Social Media & Politics
POLI 3546
Fall 2020
Online (with a *few* synchronous components)

Instructor: Dr. Scott Pruysers
Office: Henry Hicks Building, Room 360
Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:35am-12:35pm
Email: scott.pruysers@dal.ca

On weekdays, I will generally respond to your emails within 24 hours. Substantive questions are best discussed during regularly scheduled office hours. Live office hours will be held once a week online via Collaborate Ultra in Brightspace.

Course Description
This course provides students with an introduction to politics in the digital era. Election campaigns are increasingly being fought on the internet, municipalities across the country are removing paper ballots entirely and replacing them with online voting, and citizens and voters are turning to social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) more and more for opportunities to participate in, and learn about, politics. While the course explores digital politics broadly, the primary focus will be on social media, especially debates surrounding the role and importance of social media in contemporary political life. Does social media encourage individuals who would not normally participate in politics to become active? Does social media increase political knowledge via exposure to ‘shared’ content? Can social media be used to effectively organize social movements and spur protests? Who ‘falls’ for fake news and shares this content online? Is social media a threat to democracy and the integrity of elections? These are some of the questions we will address throughout the course. Weekly topics will include political communication (new and old media); digital democracy and concerns regarding the digital divide; political memes and user generated content; fake news; incivility and online polarization; the relationship between social media and political knowledge and participation; the role of social media in elections, social movements and protests; and concerns regarding privacy, surveillance, and election interference.

Required Texts

See course schedule for additional readings each week. In addition to the assigned course textbook there are a series of additional required readings each week (mix of journal articles and book chapters).

**see word document in Brightspace for links to journal article readings**

**see uploaded readings in Brightspace for non-textbook book chapter pdfs**
Course Learning Outcomes

1. Provide students with an introduction to, and understanding of, the following:
   a. the changing media landscape including the intersection of old and new media
   b. the role and significance of social media in contemporary political life (elections, protests, social movements, everyday politics, etc.)
   c. the challenges associated with social media (privacy, surveillance, etc.) as well as possible threats to the democratic process (fake news, election interference, etc.)

2. Assist students in rooting their arguments in the relevant empirical literature and expose them to the fundamental arguments of scholars in the field regarding the role and influence of social media in politics.

3. Help students develop and practice critical reading and writing skills.

Class Format

A series of video lectures for the week will be uploaded to Brightspace on the Monday of each week. These videos can be viewed online and at your own pace, but should be viewed in conjunction with assigned course readings. Once a week I will hold live office hours during our regularly scheduled class time (Tuesdays 11:35am-12:35pm) to answer questions and discuss course content with students.

Course Assignments

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<tr>
<th>Requirement/Assessment</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Participation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Presentation/Discussion</td>
<td>October 8</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media Reflection</td>
<td>September 29</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td>November 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media Campaign Document</td>
<td>December 3</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Participation (10%)

An important component of ensuring that the course has a sense of community (despite being conducted online) is frequent online participation, discussion, and student engagement. As student presentations begin in week 6 (see below), a series of discussion questions will be posted online each week and students are expected to actively engage in discussion having read the required materials and carefully watched the lecture/student presentation for the week. This kind of participation provides students with the ability to interact with one another as well as critically engage with the course material. A series of netiquette guidelines for the course as well as details regarding participation expectations will be posted on Brightspace.

Group Presentation & Discussion (15%)

Students (in groups of approximately 5) will present on a specific case study (recent election, social movement, etc.) regarding the intersection of social media and politics. Presentations should include a brief discussion of the case in question (i.e., background and context, etc.), an explanation of the outcome of the case, examples of how social media was used (i.e., show YouTube videos, tweets, etc.), and an analysis of the use, role, and effectiveness of social media (drawing on academic literature) in the particular case. Where possible, presentations should make connections to course material and major themes. Presentations should be approximately 15-20 minutes in length and will be posted on Brightspace for the rest of the class to view. In addition to the group presentation, each group will develop a series of online discussion questions relating to their specific case and will be responsible
for facilitating online discussion (i.e., responding to questions, probing further, etc.) for that week. Groups will be established during the first week of class, and a topic-specific meeting space will be available through Brightspace for students to meet and record their presentations. A grading rubric and further instructions can be found on Brightspace. Presentations are due October 8 and will be released to the class once a week for viewing.

