

COMM 346 | Mediating The Message: Social Media and People [In Greece] Spring 2025

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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 U.S. and the U.K., as well as more recent examples, such as the #Me- Too 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 contribute 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, X, 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 Greek institutional sources and major media players are keeping up with developments?

Learning Objectives:

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:

You are expected to complete all required readings indicated in the syllabus prior to the start of our first class meeting each week. Supplemental materials may at times be posted on Moodle, which will be announced in class. You are expected to attend all classes and to regularly participate in class discussions.

Course assessments will include the following:

- **Midterm and examinations (take-home):** A take-home examination based on key concepts from our course materials, readings, and class discussions. Details will be posted on Moodle. You will select from a list of topics which will be provided to you. Due dates:
 - **Midterm exam: Thursday, March 13** (by 11:59 p.m.).
 - **Final exam: Thursday, May 15** (by 11:59 p.m.).
- **Final 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 choosing related to the course material, with an in-class creative presentation. Due date: **Tuesday, April 22 – in-class presentations April 22.**

Evaluation and Grading:

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

and participation: **20%**

Midterm examination: **20%**

Final examination: **20%**

Final project: **40%**

Evaluation Criteria - Course Assessments:

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.

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.

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.

Unit	Dates	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1	Tue. Jan. 28	Introduction
1	Thu. Jan. 30 & Tue. Feb. 4	Mediating the Message - Introduction Fuchs – Social media: An introduction
2	Thu. Feb. 6 & Fri. Feb. 7*	Media, the writable web, and the network society Burnett & Marshall – Web theory: An introduction Castells – Informationalism, networks, and the network society: A theoretical blueprint Occupy Wall Street case study
3	Tue. Feb. 11 & Thu. Feb. 13	Digital literacy, the digital divide, inequality, and the generation gap <i>Skim the following:</i> Beard – What makes “Generation Z” so different? (video) Blank & Groelj – Examining internet use through a Weberian lens 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) 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 Yates et al. – Digital media use: differences and inequalities in relation to class and age
Tue. Feb. 18 & Thu. Feb. 20		No class meetings
4	Tue. Feb. 25 & Thu. Feb. 27	The networked public sphere <i>Skim the following:</i> Fraser – Rethinking the public sphere Green – Communication, technology and society Habermas – The structural transformation of the public sphere (excerpts) Kaiser – What happened to the public sphere? The networked public sphere and public opinion formation 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 public sphere, and beyond Telleria – Revisiting Habermas’ Public Sphere: Welcome to the Virtual Sphere
5	Tue. Mar. 4 & Thu. Mar. 6	Politics, campaigning, and news functions of social media <i>Skim the following:</i> Axford – The transformation of politics or anti-politics? Benski et al. – From the streets and squares to social movement studies: What have we learned? Vracciale, Andretta & Martella - Does populism go viral? How Italian leaders engage citizens through social media Dahlgren – The transformation of democracy? Engesser et al. - Populism and social media: how politicians spread a frag- mented ideology Evans, Brown & Wimberly – “Delete Your Account”: The 2016 Presidential Race on Twitter Fog – The supposed and the real role of mass media in modern democracy Freelon et al. – Quantifying the power and consequences of social media protest House of Commons – Disinformation and fake news O’Boyle & Pardun – How Twitter drives the global news agenda: Tweets from Brazil, Russia, India, China, the U.K. and U.S. and online discourse about the 2016 U.S. presidential election Pew Research study: News use across social media platforms (2017) Reuters Institute studies (to be posted) Shoemaker & Reese – Mediating the message in the 21 st century
6	Tue. Mar. 11 & Thu. Mar. 13	Networked social movements, Twitterization of politics & social issues <i>Skim the following:</i> 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) Midterm exam due Thursday, March 13 by 11:59 p.m.

