

Digital Propaganda and Disinformation *graduate level – elective*

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Online platforms like Google, Facebook and TikTok play a great role in our information environment today. They have created both opportunities and challenges in the broad area of media, politics and strategic communication. On one hand, platforms have enabled more participatory communication environment and more direct communication between people, politicians and organizations (many-to-many). On the other hand, they have amplified problems of political and commercial manipulation.

The goal of this class is to provide students with basic understanding of how this digital environment and the process of 'platformisation' shape our consumption habits, influence public opinion, redefine notion of the public sphere and encourage unflattering socio-political processes, such as polarization and radicalization. In such a complex environment, the problem of digital propaganda and its variations (disinformation, fake news) and how it is tackled emerges as an issue of supreme importance.

Special focus in proposed readings and discussions will be given to personal and big data collecting, processing, analyzing and using for the purpose of strategic communication (be it for public interests; in media; commercial campaigns; political campaigns, etc.). During the class students will be familiarized with the ethical dilemmas related to this area and with legal and regulatory frameworks.

REQUIRED READINGS ARE ATTACHED TO EACH SESSION. THEY WILL BE AVAILABLE ON THE MICROSOFT TEAM *DIGITAL PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION*.

Final grade is an amalgam of:

- Attendance (lectures & seminars): 10 points
- Seminar: 30 points
- Exam: 60 points

Class Agenda and Readings

Day 1 06/03

Introduction to the course

Topics and logistics: format of instructions and students' responsibilities. The course is composed of lectures and seminars. There is no overlap between the two except for the main topic, thus attendance in both lectures and seminars is strongly recommended.

Day 2, 13/03

Key concepts: Propaganda, bullshit and disinformation

- Sproule, J. M. (2001). Authorship and origins of the seven propaganda devices: A research note. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 4(1), 135-143.

- Armitage, R. i Vaccari, C. (2021). Misinformation and disinformation. In *The Routledge Companion to Media Disinformation and Populism* (pp. 38-48). Routledge.
- Benkler, Y. & Faris, R. & Roberts, H. (2018) *Network Propaganda. Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*. Oxford University Press, Chapter 1, *Epistemic Crisis*, pp. 3-38.
- Darren Lilleker & Marta Pérez-Escolar (2023) Bullshit and Lies? How British and Spanish Political Leaders add to Our Information Disorder, *Javnost - The Public*, 30:4, 566-585,

Day 3, 20/03

Key concepts: Platformization

- Fischer, R., & Jarren, O. (2024). The platformization of the public sphere and its challenge to democracy. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 50(1), 200-215.
- Poell, T. & Nieborg, D. & van Dijck, J. (2019). [Platformisation](#). *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4). DOI: 10.14763/2019.4.1425

Day 4, 27/03

“Social editors”: information consumption and content moderation online

- Caplan, R. and Boyd, d. (2016) [Who Controls the Public Sphere in an Era of Algorithms?](#)
- Golatz, K. & Beer, F. & Katzenbach, K. (2018) [The Turn to Artificial Intelligence in Governing Communication Online](#). Workshop Report. Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society, Berlin.
- Helberger, N. (2016) [Facebook is a new breed of editor: a social editor](#).
- Kreiss, D. I., & McGregor, S. C. (2018). Technology Firms Shape Political Communication: The Work of Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Google with Campaigns During the 2016 U. S. Presidential Cycle. *Political Communication*, 35(2): 155–177.

Seminar

Think Piece:

- [Hannah Arendt: Truth and Politics. New Yorker, 1967.](#)
- Walter Lippmann: Stereotypes. In *Public Opinion*, 1922

Day 5, 03/04

Reading week – No class and seminar

Day 6, 10/04

Journalism, media and the shifting news authorities in the digital age

- [Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2023, 2024, 2025](#)
- Hurcombe, E. (2024). Conceptualising the “newsfluencer”: Intersecting trajectories in online content creation and platformatised journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 1-12.
- [All politics is digital politics](#)
- [Don't underestimate the Rogansphere. His mammoth ecosystem is Fox News for young people](#)
- [‘The intellectual dark web just won the election!’: meet the coalition of Joe Rogan, RFK Jr, Tulsi Gabbard and Elon Musk](#)

2026

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Seminar

- **1st debate:** “Fact checking reduces the reach and impact of propaganda and disinformation” vs. “Fact checking fuels propaganda narratives by reinforcing claims of censorship and elite control”

Day 7, 17/04

Echo chambers, filter-bubbles and polarization: myth or reality?

