From the Printing Press to Facebook and Twitter: Communication Technologies, Fake News, and Politics

Paper Convenor: Dr. Alena Drieschova
Email: ad522@cam.ac.uk
Office: TBC
Office Hours: Email to arrange an appointment

Teaching Pattern: weekly 2-hour seminars
Venue: TBC

Paper Outline

The course studies the nexus between communication technologies, mechanisms of truth production, and political regimes. The first session focuses on different theories of what counts as truth considering current debates about the post-truth era. The second session looks at different theories of communication and how they relate to politics. In subsequent sessions, we will look at the evolution of communication technologies from the printing press to mass media such as newspapers, radio, and TV, and to the emergence of the internet and social media. How are these communication technologies related to what counts as truth in a given epoch? And how does all of this shape the kind of politics that develops? How are the invention of the printing press and paper related to the Reformation and the destruction of the Church's monopoly on "truth production"? Could have mass media influenced the emergence of democracy in Europe? And how do mass media relate to communism and fascism? What are the connections between social media and populism, social movements, revolutions, and authoritarianism in the contemporary era?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the paper students will be able to demonstrate intellectual, transferable and practical skills appropriate to level 6 modules and in particular will be able to:

- Differentiate between different understandings of what counts as truth.
- Be able to discern the role of communication technologies in shaping politics, as well as their limits.
- Critically reflect upon the different ways in which communication technologies can be used to obtain specific ends.
- Critically reflect upon the possibilities of long-term political changes that reach beyond a single generation.
- Critically assess the strengths and limitations of key analytical approaches;
- Effectively communicate information and argument in oral and written forms

Paper Structure

The course will consist of seven weekly two-hour seminars. Students will be expected to have completed the required readings in advance of each seminar. Each student will provide a 15-minute

reflection on the question that is the guiding theme for the respective seminar. The purpose of the seminars is to have a student-led discussion of the assigned readings each week. A discussion of the readings is only possible if students have prepared appropriately by doing the required readings. Student participation in the seminar discussion, though not formally assessed, is an essential part of your academic performance. Seminar participation is the principal opportunity for students to receive feedback on their understanding of the readings, which will be used to answer questions in the formal assessment. Therefore, prepare well for each seminar and be as active as possible. Seminars also provide spaces where you can raise questions or lines of debate with your peers and the paper convenor, so make the most of them. Seminar attendance is mandatory. If for any reason, you cannot make a seminar, be sure to contact the paper convenor in advance.

Evaluation

There is only one formal assessment for the paper, and this consists of a 3,000 word essay. The submission date is still to be confirmed.

Readings

Readings are divided into two categories: *required* and *recommended*. Students should do the required readings prior to each seminar, whilst the recommended readings provide additional material that students can avail themselves of, for example when writing their essays.

Seminar Schedule

Seminar 1: Notions of truth in the post-truth era
Seminar 2: Theories of communication technologies and politics
Seminar 3: The church, paper, the printing press and the reformation
Seminar 4: Mass media and democracy
Seminar 5: Mass media and communism and fascism
Seminar 6: Social media and fake news
Seminar 7: Social media, social movements, and new forms of identity politics

1. Notions of truth in the post-truth era

Different meta-theoretical perspectives adopt different approaches of what truth is and how people can acquire truth. Correspondence theory suggests that people can simply objectively observe an independent external reality and translate it into language. Postmodern approaches counter that any such representation is partial, and serves specific interests and purposes. Yet, in an era of post-truth politics pure relativism carries significant dangers, so how can scholars find the right balance between relativism and totalizing conceptions of truth?

Seminar question:

What is truth, and how do we acquire it?

Required:

Aradau, Claudia and Jef Huysmans. 2019. "Assembling credibility: Knowledge, method and critique in times of 'post-truth'", *Security Dialogue*, 50(1): 44–6

Arendt, Hannah. 2006. *Between Past and Future*. Penguin Classics, Chapter 7.

Crilley, Rhys and Precious Chatterje-Doody. 2019. "Security studies in the age of 'post-truth' politics: In defence of poststructuralism." *Critical Studies on Security* 7(2): 166–70.

Hamati, Ataya Inanna. 2012. "Beyond (Post)Positivism: The Missed Promises of Systemic Pragmatism." *International Studies Quarterly* 56, 291-305.

