COMM 340E Communication and Media in the Digital Age
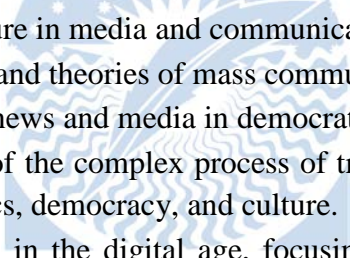
Course Description

This course is intended to provide an introduction to the major social, political, and cultural debates affecting communication and the new media landscapes. Topics include an overview of core concepts in the disciplines of Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, focusing on the connections between elements of the circuit of media. Structure, agency, power, technology, industry, content, and users interact in a global digital context. Understanding these elements is crucial for tackling enduring questions about the media in the digital age, and their overall impact on democracy, ethics, and culture.

Course Goals and Methodology

The main goal of this course is to investigate the complex relationship between media, communication, and culture in a network society. From a social and cultural approach to communication and through the critical study of recent issues and cases, students will gain a clearer understanding of the debates and trends in communication and media in the digital age.

Learning Objectives

Through this course, students will:

- Examine the central role of culture in media and communication studies.
- Trace and discuss the evolution and theories of mass communication and media.
- Reflect upon the crucial role of news and media in democratic societies.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the complex process of transformation of media in the digital context, and its impact on politics, democracy, and culture.
- Review free expression debates in the digital age, focusing on copyright issues, privacy, and security issues.
- Address ethical issues in media representation in a more and more visually oriented culture, focusing on gender, class, and race.
- Gain analytical, critical, and new media skills.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Engagement   (20%)
- Midterm exam   (18%)
- Final exam   (25%)
- Project   (15%)
- Critical response essay   (10%)
- Journal (4)   (12%)

Engagement (20%)

In-class participation will be encouraged at all sessions. Class participation will therefore be graded according to the students' previous work and reflections about the provided material. Active participation means not only attendance (being there ≠ participation) but reading assigned materials before class, providing ideas with relevant basis (properly supported), asking and answering questions in class, engaging in class discussions and conversations with classmates (embracing active listening), as well as questioning information presented and discussed. Students are also expected to actively participate in in-class exercises and to do homework. See rubric.

Exams (43%)

Exams (midterm and final) will cover the topics and questions seen in the course and will test conceptual and critical-thinking skills. Both exams will consist of multiple- choice, short answer, essay, and/or case analysis/reflection questions (*the final exam will NOT be cumulative).

Project (15%)

Students will work in small groups (no more than three/four students) to comply with this assignment. Each group of students will record a presentation on one topic from a list of suggested topics provided by the professor. In getting ready for this assignment, students should carry out a previous and intensive research on the chosen topic. Every group will get the professor's guidance during the process of research. Every group is expected to produce a clear, concise, and illustrative power point/Google Slides/Prezi presentation, on which extra material (images, YouTube videos, website links...) may be included. Time limit for each presentation is 15 minutes. *Make sure: a) not to exceed your allotted time, and b) not to present for less than 12 minutes. Further instructions are posted on Blackboard.

Critical response essay (10%)

This assignment is aimed at evaluating your critical and analytical skills. It implies: (1) the understanding of the relevance, the content, and the significance of the case study, and (2) the ability to perform critical thinking and reflect your opinion on the given subject based on what we have discussed in class. This includes the readings, theoretical concepts, videos, images, etc. associated with the assignment (e.g., social world, social imaginaries, agency, structure, the forms of capital, etc.).

Journal entries (4) (12%)

Every three weeks, students will write a short Journal entry (4 entries in total) to reflect upon the material covered in this course (readings, discussions, and so forth). The instructor will provide different prompts.

Final Grade Expectations: The instructor will use the Spanish 10-point grading scale. The grades that will appear on your final transcript are also Spanish grades.

- Grade A/A- (9-10) — Outstanding performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course. The best possible grade.
- Grade B+/B (8-9) — Remarkable performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics. Next highest.
- Grade B/B- (7-8) — Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics. Indicates high average performance.
- Grade C+/C (6-7) — Fairly good performance showing an understanding of the course on a basic level. Indicates low average performance.
- Grade C/C- (5-6) — Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course's topics. Lowest passing grade
- Grade F (0-5) – Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Failing grade.

Please be aware that anything below a 5 (i.e., a C- on the U.S. scale) is a failing grade. There is no pass/fail option at UPO. If you do not officially withdraw from a class by the withdrawal deadline, a failing grade will appear next to the course name. Check out the Student Handbook for the grade conversion table (some universities may use a slightly different scale).

