytelling: myths and reality. Amateur reporting and discourse. Fake News: mainstream or other. The main arguments; examples from the Greek case.

Readings

Pew Research Centre (2017) *News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2017*.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge. [Selected texts]

WEEK 6 **DIGITAL LITERACY**

Mar 12 According to a definition, “digital literacy is about being able to make sense of digital media... This includes the ability to analyse, prioritise, and act upon the countless digital media 21st century citizens encounter on a daily basis.”

Mar 14 Mid-Term Exam

Readings

Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge (Chapter 1).

WEEK 7 **THE TWITTERISATION OF POLITICS**

Mar 19
& Mar 21 Tweets are increasingly replacing soundbites in the subjective recording of timeliness. Special stories are written on tweeted reactions of prominent people to events and sayings of others. Twitter as a publicity tool is changing political communication producing publicity moments that intervene throughout the news cycle.

Readings

Dijck, Jose van (2013) *The Culture of Connectivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Chapter 4).

WEEK 8 **SOCIAL MEDIA AND INSTITUTIONS**

Mar 26
& Mar 28 Populism, propaganda and framing. The writable web challenges issues of quality, credibility and people’s experience of brands. Communication policies and positioning strategies: institutions and the corporate world.

Readings

Taylor, P. (2004) 'The World Wide Web Goes to War: From Kosovo to the War against Terrorism'. In Gauntlett, D. and Horsley, R. (eds.) *Web Studies* (2nd Edition). London: Arnold.

WEEK 9**SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE MILLENNIALS**

April 11
& April 16

American Millennials (18-34) spend a slight majority of their weekly media time using digital devices and are the only generation where digital media consumption exceeds traditional media. Digital Behaviour: Millennials, Gen-Xers and Boomers.

[April 16th: Deadline of 1st Assignment]

Readings

Boyd, D (2014) *It's Complicated: the Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press: New Haven (Introduction, pp.1-28).

Jackson, T. A. (2001) 'Towards a New Media Aesthetic' in Trend, D. (ed.) *Reading Digital Culture*. Blackwell: Massachusetts (pp. 347-353).

WEEK 10**SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICS IN GREECE**

April 23
& April 25

Political figures' and parties' attempts to develop a social media strategy. Social Media audiences and hardcore political messages. Election campaigns and messaging systems. A matter of trust.

Readings

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism _ Digital News Report 2017 GREECE [See relevant week on Moodle platform]

Poulakidakos, S. & Veneti, A. (2015) *Social Media in Political Communication: How do Greek political parties use Twitter during the pre-electoral period?* [Research in progress]

WEEK 11 **WHAT DO GREEKS THINK?**

April 30 - May 2 Greek media and public opinion in Greece - Facets of the crisis and the local media market

Readings

See relevant week on Moodle platform

WEEK 12 **OVERVIEW - FINAL DISCUSSION**

May 7
& May 9 Final discussion and Case studies. Review of main topics
[May 9th: deadline of 2nd Assignment]

Final exam week
May 14-17

_ FIELD TRIPS - GUEST SPEAKERS

The initial planning includes **two field trips** during class hours (or alternatively a visit by a specialist in class):

- 1) Visit to an Embassy of an EU country in Athens to explore the foreigners' perspective of Greece in terms of politics and the economy.
- 2) Visit to a political party to discuss social media campaigning and agenda setting.

_ INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS

As part of this course, students need to research and write 2 fully referenced (APA style) papers of 2,000 words each (excluding bibliography) on the following topics:

1. **The Twitterisation of Politics: The Effects of Twitter on contemporary political discourse in the US.** Analysis should include a short study of thematically oriented hashtags (#) and trends. [Deadline: April 16]
2. **Greece: Traditional online media and Social Media discourse for international audiences.** How foreigners view Greece? Include a short study of relevant hashtags (#) and trends on Facebook and Twitter [Deadline: May 9]

NOTE: To receive credit for an assignment, you must turn it in at the beginning of the class on the due dates. No late assignments will be accepted.

All submitted work must be your own, original research. Any excerpts from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation (or adequately paraphrased), and a proper citation provided. Also, special attention should be put on the quality of Internet sources you are planning to use in the paper.

For APA guidelines, visit: <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>

_ GRADING

Attendance-Participation	: 20%
Individual Assignment #1	: 20%
Individual Assignment #2	: 20%
Mid Term	: 20%
Final Exam	: 20%

Grades are intended to give you a sense of the quality of a particular piece of work. Specifically:

An A paper will do all of the following:

- Carefully and thoroughly analyse the existing literature.
- Carefully and thoroughly evaluate the various viewpoints.
- Reaches judicious conclusions, which are fully substantiated.

A B paper will do a couple of the following:

- Reasonably analyses the existing literature.
- Offers evaluation of the evident viewpoints.
- Reaches a number of conclusions, which are substantiated.

A C paper will do many of the following:

- Fail to present the existing literature.
- Misinterprets readings, evidence and arguments.
- Offers a superficial evaluation of the evident viewpoints.
- Reaches a number of fallacious conclusions.

_ ATTENDANCE IN CLASS

Students are expected to attend all class meetings, on time, and to have prepared assigned tasks for that day. Unexcused absences will directly affect grade. The class meets twice a week, so missing classes would result in gaps in the learning process.

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons, which result in absences, should be reported immediately in the Student Affairs Office.

_ USE OF DIGITAL DEVICES

In-class or on-site use of laptops and other devices is permitted if that facilitates course-related activities such as note taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if there are not used for class-related work.

_ OTHER POLICY ISSUES

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you are a registered (with your home institution) student with a disability and you are entitled to learning accommodation, please inform the Director of Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

_ INSTRUCTOR'S BIO

*Journalism Professor and journalist, primarily online. Political analyst and communications specialist. Previous studies in economics (BA), communications policy (MA) and journalism (PhD), mostly in London. Born in Hove, Brighton. Lives in Athens, Greece. Blogs when necessary. Founded and running dailyGreece.net Private Information Network, alyunaniya.com [The Greek] and embassynews.net. Occasional articles of friends are published on PostNews.eu. Interested in political communication, next-gen web apps, digital R&D, internet ethics and social networks. He taught journalism and communication at University of Indianapolis Athens (1999-2013). Published numerous analyses and Op-eds, online and in print. His first book was titled: *Digital Communication* (Zenon Publications, London, 2000 – co-authorship). Recent publications: *Crisis Talk: Greece* (2012) – eBook/iTunes; *Elections and the Internet*, Digerati Publications (Athens, 2014) [in Greek]; *Crisis Talk: Greece – Part2* (2014) – eBook/iTunes.*