Schindler, Sebastian. 2020. "The task of critique in times of post-truth politics." *Review of International Studies* 46(3): 376-394.

Recommended:

Bargués–Pedreny, Pol. 2017. "Connolly and the never-ending critiques of liberal peace: From the privilege of difference to vorarephilia." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 30(2): 216–34.

Fluck, Matthew. 2010. "Truth, values and the value of truth in critical International Relations theory." *Millennium* 39(2): 259–78.

Fluck, Matthew. 2014. "The best there is? Communication, objectivity and the future of critical International Relations theory." *European Journal of International Relations* 20(1): 56–79.

Hamati-Ataya, Inanna. 2013. "Reflectivity, reflexivity, reflexivism: IR's 'reflexive turn' – and beyond." *European Journal of International Relations* 19(4): 669–94.

Hutchings, Kimberly. 2007. "Happy anniversary! Time and critique in International Relations theory." *Review of International Studies* 33(S1): 71–89.

Koddenbrock, Kai. 2015. "Strategies of critique in IR: From Foucault and Latour towards Marx." *European Journal of International Relations* 21(2): 243–66.

Latour, Bruno. 2004. "Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30: 225–48.

Lohne, Kjersti. 2018. "As the universal breaks." *New Perspectives* 26(3): 135–42.

Patomäki, Heikki and Colin Wight. 2020. "After post-positivism? The promises of critical realism." *International Studies Quarterly* 44(2): 213-37.

Schmid, Davide. 2017. "The poverty of critical theory in International Relations: Habermas, Linklater and the failings of cosmopolitan critique." *European Journal of International Relations* 24(1): 198–220.

2.   Theories of communication technologies and politics

Between technological determinism and a constructivist notion that ideas shape social orders regardless of the technological features of a given epoch, a whole range of different theoretical perspectives focuses on the facilitating role of communication technologies. How do communication technologies favor specific kinds of actors to spread their ideas? How do they advantage particular kinds of messaging strategies? And how do social orders promote specific technological innovations in turn?

Seminar question:

How do communication technologies shape politics?

Required:

Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, Chapter 1.

Deibert, Ronald. 1997. *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation*, Columbia University Press, Introduction, and Chapter 1.

Deutsch, Karl. 1994. Nationalism and Social Communication, In: Hutchinson, John and Anthony Smith (eds.) *Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 26-9.

Webster, J. G. 2011. "The Duality of Media: A Structurational Theory of Public Attention." *Communication Theory* 21(1): 43-66.

Recommended:

Albert, Mathias. 2016. *A Theory of World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Bennett, Tony, James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, Janet Wollacott (eds.) 1982. *Culture, Society and the Media*, London: Routledge.

Couldry, Nick. 2012. *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Evans, Sandra K., Katy E. Pearce, Jessica Vitak, and Jeffrey W. Treem. 2017. "Explicating Affordances: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Affordances in Communication Research." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 22(1): 35–52.

McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore. 1967. *The Medium is the Message*. Simon and Schuster.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill.

Neuman, W. Russell. 2016. *The Digital Difference: Media Technology and the Theory of Communication Effects.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Orlikowski, Wanda J., Joanne Yates, Kazou Okamura, and Masayo Fujimoto. 1995. "Shaping Electronic Communication: The Metastructuring of Technology in the Context of Use." *Organization Science* 6(4): 423–44.

Webster, J.G. 2014. *The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

3.   The church, paper, the printing press, and the Reformation

In the medieval period the church held a quasi-monopoly on knowledge production, when most written texts were laboriously produced in monasteries. Paper was significantly lighter and cheaper than parchment, together with the invention of Gutenberg's printing press this created space for mass production and consumption of written texts. How did these changes influence the medieval structures of knowledge production? How are the printing press and the reformation related to each other?

Seminar question:

What influence did paper and the printing press have on changing the medieval knowledge structure and forms of political organization?

Required:

Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, Chapter 2, Chapter 3.

Deibert, Ronald. 1997. *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation*, Columbia University Press, Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Recommended:

Chartier, Roger. 1989. "The Practical Impact of Print," in Philippe Aries and George Duby. Eds., *A History of Private Life*, vol. 3, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pp. 111-159.