General Course Policies

Each student is expected to be familiar with the course syllabus. Students are expected to focus their full attention on the class, arrive on time, and stay until class ends. Leaving the classroom on repeated occasions is disturbing to both your professor and your classmates and may adversely affect your participation grade. Please make use of the 10-minute breaks in between classes to fill up your water bottle, use the restroom, etc.

Students are expected to listen and respect other points of view. Phone calls, social media, email, or Internet browsing at any time during class are not acceptable during class except for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor. You are responsible for any and all course material covered in class, announcements, and/or handouts if you are not present for any reason. Students will be held responsible to be up to date by attending class regularly and checking both email and the Blackboard site of the course frequently (monitor your email and Blackboard announcements at least once every 24 hours).

Communicating with instructor: Please allow at least 48 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails. The weekend is not included in this timeframe. If you have an urgent request or question for your professor, be sure to send it during the week.

Student engagement policy

Student's engagement will account for at least 20% of the final grade for every course, thus highlighting its significance for high-impact learning.

Students will receive two engagement grades: a mid-term grade (at least 10%) and an end-of-semester grade (at least 10%). An engagement rubric is provided to ensure transparent and consistent grading.

Absences and lack of engagement

Absences during the add/drop period do not count against students' engagement grade, but may impact their performance in the course.

As a consistent lack of academic engagement may raise concerns about a student's overall academic performance, the following steps will be taken in order to support students' success:

Initial outreach – after missing 3 classes*

E-mail from professor reiterating engagement policy and consequences for additional absences.

Second outreach – after missing 4 classes*

E-mail from professor and notification of academic staff at the International office.

Academic probation – after missing 6 classes*

Student is called in for a meeting with academic staff at the International office. Automatic notification of home institution and further academic consequences.

Any additional absences will result in a failing grade.

RUBRIC

Criteria	Exemplary (9-10)	Proficient (7-8)	Passing (5-6)	Poor (0-4)
Attendance	Arrives on time and stays for the entire duration of class. No absences, or if absent once, demonstrates knowledge of course material missed.	Misses no more than two sessions or is occasionally late. Demonstrates knowledge of course material missed.	Misses 3 or 4 sessions or frequently arrives late/leaves early; exhibits little knowledge/interest regarding course material missed.	Misses 5 or more sessions and does not demonstrate knowledge of course material missed.
Preparation	Consistently well-prepared; demonstrates deep understanding of readings and completes assignments.	Usually prepared; completes readings with some understanding and usually completes assignments.	Occasionally prepared. Demonstrates limited understanding of materials and occasionally completes assignments.	Rarely prepared; minimal effort to engage with course materials.
Participation	Actively participates in discussions with thoughtful comments/questions; demonstrates knowledge of the material and critical thinking skills.	Participates often demonstrating knowledge of material and critical thinking skills.	Participates once in a while or contributions lack depth or relevance.	Does not participate or is disruptive during discussions.
Attentiveness & Respect	Fully engaged and attentive during all sessions; respectful to professor and fellow students. Use of laptop/tablet for notetaking only; no cellphone use.	Generally attentive, with very infrequent lapses in focus and use of electronic devices for non-class related purposes. Respectful to professor and fellow students.	Occasionally inattentive or disengaged. Use of electronic devices for non-class related purposes thus showing disrespect towards professor and fellow students.	Rarely attentive, focused or responsive. Repeated use of electronic devices for non-class related purposes thus showing disrespect towards professor and fellow students.
Collaboration & Feedback	Effectively collaborates with peers in group or in-class activities following professor's instructions. Incorporates feedback to improve learning & performance.	Collaborates frequently with peers or in in-class activities. Incorporates feedback and makes moderate efforts to improve learning & performance.	Occasionally works well with peers but does not contribute substantially to in-class or group assignments. Responds to feedback inconsistently with minimal improvement.	Does not collaborate with peers, does not complete in-class or group assignments. Ignores feedback.

Academic Honesty

Academic integrity is a guiding principle for all academic activity at Pablo de Olavide University. Cheating on exams and plagiarism (which includes copying from the Internet) are clear violations of academic honesty. A student is guilty of plagiarism when he or she presents another person's intellectual property as his or her own. The penalty for plagiarism and cheating is a failing grade for the assignment/exam and a failing grade for the course. The International Center may also report this to your home university. Avoid plagiarism by citing sources properly, using footnotes and a bibliography, and not cutting and pasting information from various websites when writing assignments.

Learning Accommodations

If you require special accommodations or have any other medical condition you deem may affect your class performance, you must stop by the International Center to speak to Marta Carrillo (mcaroro@acu.upo.es) to either turn in your documentation or to confirm that our office has received it.

Behavior Policy

Students are expected to show integrity and act in a professional and respectful manner at all times. A student's attitude in class may influence his/her participation grade. The professor has a right to ask a student to leave the classroom if the student is unruly or appears intoxicated. If a student is asked to leave the classroom, that day will count as an absence regardless of how long the student has been in class.