- Erickson, J. (2024). Rethinking the filter bubble? Developing a research agenda for the protective filter bubble. *Big Data & Society*, 11(1), 20539517241231276.
- Möller, J. (2021). Filter bubbles and digital echo chambers. In *The Routledge companion to media disinformation and populism* (pp. 92-100). Routledge.

Seminar

Think Piece:

- Analyzing digital propaganda and conflict rhetoric: a study on Russia’s bot-driven campaigns and counter-narratives during the Ukraine crisis (Marigliano, R., Ng, L.H.X. & Carley, K.M, 2024)
- ‘Pay Pal mafia’ and the idea of tech oligarchy

Day 8, 24/04

Womanosphere/manosphere

- Rieder, B., August, B., & Latil, B. (2026). The Tate-space on YouTube: Ambient ideology and the limits of platform moderation. *New Media & Society*, 0(0).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251409209>
- Bauer, M. F. (2024). Beauty, baby and backlash? Anti-feminist influencers on TikTok. *Feminist Media Studies*, 24(5), 1023–1041.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2263820>
- Scott, K., & Day, L. (2025). TikTok tradwives: femininity, reproduction, and social media. *Gender and Education*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2025.2546050>

Seminar

2nd debate: “In the age of platforms, journalism is more important than ever” vs. “In the age of platforms, journalism is dead”

Day 9, 01/05

Public holiday - No class and seminar

Day 10, 08/05

Information disorder

- Bennett, W. L. and Livingston, S. (2018). The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. *European journal of communication*, 33(2), 122-139.
- [Grbeša, M. & Nenadić, I. \(2023\) Strengthening Resilience to Disinformation. AEM. CHAPTERS 1, 2, 3 and 5](#)
- [Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. \(2017\). Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking. Report No. DGI\(2017\)09. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.](#)

Seminar

Think Piece:

- Character assassination as a tool of digital propaganda applied (on a case of your choice, based on Shiraev et al. Introduction. *Character Assassination and Reputation Management*, Routledge, 2022.
- [Fears about the impact of generative AI are overblown](#)

Day 11, 15/05

Media Literacy Incubator: Countering the Impact of Disinformation in Croatia

Day 12, 22/05

Radicalisation and conspiracy theories online

“They are eating the cats”: How memes, fandom and fanspiracies shape digital propaganda

- Driessen, S., Jones, B., & Litherland, B. (2024). From fan citizenship to ‘fanspiracies’: Politics and participatory cultures in times of crisis?. *Convergence*, 30(1), 304-312.
- Kasimov, A., Johnston, R., & Heer, T. (2025). “Pepe the frog, the greedy merchant and #stopthesteal”: A comparative study of discursive and memetic communication on Twitter and 4chan/pol during the insurrection on the US Capitol. *New Media & Society*, 27(1), 127-150.
- Petersen, L. N., Reinhard, C. D., Dannar, A., & Le Clue, N. (2024). New territories for fan studies: The insurrection, Qanon, Donald Trump and fandom. *Convergence*, 30(1), 313-328.
- Christensen, M., & Au, A. (2023). The Great Reset and the Cultural Boundaries of Conspiracy Theory. *International Journal of Communication*, 17, 19.
- Hannah, M. N. (2021). A Conspiracy of Data: Qanon, Social Media, and Information Visualization. *Social Media + Society*, 7(3).
- Bovan, K., Mikašinović-Komšo, M. Beyond the board: a thematic analysis of political actions from 4chan’s /pol/ board. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 11, 642 (2024).

