CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Media Sociology from the European Perspective
Course code: SOCI 4001 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

The 21st century brought dramatic transformations of the media landscape and communication systems through processes such as digitalization and hybridization. Traditionally, media research has been fragmented alongside the disciplines of communication, journalism, political science and regional studies. Media sociology aims to bridge these perspectives through an interdisciplinary study of media as social institutions while assessing their impact on the society as a whole. This theoretical framework is particularly paramount in comprehending such diverse phenomena as social networks, alternative media, fake news, whistleblowing and echo chambers and the links between media, democracy, identity and populism. The course equips students with concrete tools and provides opportunities to apply theoretical concepts in individual case studies in the media sphere, while carefully examining the challenges faced by the media researchers of today. Particular attention is paid to the local contextualization of media developments, discussions of leading media issues in present-day Europe and analyzing political communication strategies used by European political and media actors.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- articulate and define the central challenges media sociology faces in its research of communication, journalism, politics and social media, both globally and within the European context;
- analyze and contrast leading theoretical perspectives in different areas of media sociology, including a critical discussion of key buzzwords: populism, fake news, whistle-blowing, echo chambers, filter bubbles, hybrid warfare, alternative media and oligarchization;
- critique and evaluate the transformation of the media system in the past two decades, with a particular emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe, choosing one European country as a case study for the research paper;
- analyze the impact of new media on one's identity, communication, participation, representation and social polarization with a specific focus on the European context through a Socratic Seminar activity;
- transfer ideas through efficient communication and reflect on their intercultural learning experience through individual and team assignments, interactive class activities and diverse forms of debates.

Course Prerequisites

This course requires previous experience: at least one 2000-level and one 3000-level course, or two 2000-level courses in the sociology of media, journalism, and communications. Background in political science is an advantage.

Methods of Instruction

This course uses student-centered learning, while lecture-based teaching forms only a minor part of the course – aligning the learning objectives with learning opportunities. For this reason, students are expected to read and critically evaluate the course literature before the class. The course literature serves as an essential background to the class debates, activities and majority of the assignments. The recommended readings and class activities are designed to provide multilevel learning opportunities to reflect the diversity of student backgrounds. Furthermore, students engage with a diverse range of media experts (joining the course as guest lecturers) and apply their knowledge while participating in a field trip to a Czech-based news media outlet.

The student assessment is evenly spread out throughout the semester to reflect their development over the
semester, to minimize unnecessary stress and to provide students with continuous feedback to support their learning achievements. The assignments reflect the gradual development of skills in analytical reading, debating, reflecting on the acquired knowledge, presenting and academic writing needed to reach the aims of the course objectives.

To maintain high standards of communication between the instructor and the students, all necessary information will also be provided through the Canvas system. This includes course materials such as readings together with assignments, deadlines, updated syllabus and other resources. All submissions and communication are via Canvas as well. Students are expected to stay up-to-date regarding the Canvas developments relevant to the course.

Finally, students are encouraged to make use of the regular office hours to consult the instructor to enhance their learning process.

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Reflection Papers 20%
2. Leadership of Socratic Seminar Activity 15%
3. Grant Proposal Presentation 15%
4. Grant Proposal Paper 20%
5. Active class participation and quizzes 30%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Reflection Papers

Reflection papers aim to further enhance students' perspective and scholarly critique by reflecting on their learning process. While the overall focus of the course is relatively broad, reflection papers enable students to specialize in the areas of their interest.

Each student is expected to submit four reflection papers per semester. The first reflection paper is due at the end of week 4, the second one is due by the end of week 7, the third one is due by the end of week 10 and the fourth and the last one is due by the end of week 12.

In each reflection paper, students choose one of the class topics covered in the preceding semester quarter. Students are encouraged to reflect on crucial takeaways, intercultural learning experience and on issues that may still require further attention. Instructions on how to write a “quality reflection paper” will be provided in class and on Canvas. The length should be 375-750 words. There will be four reflection papers, each worth 5%. In total, all reflection papers are worth 20% of the final grade.

A-grade reflection paper is appropriately structured, while displaying an exceptional analytical reflection of the learning process.

Leadership of Socratic Seminar Activity

Over the first half of course of the semester (week 4-7), students (in the groups of 2-4 people) will take a leadership role in Socratic Seminar activity such as Fishbowl (15 min). Students are responsible for a thorough examination and critique of the provided text and collaboration on the preparation of an engaging discussion in regards to the complexity of ideas in the text provided before the class. Guidelines for the Socratic Seminar will be provided in class as well as on Canvas.