About using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The use of AI tools such as grammar checkers, ChatGPT, etc. and automatic translation tools is prohibited unless expressly permitted by the instructor to enhance the students' learning experience. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unacknowledged use of these tools to create content submitted as one's own. If the use of any of these tools is suspected, the instructor may request notes and other materials used in preparing assignments. Students must retain these materials until final grades are posted. Failure to produce these materials when requested may negatively impact the student's grades.

Course Contents

Media, Communication, and Society

1. The Evolution of Media Technology
2. The Media Industry
3. The Content of the Media
4. From Media Effects to Active Audiences

Required Texts

There is no textbook required for this course. Therefore, students are not expected to purchase any material. The instructor will post the class material (Google Slides, case studies handouts, in-class worksheets, announcements, links, and any additional reading) on Blackboard, which is accessible both on campus and off campus. To log in, you need to sign in on https://campusvirtual.upo.es using the username and password you received in your orientation folder.

The contents of the course are mainly but not only based on the following texts (more sources on Blackboard):

- Castells, M. (2023). The network society revisited. American Behavioral Scientist, 67(7) 940–946.
- Chakravartty, P. & Schiller, D. (2010). Neoliberal newspeak and digital capitalism in crisis. International Journal of Communication, 4, 670-692.
- Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2019). Media/society: technology, industries, content, and users (Sixth edition). Thousand Oaks (CA): SAGE.
- Durham, M. G., & Kellner, D. (2006). Media and cultural studies: Keyworks. Malden (MA): Blackwell.
- Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices. London (UK): Sage & the Open University.
- Kellner, D. (2020). Media culture: Cultural studies identity and politics in the contemporary moment. New York (NY): Routledge.
- Nightingale, V. (Ed.). (2011). The Handbook of media audiences. Malden (MA): Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wood, J. T. (2011). Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and lives (9thed.). Nelson Education. Boston (MA): Wadsworth.

COURSE

I. MEDIA, COMMUNICATION, AND SOCIETY	
Introductions. Course syllabus. Introductory activity	
Models of communication media. A model of media and the social world. Network society	Castells (2023), pp. 940-946
Structure and agency in the media	Croteau & Haynes (2012), pp. 20-25
The forms of capital	Bourdieu (1986), pp. 241-258

II. THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIA TECHNOLOGY	
From print to the Internet	When Was the Printing Press Invented? (2018) Journal 1
Technological determinism and social constructionism. McLuhan versus Postman	Watch The Medium Is the Message (9:05 min.)

III. THE MEDIA INDUSTRY	
Have digital communication technologies democratized the media industries? Social Media and a (New) Public Sphere: A Participatory Culture?	Watch Digital Disconnect (on Kanopy) (63 min.)
Concentration of ownership, media control, and political power	Chakravartty & Schiller (2010), pp. 672-676
Media regulation, free speech, and democracy	Cammaerts & Carpentier (2007), pp. xi-xvii
Regulating access and distribution. Net neutrality. Media Justice Movement	Media Justice Movement Project- Topic Watch What Is Net Neutrality? (4:43 min.)
Media prosumers	Ritzer et al. (2012), pp. 379-389 Journal 2
Midterm Exam	

IV. THE CONTENT OF THE MEDIA	
Media and ideology. Cultural hegemony. Representation. The Society of the Spectacle	Watch Hall (1997), Representation and media (8:32 min.)
Media and ideology. Cultural hegemony. Representation. The Society of the Spectacle (cont.).	Hall, p. 7 (hegemony)
Race and media representation	Hall (1992), pp. 10-18
Gender and media representation	Watch Kilbourne (Killing Us Softly 4) on Kanopy (45min.)
Social class and media representation	Kellner & Share (2019), pp.1-6
LGBT media representation	Explore https://glaad.org/ Critical Response Essay

V. FROM MEDIA EFFECTS TO ACTIVE AUDIENCES	
Propaganda. Early media effects theories	Watch Evolution of Media Theories (15:25 min.) Journal 3
Agenda setting and framing. The Spiral of silence. Cultivation theory	Watch Evolution of Media Theories II (16:53) Watch Evolution of Media Theories III (10:25)
Encoding/decoding: Balancing agency and structure	Hall (1980), pp. 51-61
Audiencing in the XXI century	Nightingale (2011) pp. 1-15
Media and embodiment	Gill (2021), pp. 1-5
Online media influence. The mediatization of society and politics. Echo chamber. Filter bubbles.	"Cambridge Analytica and Facebook" (2018) Final project (video)
Final Project presentations	
Summing up	Journal 4
FINAL EXAM.	