Chaytor, Henry John. 1945. *From Script to Print: An Introduction to Medieval Vernaculars*. London: Folcroft Library Editions.

Curran, James. 1982. "Communications, power, and social order." In Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Culture, Society and the Media*. Routledge.

Dudley, Leonard. 1991. *The word and the sword: How technologies of information and violence have shaped our world*, Cambridge: Basel Blackwell.

Febvre, Lucien and Henri-Jean Martin. 1976. *The coming of the book: the impact of printing 1450-1800*, London, NLB.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*, Basil Blackwell, Chapters 2 and 3.

Gellner, Ernest. 1988. *Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History.* The University of Chicago Press.

Harrison, Peter. 2007. *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Heyer, Paul. 1988. *Communication and History: Theories of Media, Knowledge, and Civilization*. Greenwood Press.

Innis, Harold Adam. 1950. *Empire and communications*. Oxford University Press.

Innis, Harold Adam. 1951. The bias of communication. University of Toronto Press.

Le Goff, Jacques. 1988. *Medieval Civilization*. Oxford University Press.

Luke, Carmen. 1989. *Pedagogy, Printing, and Protestantism: The Discourse on Childhood*. SUNY Press.

Mark Edwards. 1994. *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1962. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. University of Toronto Press.

4.   Mass media and democracy

Modern representative democracy entails the understanding that the few have been elected by the many to rule on their behalf. But for the many to be able to evaluate the performance of their government they need to have an understanding of what their government accomplished. Mass media play an important role in this regard. They also create a public sphere, and they help provide a societal conception of a shared common sense. At the same time mass media are gatekeepers for information sharing, and they incorporate norms of accuracy, even as lying is still an integral part of democratic societies.

Seminar question:

Which role do mass media perform in a democratic society?

Required:

Ezrahi, Yaron. 2012. *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions*, Cambridge University Press, Chapter 12

Habermas, Juergen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Cambridge: Polity Press, Chapter VI

Walters, William, and Alex Luscombe. 2017. "Hannah Arendt and the Art of Secrecy; Or the Fog of Cobra Mist." *International Political Sociology* 11(1):5–20.

Williams, B. A. and Delli Carpini, M. X. 2011. *After Broadcast News: Media Regimes, Democracy, and the New Information Environment*, Cambridge University Press, Chapter 2.

Recommended:

Bimber, B. 2003. *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power.* Cambridge University Press.

Ellinas, Antonis A. 2010. The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card. Cambridge University Press.￼

G. C. Edwards III, L. R. Jacobs and R. Y. Shapiro (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media.* Oxford University Press.

Prior, M. (2007). *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Elections*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, R. 2003. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Diana C. Mutz. 2001. "Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference: The Role of Mass Media." American Political Science Review, 95 (1): 97-114

Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch. 1973. "On the Use of Mass Media for IMportant Things" Americna Scoiological Review 38(2): 164-181.

Grossberg, Lawrence, Ellen Wartella, Charles Whitney and Macgregor Wise. 2006. Media Making: Mass Media in a Popular Culture. London: Sage Publications

Graber, Doris and Johanna Dunaway. 2017. Mass Media and American Politics. CQ Press. Neuman, Russell. 1990. "The Threshold of Public Attention," Public Opinion Quarterly 54:159-176.

5.   Mass media and communism and fascism

The common assumption would be that communist and fascist regimes fully controlled mass media for propaganda purposes. Yet, the mass media under these regimes were subject to some of the same economic and technological pressures that democracies experienced. As a result, there were certain constrains put upon the control of mass media. Yet, mass media did serve the consolidation and maintenance of communist and fascist regimes. The specific governing arrangements of the media bodies, and the messaging strategies that these regimes employed are worth analyzing as key components of communism and fascism respectively.

Seminar question:
How did communist and fascist regimes deploy mass media for a consolidation of their power?

Required readings:

Arendt, Hannah. 2017. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Penguin Books, Chapter 11.I

McNair, Brian. 1991. *Glasnost, Perestroika, and the Soviet Media*. Routledge. Chapter 2.

Ross, Corey. 2008. *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Part V, Chapters 9, 10, and 11.

Recommended readings:

Fritzsche, Peter. 1998. *Germans into Nazis*. Harvard University Press.

Grunberger, Richard. 1974. *A Social History of the Third Reich*. Phoenix.