A-grade Socratic Seminar is evidence-focused, devoid of speculation, engaging and thoughtful, respecting diversity of opinions. The leading team is well-prepared and able to make the discussion constructive by asking high-level questions, thus facilitating the creation of new perspectives of their peers.

Grant Proposal Presentation

In the second part of the semester (week 8-11), students will present and defend their research grant proposal ideas in teams of 3. Students will demonstrate their compliance with the standards of scientific excellence such as ground-breaking nature, ambition, feasibility and interdisciplinarity. Guidelines for the team presentation (such as how to find a unique selling point) will be provided in class as well as on Canvas. Length of the presentation should not exceed 10 min, with a subsequent Q&A session with the class (5 min). Students are required to submit
the presentation outline to the instructors reflecting the feedback provided subsequently in class after the presentations within two days. The presentation is worth 15% of the final grade.

In an A-grade presentation, students display an exceptional grasp of the material and originality of research. Such presentation is structured in a balanced manner, presented in an appropriate style, well-managed timewise and contains a constructive follow-up discussion with the audience.

**Grant Proposal Paper**

The written grant proposal is the final subsequent stage of the grant proposal teamwork. The evaluation criteria rubric will include clear structure, appropriate style, in-depth literature review and logical organization of the central arguments. The grant proposal will also include evaluation of the teamwork process (communication within the team, distribution and accountability of team members for the joint final product).

The grant proposal paper is due by the end of week 13 and should be 1500-3000 words long. Preferred citation system is Chicago: Author-Date. This assignment is worth 20% of the final grade.

An A-grade written paper contains a competent grant proposal idea, which further develops on the presentation and demonstrates a deep understanding of the scholarly context. Such paper clearly communicates its scientific significance, has a logical structure and a sound methodology. Furthermore, students demonstrate a high-level of critical thinking and an appropriate usage of quality sources.

**Active class participation and quizzes**

A strong emphasis of this course is placed upon student-centered learning. For this reason, students are expected to participate in class activities and discussions, which may include both oral and written assignments - individually or in groups. Also, students are responsible for keeping up with the class readings and being ready to discuss them constructively.

To support sophisticated understanding of the required course readings, students are expected to complete short conceptual online quizzes on Canvas course page. Quiz for the current week is always due the day before the first class of the week. The first quiz covers the required literature of week 3 and should, therefore, be completed by the day before the start of week 3. Subsequent quizzes follow the same formula. Answers should be analytical, concise and well-structured. The length of each answer should be 75-150 words.

There will be four evaluations of students' in-class performance, each worth 5%. Also, there will be ten online quizzes to be completed outside of the class, each worth 1%. In total, the participation grade is worth 30% of the final grade.

**Attendance**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program.

If you will miss a class for any reason, notify the Program Coordinator and your instructor beforehand via Canvas. You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absence, and except in the specific cases listed below, credit will not be granted for missed assessments.

Excessive absences will result in a notification letter, and finally a warning letter, sent to you and your home school, based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of course hours missed</th>
<th>Number of CIEE classes</th>
<th>Minimum penalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>One to Three 90-min. classes; or One 180-min. class</td>
<td>No penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% - 20%</td>
<td>Four 90-min. classes</td>
<td>Written notification* to the student, followed by a warning letter to the student and home school; 3% reduction in the final grade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five 90-min. classes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Two 180-min. classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Six 90-min. classes; or Three 180-min. classes</td>
<td>Automatic course failure, and possible expulsion with notification to the home school</td>
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* The notification letters are intended to ensure that you are well advised in advance of any potential for failure or dismissal, so that you can take steps to avoid this.

As the table shows, missing more than 20% of any class (e.g., due to undocumented illness, travel delays, flight cancellations, over-sleeping, etc.) results in automatic failure of the course.
If you miss an assessment in class due to an absence, you will be able to make it up in the following instances:

- You provide a relevant doctor's note from a local medical professional to your Program Coordinator within 24 hours of your absence (a scan or photograph sent via e-mail are acceptable)
- A CIEE staff member verifies that you were too ill to attend class.
- You provide evidence of a family emergency to your Program Coordinator.
- You have an approved absence related to the observance of a religious holiday from the Academic Director based on a request submitted before you arrived onsite.