	Tue. Mar. 18 & Thu. Mar. 20	No class meetings
7	Thu. Mar. 27 & Fri. Mar. 28*	<p>Clicktivism, hashtag activism and polarization <i>Skim the following:</i> 2023 Reuters digital news report Azzimonti & Fernandes – Social media networks, fake news, and polarization Castillo-Esparcia, Caro-Castaño & Almansa-Martínez – Evolution of digital activism on social media: Opportunities and challenges George & Leidner - From clicktivism to hacktivism: Understanding digital activism Hagström, Wagnsson & Lundström – Logics of othering: Sweden as other in the time of COVID-19 Halupka – Clicktivism: A systematic heuristic Halupka – The legitimisation of clicktivism Jaworska, Goodman & Gibas – The making of #CovidTwitter: Who were the loudest “Covid influencers” and what did they say about the COVID-19 pandemic? Karpf – Online political mobilization from the advocacy group’s perspective: Looking beyond clicktivism Kostygina, Tran & Hair – Boosting health campaign reach and engagement through use of social media influencers and memes Lau - The subtle psychology of ‘nudging’ during a pandemic Pew Research Center – Diversity and division in advanced economies Schmidt & Engelen – The ethics of nudging: An overview Zulli – Evaluating hashtag activism: Examining the theoretical challenges and opportunities of #BlackLivesMatter</p>
8	Tue. Apr. 1 & Thu. Apr. 3	<p>Contemporary debates: mis-/disinformation, fact-checking, regulation <i>Skim the following:</i> Aimeur, Amri & Brassard - Fake news, disinformation and misinformation in social media: a review Alice – The Substack censorship wars: Round 1 Altay, Berriche & Acerbi - Misinformation on misinformation: Conceptual and methodological challenges Claesson – Twitter: A necessary evil? Journalistic responses to Elon Musk and the denormalization of social media Dias et al. – Emphasizing publishers does not effectively reduce susceptibility to misinformation on social media Hearings involving Section 230 (to be posted) Johnson & Dewsnap – Internet censorship in the time of a global pandemic: A proposal for revisions to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act Malik, Bashir & Mahmood – Antecedents and consequences of misinformation sharing behavior among adults on social media during COVID-19 Meta – Oversight Board selects a PAO on the removal of COVID-19 misinformation Murthy, et al. v. Missouri, et al. (f/k/a Missouri, et al. v. Biden, et al.) Paige – The Digital Services Act: Does it respect the freedom of expression, and is it enforceable? Park, Chung & Kim – Social media, misinformation, and cultivation of informational mistrust: Cultivating Covid-19 mistrust Rexhepi – Content moderation: How the EU and the U.S. approach striking a balance between protecting free speech and protecting public interest Rohlinger et al. – Does the Musk Twitter takeover matter? Political influencers, their arguments, and the quality of information they share Schlag – European Union’s regulating of social media: A discourse analysis of the Digital Services Act Shir-Raz et al. – Censorship and suppression of Covid-19 Heterodoxy: tactics and counter-tactics Tourkochoriti – The Digital Services Act and the EU as the global regulator of the internet Turillazzi et al. – The Digital Services Act: An analysis of its ethical, legal, and social implications U.S. House of Representatives hearings (to be posted) World Economic Forum – Global Risks Report 2024 Xiao, Borah & Su – The dangers of blind trust: Examining the interplay among social media news use, misinformation identification, and news trust on conspiracy beliefs</p>

9	Tue. Apr. 8 & Thu. Apr. 10	<p>Recent activism and social media: #BLM and #MeToo <i>Skim the following:</i> Alaggia & Wang – “I never told anyone until the #MeToo movement”: What can we learn from sexual abuse and sexual assault disclosures made through social media? Brünker et al. – The role of social media during social movements – Observations from the #MeToo debate on Twitter Clark-Parsons – “I see you, I believe you, I stand with you”: #MeToo and the performance of networked feminist visibility Cox – The source of a movement: making the case for social media as an informational source using Black Lives Matter Foster, Tassone & Matheson – Tweeting about sexism motivates further activism: A social identity perspective Hosterman et al. – Twitter, social support messages, and the #MeToo movement Ince, Rojas & Davis – The social media response to Black Lives Matter: How Twitter users interact with Black Lives Matter through hashtag use Kunst et al. – Sexism, rape myths and feminist identification explain gender differences in attitudes toward the #MeToo social media campaign in two countries Manikonda et al. – Twitter for sparking a movement, Reddit for sharing the moment: #MeToo through the lens of social media Mourão & Brown – Black Lives Matter coverage: How protest news frames and attitudinal change affect social media engagement Mundt, Ross & Barnett – Scaling social movements through social media: The case of Black Lives Matter Nummi, Jennings & Feagin – #BlackLivesMatter: Innovative Black resistance Pampapura Madali, Alsaïd & Hawamdeh – The impact of social noise on social media and the original intended message: BLM as a case study Quan-Hasse et al. – Mapping #MeToo: A synthesis review of digital feminist research across social media platforms Trott – Networked feminism: Counterpublics and the intersectional issues of #MeToo Wilkins, Livingstone & Levine – Whose tweets? The rhetorical functions of social media use in developing the Black Lives Matter movement</p>
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Tue. Apr. 15 & Thu. Apr. 17 **No class meetings – Easter break**

10	Tue. Apr. 22, Thu. Apr. 24 & Tue. Apr. 29	<p>The Greek case, part 1: Greece’s media, public sphere and civil society <i>Skim the following:</i> Boucas – Alternative digital journalism in Greece 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 (Chapters 4-6) Nevradakis – Radio’s role as an alternative online medium and site of activism during a time of crisis: The case of Greece’s Radiobubble Nevradakis – Investigative series on Greek media Reuters Institute reports on news and media consumption in Greece Stiglitz – Toward a taxonomy of media capture 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 Veneti & Karadimitriou – Policy and regulation in the media landscape: The Greek paradigm</p>
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Final project due Tue., April 22 by class time – in-class presentations

Thu, May 1 **No class meeting – Labor Day**

11	Tue. May 6 & Thu. May 8	<p>The Greek case, part 2: Protest movements, campaigns & social media <i>Skim the following:</i> Hänska & Bauchowitz – #ThisIsACoup: The emergence of an anti-austerity hashtag across Europe’s Twittersphere Lilleker, Veneti & Jackson – Social media in political communication in Greece Mylonas – Social media as propaganda tools: The Greek conservative party and national elections Papa & Milioni – “I don’t wear blinkers, all right?” The multiple meanings of civic identity in the Indignados and the role of social media 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 Trere, Jeppesen & Mattoni – Comparing digital protest media imaginaries: Anti-austerity movements in Spain, Italy & Greece Vatikiotis – Networking activism: Implications for Greece Zeri, Tsekeris & Tsekeris – Investigating the Macedonia name dispute</p>
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Thu. May 15 **FINAL EXAM due (by 11:59 pm)**

* - Denotes make-up class dates

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.