Inkeles, Axel. 2013. *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia: A Study of Mass Persuasion*. Harvard University Press.

Kallis, Aristotle *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kershaw, Ian. 1983. *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich*. Oxford University Press.

Mickiewicz, Ellen and Andrei Richter. 1996. Television, Campaigning, and Elections in the Soviet Union, In: David L. Swanson and Paolo Mancini (eds.) *Politics, Media, and Democracy*, Prraeger.

Rentschler, Eric. 1996. *The Ministry of Illusion.* Harvard University Press.

Schulte-Sasse, Linda. 1996. *Entertaining the Third Reich*. Duke University Press.

Tomasz Goban-Klas, Pål Kolstø "East European Mass Media: The Soviet Role", In: Odd Arne Westad, Sven Holtsmark, Iver B. Neumann (eds.) *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, pp. 110-136.

Vande Winkel, Roel and David Welch. Eds. 2007. *Cinema and the Swastika: The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan.

von Geldern, James and Richard Stites. 1995. *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia*. Indiana University Press.

Welch, David. 1983. *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–45*. Bloomsbury.

6. Social media and fake news

Social media have removed the gatekeeping role legacy media have traditionally performed. Anyone can post messages on social media and potentially reach large crowds. Fake news have significantly outperformed accurate news stories in terms of user engagement. Social media are fundamentally challenging the media environment of established democracies. What does this mean for democracy itself? But not just democracies, authoritarian regimes have adapted their messaging strategies to the new media environment as well.

Seminar question:

Which kind of change, if any, do social media signify for the political landscape?

Required readings:

Adler, Emanuel and Alena Drieschova. 2021. "The epistemological challenge of truth-subversion to the Liberal International Order." *International Organization* 75(2): 359-386.

Duncombe, Constance. 2020. "Social media and the visibility of horrific violence." *International Affairs* Vol. 96(3): 609-629.

Farrel, Henry and Abraham Newman. 2021. "The Janus face of the Liberal International Information Order: When global institutions are self-undermining." *International Organization* 75(2): 333-358.

Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2018. Social media and populism: an elective affinity? *Media, Culture & Society* 40(5): 745-753.

Gunitsky, Seva. 2015. "Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability." *Perspectives on Politics* 13(1): 42-54.

Recommended readings:

Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31 (2):211–35.

Baron, Ilan Zvi. 2018. *How to Have Politics in a Post-Truth Era*. Manchester University Press.

Conway, B.A., K. Kenski, and D. Wang. 2015. "The Rise of Twitter in the Political Campaign: Searching for Intermedia Agenda-Setting Effects in the Presidential Primary." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 20(4): 363-380.

Deibert, Ronald, Ronald Rohozinski and Masashi Crete-Nishihata. 2012. "Cyclones in cyberspace: Information shaping and denial in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war." *Security Dialogue* 43(1):3-24.

Duncombe, Constance. 2019. "The Politics of Twitter: Emotions and the Power of Social Media." *International Political Sociology* 13(4): 409-429.

Farrell, Henry. 2012. "The consequences of the Internet for politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15(1): 35-52

Freistein, Katja and Frank Gadinger. 2019. "Populist stories of honest men and proud mothers: A visual narrative analysis." *Review of International Studies* 46(2): 217-236.

Golovchenko, Yevgeniy, Mareike Hartmann, and Rebecca Adler-Nissen. 2018. "State, Media and Civil Society in the Information Warfare over Ukraine: Citizen Curators of Digital Disinformation." *International Affairs* 94 (5):975–94.

Hjorth, Frederik, and Rebecca Adler-Nissen. 2019. "Ideological Asymmetry in the Reach of Pro-Russian Digital Disinformation to United States Audiences." *Journal of Communication* 69(2):168–92.

Laybats, Claire and Luke Tredinnick. 2016. "Post truth, information, and emotion." *Business Information Review* 33(4):204-206.

Lazer, David M.J., Matthew Baum, Yochai Benkler, Adam Berinsky, Kelly Greenhill, Filippo Menczer, Miriam Metzger, Brendan Nyhan, Gordon Pennycook, David Rothschild, Michael Schudson, Steven Sloman, Cass Sunstein, Emily Thorson, Duncan Watts, and Jonathan Zittrain. 2018. "The Science of Fake News: Addressing Fake News Requires a Multidisciplinary Effort." *Science* 359 (6380):1094–96.

