

Number & Title of Course:

COMM 346 – Mediating the message: Social media and people [in Greece]

Semester or Session/ Year and Location(s): Spring 2023 – CYA Athens

Course Instructor(s): Dr. Michael Nevradakis

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Course Description:

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/social networks has altered the traditional news media-audience 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" in the US and the UK, as well as more recent examples, such as the #MeToo movement, are discussed in terms of the effect of social media/social networks in people's mobilizations and message dissemination, challenging the traditional status quo.

Furthermore, 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 began in the late 2000s, which, however, as commonly argued, has its origins throughout the period that followed the restoration of democracy in the mid-1970s.

Following the "end" of the economic crisis in the 2018-19 period, social media in Greece have continued to play a substantial – and arguably divisive – role in the Greek public and political spheres during the COVID 19 pandemic, and through the burgeoning #MeToo movement in Greece, to name two examples.

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. Greece represents a notable case study as a country that finds itself at the crossroads of the west and the east, between the EU, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Global South, and a country with, arguably, longstanding weaknesses in its public sphere and civil society, but a long tradition of social movements and activism which continues to the present time.

Greece is also a notable example of a country with relatively low broadband penetration (in the context of the EU) but particularly high usage of social media, including as sources of news and information, while levels of trust in traditional institutions and "mainstream" media are consistently low.

Course Approach:

Social media (or social networks) constitute the spear of the writable web that are perpetuating 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.

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 prearranged syntheses of news stories on mainstream web portals.

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, who are particularly active online.

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

During the crisis and post-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.

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

In turn, other global movements that have been prominent on social media, such as #MeToo, have made their way to Greece and have contributed to a reshaping of public discourse around previously sensitive or taboo issues.

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:

- To what degree do Facebook, Instagram, and other popular social networks constitute public spheres?
- What is the effect of social networks 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 are Greece and the Greek crisis depicted on social media?
- What is the role of people's voice as expressed through everyday online activity? - How does mainstream media react to the digital agora?
 - How are Greek institutional sources and major media players keeping up with developments?

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; • analyze public discourse on new and traditional media platforms;
- navigate their way through Greece's media messaging system in an efficient way; and... • critically evaluate contemporary rhetoric and reality regarding the Greek crisis.

Course Requirements:

For this course, you are expected to complete all required readings indicated in the syllabus and available on Moodle, prior to the start of our first class meeting each week. Supplemental materials may also be posted on Moodle throughout the semester, which will be announced to you in class.

Students are also expected to attend all class meetings and to regularly participate in class discussions.

Course assessments will include the following:

- **Midterm examination (take-home):** essay format where you will select from a list of topics which will be provided to you.
- **Final examination (take-home):** essay format where you will select from a list of topics which will be provided to you.
- **Individual project:** you will research and write a fully researched (APA style) paper of 1,500- 2,000 words (excluding bibliography) on a topic of your choice related to the course material, with an accompanying creative presentation. You will be provided with a list of recommended topics to help you with your selection.

Evaluation and Grading:

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Attendance and participation: **20%**
Midterm examination: **25%**
Final examination: **25%**
Individual project: **30%**

Evaluation Criteria - Course Assignments:

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

An "A" paper/examination will do all of the following:

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

A "B" paper/examination 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/examination 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.

CYA Regulations and Accommodations:

Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. Absences are

recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office.

Academic Accommodations

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

Policy on Original Work

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided (Check the Student Handbook, pg. 7).

Use of Laptops

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

Religious Holidays

CYA recognizes that there are important religious holidays that affect students and their participation in CYA classes, activities, and trips. Some students may wish to attend services, while others may have obligations (such as fasting or other personal rituals) that interfere with their academic engagement. Students are required to inform both CYA and their professors of the religious holidays that they wish to observe during the first two weeks of classes, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Class Schedule

Schedule is tentative and subject to change - Specifics regarding the readings, including which to focus on and which to skim/glance through, will be provided in class. Readings will be posted on Moodle.

Week Dates Topic / Readings / Assignments Due

1 Tue. Jan. 31 & Thu. Feb. 2

Burnett & Marshall – Web theory: An introduction
Castells – Informationalism, networks, and the network society: A theoretical blueprint
Occupy Wall Street case study

2 Tue. Feb. 7 & Thu. Feb. 9

No class meetings

**Tue. Feb. 14 &
Thu. Feb. 16**

Digital literacy, inequality, and the generation gap

3 Tue. Feb. 21 & Thu. Feb. 23

Mediating the Message - Introduction

Fuchs – Social media: An introduction

Beard – What makes “Generation Z” so different? (video)

boyd – It’s complicated: The social lives of networked teens

Jackson – Towards a new media aesthetic

Kress – Literacy in the new media age (continued on next page)