**Please note:** Absences incurred due to documented illness, documented family emergency or the observance of a religious holiday approved before arrival onsite do not count towards the total of absences. Students may self-certify one absence due to illness without providing a doctor’s note as long as they notify the Program Coordinator within 24 hours of their absence by e-mail or a text message.

**Other attendance-related policies**

If you transfer from one CIEE class to another during the Add/Drop period, you will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of the new class provided you were marked present for the first session(s) of the original class.

If you are over 15 minutes late for a class, the instructor is required to mark you absent.

In case of class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips and make-up classes), always contact the Academic Department to decide the appropriate course of action.

Please remember to track your attendance on the Canvas Course Sites and report any errors in the record to the Academic Department within one week of the discrepancy date, as later claims may not be considered.

These attendance rules also apply to any required co-curricular excursion, activity, or event, and to for-credit internships.

CIEE staff does not manage absences at partner institutions providing direct enrollment classes (FAMU, ECES and FSV), but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

*N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.*

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: 1.1 What is the role of media sociology?

In the first class, we will examine the central issues studied by the discipline of media sociology. Why is there a need for a discipline that offers an interdisciplinary way to study media and their impact on society? How does its analytical approach differ from other related disciplines? What are the fundamental questions we should ask when examining the mediasphere in the Central and Eastern Europe?

**Recommended reading:**

1. Shoemaker and Reese, chap. 1.

Class: 1.2 How do we study it? The development of a theoretical framework

We will consider the main developments in the field of media sociology. Furthermore, we will also discuss the most prominent theories that help us to fathom the world of media and give us the opportunity to use these “theoretical lens” in specific cases during the semester.

**Required reading:**

1. Shoemaker and Reese, chap. 2.

**Recommended reading:**

1. Brienza and Revers, 539–52.

**Week 2**
The emergence of the Hybrid Media System

We will discuss the revolution of the communication technologies in the 21st century that has profoundly transformed the media, society and politics. How can we define this new, so-called, Hybrid Media System and distinguish it from previous media systems? In the second part of the class, we will analyze the functioning of this new system in the case of the US presidential election of 2016.

Required reading:
1. Short video: Hybrid media system by Andrew Chadwick
2. Chadwick, chap. 10.

Recommended reading:
1. Dennis and Chadwick, 1–19.

Class: 2.2 Media and audience - powerful or limited effects?

We will look at the age-old scholarly debate: do media exert powerful or limited effects on its audience? What are the main strengths and limitations of these theoretical effect models?

Required reading:
1. Perse and Lambe, chap. 1.

Recommended reading:

FIRST ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 2

Week 3
Class: 3.1 Political communication – intro to the theory & practice

We will focus on the study of “PolComm” - political communication and its relevance for understanding the nexus of media and politics. What are the field's central debates?

Required reading:
1. McNair, chap. 1.

Recommended reading:
1. Nielsen, 1–5.

Class: 3.2 The time machine: ancient Rome political communication case study

While the scholarly study of political communication is a comparatively modern endeavor, the practice of it is significantly older. For this reason, the second class of the week shifts its focus from present-day to the times of the ancient Rome to investigate the way Roman politicians communicated their political agendas to their audience.

Required reading:
1. Video: Claudia Tiersch & political communication in the Roman Republic

Recommended reading:
1. Steel, 17–33.

SECOND ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 3

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT TEAMS WILL BE FORMED AND DATES SCHEDULED FOR EACH TEAM TO LEAD THE SOCRATIC SEMINAR AND GRANT PROPOSAL IDEA PRESENTATION BY THE END OF WEEK 3
Class: 4.1 What is populism & how do we study it?

We will examine the emergence of the scholarly inquiry of populism in the past two decades, from Cas Muddle’s interpretation of populism as a “thin ideology” to the subsequent research of populism as a discourse and a “populist frame” in communication.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
1. Aslanidis, 88–104.
2. Aalberg et al., chap. 1.

Class: 4.2 Populism as a style of political communication

We will examine populism as a style of political communication. We will discuss the strategies of populist political communicators with specific attention paid to the distinction between empty-populism, anti-elitist populism and excluding populism.

Required reading:
1. Short video playlist: Populist political communication
2. Aalberg et al., chap. 2.