Marshall, Hannah, and Alena Drieschova. 2018. "Post-Truth Politics in the UK's Brexit Referendum." *New Perspectives* 26 (3):89–105.

Rosenfeld, Sophia. 2019. *Democracy and Truth: A Short History*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Silverman, Craig. 2016. "This Analysis Shows How Viral Fake Election News Stories Outperformed Real News on Facebook." *BuzzFeedNews*. 16 November 2016. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news- outperformed-real-news-on-facebook

Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. 2018. "The spread of true and false news online." *Science* 359(1146-1151):1-6.

Waisbord, Silvio. 2018. "The Elective Affinity Between Post-Truth Communication and Populist Politics." *Communication Research and Practice* 4 (1):17–34.

Wells, C., D. V. Shah, J. C. Pevehouse, J. H. Yang, A. Pelled, F. Boehm, J. Lukito, S. Gosh and J. L. Schmidt. 2016. "How Trump Drove Coverage of the Nomination: Hybrid Media." *Political Communication*: 33(4): 669-676.

Dean, J. (2008). "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics." In *Digital media and democracy: Tactics in hard times*, edited by M. Boler. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kurowska, X. and A. Reshetnikov. 2018. "Neutrollization: Industrialized trolling as a pro-Kremlin strategy of desecuritization." Security Dialogue 49(5): 345-363.

Kurowska, X. and A. Reshetnikov. 2021. "Trickstery: Pluralising stigma in international society." European Journal of International Relations 27(1): 232-257.

7.   Social media, social movements, and new forms of identity politics

Social movements are increasingly using social media to their own advantage, in order to mobilise large crowds online. The logic of connective action that emerges as a result of social media mobilization fundamentally differs from the more traditional logic of collective action. Micro-celebrities operate in the attention economy of the internet, where they are using specific aesthetic strategies to mobilize for political causes.

Seminar question:

How have the strategies of mobilization of social movements changed in the wake of the web 2.0 revolution?

Required:

Bennett, Lance and Alexandra Segerberg. 2012. The Logic of Connective Action. *Information, Communication & Society* 15(5): 739-768.

Stefania Milan. 2015. From social movements to cloud protesting: the evolution of collective identity, *Information, Communication & Society*, 18:8, 887-900

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2013. 'Not This One': Social Movements, the Attention Economy, and Microcelebrity Networked Activism. *American Behavioral Scientist* 57(7):848-870.

Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2015. Protest avatars as memetic signifiers: political profile pictures and the construction of collective identity on social media in the 2011 protest wave. *Information, Communication & Society* 18(8): 916-929.

Recommended:

Zizi Papacharissi (2016) Affective publics and structures of storytelling: sentiment, events and mediality, Information, Communication & Society, 19:3, 307-324

W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2011) Digital Media and the Personalization of Collective Aaction, Information, Communication & Society, 14:6, 770-799

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, Katrine Emilie Andersen, and Lene Hansen. 2020. Images, emotions, and international politics: the death of Alan Kurdi. *Review of International Studies* 46(1): 75-95.

Bakardjieva, Maria. 2015. Do clouds have politics? Collective actors in social media land. *Information, Communication & Society* 18(8): 983-990.

Olesen, Thomas. 2018. Memetic protest and the dramatic diffusion of Alan Kurdi. *Media, Culture & Society* 40(5): 656-672.

Singer, Jane B. 2014. User-Generated Visibility: Secondary Gatekeeping in a Shared Media Space. *New Media and Society* 16 (1):55–73.

Halpern, D. und Gibss, J. (2013). Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(3), 1159–1168.

Karpf, D. 2016. *Analytical Activism: Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy*. Oxford University Press.

Margetts, Helen ; John, Peter ; Hale, Scott ; Yasseri, Taha. 2015. *Political turbulence: how social media shape collective action.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Castells, M. (2012), *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Earl, J., & Kimport, K. (2011). *Digitally enabled social change: Activism in the internet age*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Morozov, E. (2009) From slacktivism to activism. *https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/05/from-slacktivism-to-activism/* retrieved Dec 2021

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the Streets: Social media and contemporaryactivism*. London: Pluto