Reflection (15%)
In his New Yorker article, “Small Change. Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted”, Malcolm Gladwell is critical of those who argue that social media is profoundly changing political life. The purpose of this assignment is to read the article and respond to Gladwell in a short reflection (3-4 page double spaced). How important is social media in contemporary political life, and importantly, is Gladwell correct in his assessment 10 years later? The reflection is to be submitted via Brightspace on September 29.

Tests (15% each)
There will be two in class tests (October 15 and November 19). The tests will cover all assigned readings, lectures, and any videos up to the date of the test. The tests will consist of two parts: a section in which students will be asked to define and explain the significance of key terms/concepts, and a short essay question. Tests will be ‘open book’ and submissions will be open via Brightspace for a 24-hour period.

Social Media Campaign Document (30%)
The major individual assignment for this course is a social media campaign document. Imagine the following hypothetical scenario: It has only been a year since the 2019 general election but there is a by-election in the Halifax electoral district. You are tasked with developing an online strategy document for your preferred (fictional) candidate/party in the election. Each assignment must include at least 4 types of original content that you create from the following list:

- YouTube video/ad (30 seconds+)
- TikTok video (x2)
- Political meme (x5)
- Facebook post (x5)
- Tweet (x10)
- Blog post (700 words)
- Campaign website
- Infographic regarding a particular policy
- Op-ed for an online news outlet (500 words)
- Instagram post (x7)

In addition to creating your unique social media content, students will need to discuss the overall strategy of their social media campaign, drawing on course readings as well as original research. The strategy portion of the assignment (5 pages double spaced) should draw on the academic literature and consider questions such as Why these forms of social media over others? Who was the intended audience? What was the primary message (were some messages better suited for different forms of media/social media)? What was the overall campaign strategy? This assignment is due December 3 and will be submitted via Brightspace.
Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1: Introduction & What is ‘social media’?
Week of September 7-11
- Textbook Chapter 3. Where There Is Social Media There Is Politics

Week 2: Old Media and Media Logic
Week of September 14-18
- Textbook: Chapter 2: Network Media Logic: Some Conceptual Considerations

Week 3: The Digital Divide
Week of September 21-25

Week 4: Memes and User Generated Content (UGC)
Week of September 28 to October 2

*September 29: Reflection due via Brightspace
Week 5: Fake News and Polarization
Week of October 5-9


*October 8: All Group Presentations to be submitted via Brightspace*

Week 6: Participation
Week of October 12-16

- Textbook Chapter 19. Cyberactivism in China: Empowerment, Control, and Beyond

*October 15: Test 1 released online at 9:00am (students have 24 hours to submit via Brightspace) *
*Occupy Wall Street group leading weekly online discussion*

Week 7: Mobilization and Protests
Week of October 19-23

- Textbook Chapter 13. Social Media Use during Political Crises: The Case of the Gezi Protests in Turkey

*Arab Spring Group leading weekly online discussion*

Week 8: Control and Surveillance
Week of October 26-30

• McKelvey, Fenwick. 2018. “Protecting our information in the age of data-driven politics.” Policy Options

*Idle No More Group leading weekly online discussion

**Week 9: Elections**
Week of November 2-6
• Textbook Chapter 23. Social Media in the UK Election Campaigns 2008-14: Experimentation, Innovation and Convergence
• Textbook Chapter 24. Compulsory Voting, Encouraged Tweeting? Australian Elections and Social Media
• Textbook Chapter 31. Comparing Facebook and Twitter during the 2013 General Election in Italy
• Textbook Chapter 26: Social Media Incumbent Advantage: Barack Obama’s and Mitt Romney’s Tweets in the 2012 US Presidential Election Campaign

*Canadian Election (2015) Group leading weekly online discussion

**Fall Break**

**Week 10: Election Interference and Threats**
Week of November 16-20
• Chapter 5. “Cambridge Hyperbolityca.” In Outnumbered: From Facebook and google to fake news and filter bubbles – the algorithms that control our lives.