Recommended reading:

FIRST REFLECTION PAPER DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 4
THIRD ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 4
TEAM A LEADS SOCRATIC SEMINAR IN THE SECOND CLASS

Week 5
Class: 5.1 Populist political communication in Europe

We will discuss the most recent research on the populist political communication strategies of the far-right and far-left parties across Europe. Additionally, we will discuss the effects of these strategies on the populist party preferences of the European citizens. We will use a practical tool to study these phenomena – a content analysis codebook. This exercise will provide insights into the challenges faced by the researchers of populist communication.

Required reading:
1. Ernst et al., 1347–64.

Recommended reading:

Class: 5.2 Populist political communication in Europe & beyond

We will continue our survey of contemporary populist political communication. We will focus on a comparative case analysis between the UK and Venezuela. Also, following up on the relationship between populism and European society examined in the previous class, we will look at the other side of the coin – media preferences of citizens with populist attitudes.

Furthermore, we will do the content analysis of selected media articles, this time in independent groups. Towards the end of the class, group results will be compared and discussed.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
Week 6

Class: 6.1 Journalism & professionalism

We will shift from our focus on communication & politics to the study of the journalistic profession and we will discuss its 21st-century. What are the most prominent challenges faced by the journalistic actors in this new environment?

**Required reading:**

1. Waisbord, chap. 1.

**Recommended reading:**

1. Steen and Ahva, 1–18.

Class: 6.2 Journalism & social context

We will find answers to: How has the role of journalists as “gatekeepers” changed in the modern era? Do different ownership and business models significantly influence the media system? To answer these questions, we will assess the factors of media ownership, economic models and media regulations with a focus on the CEE region.

**Required reading:**

1. Waschková Císařová and Metyková, 6–18.

**Recommended reading:**

1. Fengler et al., 249–66.

Week 7

Class: 7.1 Alternative vs. mainstream media & beyond

We will examine the usefulness of the alternative vs. mainstream dichotomy in the comprehension of the functioning of the Hybrid Media System. We will discuss the possibilities of further expansion of this dichotomy with other typologies, such as community, anti-systemic media and propaganda outlets. We will analyze and categorize selected Czech media outlets and their results will be discussed.

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**

2. Columbia Journalism Review: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda

Class: 7.2 Opportunities and pitfalls: journalistic profession guest lecture

We will engage with the guest speaker - a working professional journalist based in the Czech Republic, who is a political correspondent for BBC and Deutsche Welle - in discussion over topics from previous classes.

**Required reading:**

1. Urbániková and Volek.
TEAM D LEADS SOCRATIC SEMINAR IN THE SECOND CLASS
SECOND REFLECTION PAPER DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 7
SIXTH ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 7

Week 8
Class: 8.1 Czech media system case study

Following-up on all the previous themes covered during the semester, we will focus on the intersection of media and political landscape in the Czech Republic. Primarily, we will analyze the consequences of the dramatic transformation of the media sphere in the past decade through processes of oligarchization, tabloidization and hybridization.

Required reading:
1. Štětka, 85–98.

Recommended reading:

Class: 8.2 Czech political communication and media coverage case study cont.

Continuing with the case study of the Czech media landscape, we will inspect the current state of research of the Czech political communication. We will also analyze the media coverage of some of the controversial public topics, such as the European refugee crisis and the Roma community.

Required reading:
1. Aalberg et al., chap.22.

Recommended reading:
1. Tkaczyk, 90–110.
2. Veselková, 141–54.

Class: 8.3 Excursion to a Prague-based Media Outlet

We will gain a more complex understanding of how major European newsroom works by conducting an excursion to a media organization in Prague. We will meet up with the working journalists and editors of the outlet. Students will be able to link their theoretical knowledge from the first two classes of this week with practical experience of the professionals.

TEAM A PRESENTS RESEARCH GRANT IDEA IN THE SECOND CLASS
SEVENTH ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 8

Week 9
Class: 9.1 Social media: their role & impact on our lives

We will review the state-of-the-art research regarding the connection between the social media and well-being, populist messages and political communication.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
1. Rune, and Enjolras, 338–57.
2. Hameleers and Schmuck, 1425–44.
We will investigate the unexpected emergence of the Czech YouTube celebrity culture through expert guest lecture and subsequent debate. What are its specificities? How is Czech YouTube stardom comparable to other countries, such as the US? Could YouTube be characterized a new locale for industrial celebrity manufacturing? How does our “need to belong” influence the way we look up to celebrities in general?