Media, the writable web, and the network society

4 Tue. Feb. 28 & Thu. Mar. 2

5 Tue. Mar. 7 & Thu. Mar. 9

6 Tue. Mar. 14 & Thu. Mar. 16

public sphere, and beyond

The 'news function' of social networks

Fog – The supposed and the real role of mass media in modern democracy
Pew Research study: News use across social media platforms (2017)
Shoemaker & Reese – Mediating the message in the 21st century
Reuters Institute studies (to be posted)

MIDTERM EXAM (March 16)

The Twitterization of Politics

Bennett & Segerberg – The logic of connective action
Conway et al – The rise of Twitter in the political campaign: Searching for intermedia agenda-setting effects in the presidential primary
Dijck – The culture of connectivity
Juris – Networked social movements: Global movements for global justice
Ronson – How one tweet could ruin your life (video)

No class meetings

The Greek case, part 1: Greek media

Hallin & Mancini – The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model
Kalogeropoulos, Rori & Dimitrakopoulou – Social media help me distinguish between truth and lies: News consumption in the polarized and low-trust media landscape of Greece
Nevradakis – From the Polis to Facebook: Social media and the development of a new Greek public sphere (Chapter 4)
Nevradakis – Investigative series on Greek media
Reuters Institute reports on news and media consumption in Greece
Stiglitz – Toward a taxonomy of media capture
Veneti & Karadimitriou – Policy and regulation in the media landscape: The Greek paradigm

7 Tue. Mar. 21 & Thu. Mar. 23

**Tue. Mar. 28 &
Thu. Mar. 30**

9 Tue. Apr. 4 & Thu. Apr. 6
Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings: The millennial generation: A demographic bridge to America's diverse future
Robinson et al. – Digital inequalities 3.0: Emergent inequalities in the information age

Politics and campaigning

Axford – The transformation of politics or anti-politics?
Benski et al. – From the streets and squares to social movement studies: What have we learned?
Dahlgren – The transformation of democracy?
House of Commons – Disinformation and fake news

The networked public sphere

Fraser – Rethinking the public sphere
Green – Communication, technology and society
Habermas – The structural transformation of the public sphere (excerpts)
Nevradakis – From the Polis to Facebook: Social media and the development of a new Greek public sphere (Chapter 2 – excerpts)
Papacharissi – The virtual sphere 2.0: The internet, the

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**Tue. Apr. 11 &
Thu. Apr. 13**

10 Tue. Apr. 18 & Thu. Apr. 20

12 Tue. May 2 & Thu. May 4

11 Tue. Apr. 25 & Thu. Apr. 27

13 Tue. May 9 & Thu. May 11

**Tuesday, May
16**

**Thursday, May
18**
No class meetings

The Greek case, part 2: Greek public sphere and civil society in a time of protest

Boucas – Alternative digital journalism in Greece
Nevradakis – From the Polis to Facebook: Social media and the development of a new Greek public sphere (Chapters 5, 6)
Nevradakis - Radio's role as an alternative online medium and site of activism during a time of crisis: The case of Greece's Radiobubble
Theocharis – Civil society in times of crisis: Understanding collective action dynamics in digitally-enabled volunteer networks
Vatikiotis & Milioni – From inside the rhizome: Mapping the Greek alternative mediascape

The Greek case, part 3: Greek protest movements and social media

Hänska & Bauchowitz - #ThisIsACoup: The emergence of an anti-austerity hashtag across Europe's

Twittersphere
Trere, Jeppesen & Mattoni – Comparing digital protest media imaginaries: Anti austerity movements in Spain, Italy & Greece
Papa & Milioni – “I don't wear blinkers, all right?” The multiple meanings of civic identity in the Indignados and the role of social media
Vatikiotis – Networking activism: Implications for Greece

The Greek case, part 4: Campaigns and social media

Hänska & Bauchowitz - #ThisIsACoup: The emergence of an anti-austerity hashtag across Europe's Twittersphere
Mylonas – Social media as propaganda tools: The Greek conservative party and national elections
Poulakidakos & Veneti – Social media in political communication
Veneti et al. – Between analogue and digital: A critical exploration of strategic social media use in Greek election campaigns
Zeri, Tsekeris & Tsekeris – Investigating the Macedonia name dispute
End-of-semester and final examination review (May 9)
Final project presentations (May 11)

FINAL PROJECT DUE (by 11:59 pm)

FINAL EXAM

N.B.: The course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, is tentative and may be subject to change to benefit student learning and to keep up to date with current research.

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Course Readings

Required:

- 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.

Readings, as well as course materials such as PowerPoint slides, will be posted on the Moodle platform.

Additional readings:

Additional pieces of literature and informational material will be made available on the course page on the

Moodle platform. You will be informed in class about new Moodle postings.

CYA advising services for Fall 2023

To be announced.