

Ethics and Politics in the Digital Era

2022-23

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“It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind, who harness old social forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world”(Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*)

The course analyzes how internet is redefining contemporary democracy focusing in particular on the recent phenomena of public opinion conditioning, on the decline of intermediate bodies with the related marginalization of experts, on the info-wars waged by organized groups and at times autocratic foreign governments, on freedom of expression in the social media and on who should set its limits (if any).

Teaching Methods

The course presupposes active participation. Students are required to select at least one text from the reading list and present it to their colleagues. Classes will be run as seminars: it is expected that students read the material before class and participate in the discussion of the material presented. In addition to in-class presentations, students are required to write a 10-15 page final paper on a topic relevant to the course or to take a final oral exam.

Required Readings

Cass Sunstein, *#Republic.com. Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Princeton Oxford: Princeton UP, 2017.

Jamie Bartlett, *The People Vs Tech. How the Internet is killing democracy (and how we save it)*. London: Penguin 2018.

Recommended Readings

Martin Moore, *Democracy Hacked: Political Turmoil and Information Warfare in the Digital Era*. London: OneWorld 2018.

Pollicino, O. and Bassini, M., “Free Speech, Defamation and the Limits to Freedom of Expression in the EU: A Comparative Analysis” IN: A. Savin, J. Trzaskowski (eds), *Research Handbook on EU Internet Law*, 2014, Bocconi Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2706112, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2706112>

Quattrociochi, W. and Scala, A. and Sunstein, C. R., “Echo Chambers on Facebook” (June 13, 2016). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2795110> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2795110>

Assessment methods

Assessment will take place by looking at four aspects of students’ performance: 1) Participation in class, 2) Presentation, 3) Final oral exam (date to be scheduled first half of February) OR written term paper of 10-15 pages (deadline March 31st 2023)

Grade Weights:

Participation in class: 25%

Presentation: 25%

Final paper or Final Exam: 50%

Syllabus 2022

1. Introduction
Oct 18th
2. Daily me. (C. Sunstein *#Republic* 1-30)
Nov 15th
3. Representative democracy, citizens and internet. (C. Sunstein *#Republic*, 31-58)
Nov 29th
4. Polarization (C. Sunstein *#Republic*:59-97)
December 13th
5. The limits of freedom of expression (C. Sunstein *#Republic*: 191-212)
January 10th

January 20th and 21st International Workshop:

6. Artificial intelligence: Driverless Democracy (J. Bartlett, *The People Vs Tech*, Penguin 2018; 103-129)
January 24th
7. Internet, social, and political elections (J. Bartlett, *The People Vs Tech*, Penguin 2018; 69-101)
January 31st

Essential references

- Anagnostopoulos, Aris et al. "Viral misinformation: The role of homophily and polarization." *arXiv preprint arXiv:1411.2893* (2014).
- Bessi, Alessandro et al. "Science vs conspiracy: Collective narratives in the age of misinformation." *PloS one* 10.2 (2015): e0118093.
- Bessi, Alessandro et al. "Social determinants of content selection in the age of (mis)information." *Social Informatics* (2014): 259-268.
- Bessi, Alessandro et al. "Trend of Narratives in the Age of Misinformation." *PloS one* 10.8 (2015): e0134641.
- Bessi, Alessandro et al. "The economy of attention in the age of (mis) information." *Journal of Trust Management* 1.1 (2014): 1-13.
- Del Vicario, Michela et al. "The spreading of misinformation online." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113.3 (2016): 554-559.
- Mocanu, Delia et al. "Collective attention in the age of (mis) information." *Computers in Human Behavior* 51 (2015): 1198-1204.
- Zollo, Fabiana et al. "Debunking in a World of Tribes." *arXiv preprint arXiv:1510.04267* (2015).
- Zollo, Fabiana et al. "Emotional dynamics in the age of misinformation." *PloS one* 10.9 (2015): e0138740.