**Required reading:**

1. Hou.

**Recommended reading:**

1. Escalas and Bettman, 297–308.

**TEAM B PRESENTS RESEARCH GRANT IDEA IN THE SECOND CLASS SESSION**

**EIGHTH ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 9**

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**Week 10**

**Class: 10.1 Media, identity, communication and participation**

We will explore the relationship between media and personal identity. We will devote a specific focus to the link between “offline” and “online” identity and the role of age in the patterns of communication and political participation of Czech citizens.

**Required reading:**

1. Schwartz and Halegoua, 1643–60.

**Recommended reading:**

1. Macková et al., 46–65.

**Class: 10.2 Women & the online world: guest lecture**

During this guest lecture and ensuing discussion, we will examine the experiences, characterization and political participation of women in the world of online news and social networks, with particular scrutiny of the Czech online environment.

**Required reading:**

1. Vochocová, 1–16

**Recommended reading:**

1. Humprecht and Esser, 1–18

**TEAM C PRESENTS RESEARCH GRANT IDEA IN THE SECOND CLASS**

**THIRD REFLECTION PAPER DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 10**

**NINTH ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 10**

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**Week 11**

**Class: 11.1 The era of whistleblowing? The case of Wikileaks.**

We will analyze the evolution of the practice of whistleblowing from a media sociology standpoint. Specifically, we will examine the rise of Wikileaks as the leading whistleblower platform and assess the four scholarship approaches to the research of it. Furthermore, we will discuss Wikileaks' impact on the day-to-day work of journalists, legal and ethical consequences of its operations and reflect upon the “new digital culture of disclosure” and its complicated relationship with the public interest journalism.

**Required reading:**
Class: 11.2 Media & polarization of society

We will focus on a discussion of two critical questions - are social media, partisan news outlets, filter bubbles and echo chambers important factors in the process of polarization of our societies? How can we link these issues with the citizens' news bias perception and media trust in general?

Required reading:
1. Bessi et al., 1–24.

Recommended reading:
1. Ardèvol-Abreu and Gil De Zúñiga, 703–24.

TEAM D PRESENTS RESEARCH GRANT IDEA IN THE SECOND CLASS
TENTH ONLINE QUIZ DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 11

Week 12
Class: 12.1 Media as a tool of propaganda & hybrid warfare: guest lecture

We will debate the role of media instrument of propaganda and hybrid warfare. Specifically, we will examine the case study of the Ukrainian conflict with the added perspective of a guest lecturer, who served as a correspondent in Ukraine during the 2014 Euromaidan revolution and the subsequent escalation of the security situation in Eastern Ukraine.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
1. Lanoszka, 175–95.

Class: 12.2 What exactly is “Fake News“?

We will carefully analyze the buzzword “fake news” from a scholarly standpoint. How can we operationalize this concept in media research? Furthermore, we will look at the impact of misinformation on political attitudes of the citizens. We will also assess the most recent advances regarding machine-learning and misinformation detection. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of the underlying socio-psychological foundations of misperceptions.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

FOURTH REFLECTION PAPER DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 12

Week 13
Class: 13.2 Where do We go from Here? The future of media & media sociology

In the final session, we will reflect upon the themes introduced in the previous class and discuss the prospects of the media landscape in Europe and beyond. Does high-choice media environment spell doom for the future of liberal democracies? Which media business models are sustainable and which are destined to fail? Are current theories sufficient for understanding and anticipating future
media transformations?

**Required reading:**

1. Van Aelst et al., 3–27.

**Recommended reading:**

1. Podcast: 7 Predictions About the Future of Media
2. Revers and Brienza, 1–17.

**GRANT PROPOSAL PAPER DUE BY THE END OF WEEK 13**

**Course Materials**

**Readings**

**Required Readings**


Media Resources

Media Sociology – key concepts


Hybrid Media System


YouTube. February 26, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5BtLO1nSNE.

Political Communication – key concepts

Political Communication in Ancient Rome

Latest Thinking. https://lt.org/publication/what-were-cultural-implications-political-communication-late-roman-republic.

Populist Political Communication in Europe


Professional & citizen journalism


Example of a research of the alternative media ecosystem


Czech media landscape in the Central European context


Social media and society – key concepts


Media future prediction