Seminar

Social media project presentations

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Day 13, 29/05
GUEST LECTURER
Tuan Samahon, Villanova University
Free Speech in America

Seminar

Social media project presentations

Day 15, 05/06
Legal and regulatory approaches to platformisation

- Digital Services Act, AI Act
<https://law.yale.edu/isp/publications/digital-public-sphere/artificial-intelligence-and-digital-public-sphere-0>
- Nenadić, I. and Brogi, E. (2023). [Why news media need article 17 of the European Media Freedom Act?](#). Discussion Series. European University Institute.
- Nenadić, I. (2019). [Unpacking the “European approach” to tackling challenges of disinformation and political manipulation](#). *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4). DOI: 10.14763/2019.4.1436

Seminars

Student Participation (40% of Final Grade)

Students can earn a total of **40 points** in the seminar by choosing and actively participating in **ONE** of the following activities:

1. Deliver a presentation and lead a discussion (40 points)

Presentation: Deliver a 10-minute engaging presentation based on a Think Piece.

Discussion: Follow your presentation with a 30-minute discussion with your peers.

Think Piece topics (choose one of the following topics)

- [Hannah Arendt: *Truth and Politics*. New Yorker, 1967.](#)
- [Analyzing digital propaganda and conflict rhetoric: a study on Russia’s bot-driven campaigns and counter-narratives during the Ukraine crisis \(Marigliano, R., Ng, L.H.X. & Carley, K.M, 2024\)](#)
- Walter Lippmann: Stereotypes. In *Public Opinion*, 1922.
- [‘Pay Pal mafia’ and the idea of tech oligarchy](#)
- Character assassination as a tool of digital propaganda applied (on a case of your choice, based on Shiraev et al. *Character Assassination and Reputation Management*, Routledge, 2022.
- [Fears about the impact of generative AI are overblown](#)

Note: Think Pieces can be presented in pairs.

OR

2. Participate in ONE debate challenge (40 points)

1st debate: “Fact checking reduces the reach and impact of propaganda and disinformation” vs. “Fact checking fuels propaganda narratives by reinforcing claims of censorship and elite control”

Prep kick-off reading

- [Grbeša, M. & Nenadić, I. \(2022\). Strengthening Resilience to Disinformation: The State of Affairs and Guidelines for Action. Agency for Electronic Media.](#)
- Morgan, S. (2018). [Fake news, disinformation, manipulation and online tactics to undermine democracy.](#) *Journal of Cyber Policy*, 3(1): 39–43.
- Lyons, B., Mérola, V., Reifler, J., Stoeckel, F. (2020). How politics shape views toward fact-checking: Evidence from six European countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(3), 469-492.
- Nathan Walter, Jonathan Cohen, R. Lance Holbert & Yasmin Morag (2020) Fact-Checking: A Meta-Analysis of What Works and for Whom, *Political Communication*, 37:3, 350-375.

2nd debate: “In the age of platforms, journalism is more important than ever” vs. “In the age of platforms, journalism is dead”

Prep kick-off reading

- Hurcombe, E. (2024). Conceptualising the “newsfluencer”: Intersecting trajectories in online content creation and platformised journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 1-12.
- Lischka, J. A., & Garz, M. (2023). Clickbait news and algorithmic curation: A game theory framework of the relation between journalism, users, and platforms. *New Media & Society*, 25(8), 2073-2094.

Each debate team may include up to five students, with three additional students serving as moderators and jurors (13 per debate).

OR

3. Create a social media profile on a selected topic (40 points)

Choose a topic and publish related content on social media throughout the semester or during a specified period. THE TOPIC SHOULD BE RELATED TO THE COURSE CONTENT AND AGREED WITH THE COURSE INSTRUCTORS. You may use your personal profile or create a dedicated account for the project. Each student must publish at least ten posts, with multimedia (e.g., images, videos) included in at least half of the posts. Submit a brief report (2–3 pages) discussing your posts and the creative process, and present key highlights of your project to the class.

Note: Social media projects can be presented in pairs.

Evaluation criteria for seminar assignments

Projects will be evaluated based on comprehension of the reading materials, critical thinking skills, presentation and communication abilities, strength and clarity of arguments, quality of discussions with peers. Students are encouraged to enhance their presentations with mind maps, images, posters, videos, or other relevant materials.

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Selection of seminar assignments is on a first come – first serve basis. Online sign-ups will be available on the course team.