*November 19: Test 2 released online at 9:00am (students have 24 hours to submit via Brightspace)

*Brexit Group leading weekly online discussion

**Week 11: Documentary**
Week of November 23-27
• We will watch a documentary as a class using our assigned timeslot for the week (Tuesday and Thursday 11:35am-12:55pm)
• Details will be posted on Brightspace.

*#MeToo Group leading weekly online discussion

**Week 12: Wrap up and Review**
Week of November 30 to December 4
Additional Suggested Readings (not required)

- Textbook Chapter 5. Third Space, Social Media, and Everyday Political Talk
- Textbook Chapter 1: Politics in the Age of Hybrid Media: Power, Systems, and Media Logics
- Textbook Chapter 10: All Politics is Local: Anonymous and the Steubenville Rape Cases

Resources for Student Presentations

**The following readings are not required for lecture or tests but are meant to help students with their group presentations**

**Brexit**


**Occupy Wall Street**


**Arab Spring**


**Idle No More**


• Lesley J. Wood. 2015. “Idle No More, Facebook and Diffusion.” *Social Movement Studies*, 14:5, 615-621.

• Moscato, Derek. 2016. ‘Media Portrayals of Hashtag Activism: A Framing Analysis of Canada’s #Idlenomore Movement.” *Journalism*.

**#MeToo**


**Canadian Election 2015**

**Black Lives Matter**

**Supplemental Blogs and Resources**
Other relevant source of information and commentary about social media and politics are available at the following sites:
• ePolitics. [www.epolitics.com](http://www.epolitics.com)
• Pew Institute - [https://www.pewinternet.org/topics/social-media/](https://www.pewinternet.org/topics/social-media/)
University Grading Policy

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SECTION B: UNIVERSITY POLICIES, STATEMENTS, GUIDELINES and RESOURCES for SUPPORT

This course is governed by the academic rules and regulations set forth in the University Calendar and the Senate.

University Statements

Academic Integrity  [http://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html](http://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html)

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect (The Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 1999). As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity.

Accessibility  [https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html)

The Advising and Access Services Centre is Dalhousie's centre of expertise for student accessibility and accommodation. The advising team works with students who request accommodation as a result of: a disability, religious obligation, or any barrier related to any other characteristic protected under Human Rights legislation (NS, NB, PEI, NFLD).


Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The Code of Student Conduct allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students don’t follow this community expectation. When appropriate, violations of the code can be resolved in a reasonable and informal manner—perhaps through a restorative justice process. If an informal resolution can’t be reached, or would be inappropriate, procedures exist for formal dispute resolution.

Diversity and Inclusion – Culture of Respect

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. We stand for equality. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity. We are a respectful and inclusive community. We are committed to being a place where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our Strategic Direction prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness (Strategic Priority 5.2).

(read more: [http://www.dal.ca/cultureofrespect.html](http://www.dal.ca/cultureofrespect.html))
Recognition of Mi'kmaq Territory

Dalhousie University would like to acknowledge that the University is on Traditional Mi'kmaq Territory. The Elders in Residence program provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. Contact the program at elders@dal.ca.

University Policies and Programs

Important Dates in the Academic Year (including add/drop dates)
http://www.dal.ca/academics/important_dates.html

University Grading Practices: Statement of Principles and Procedures
https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/academic/grading-practices-policy.html

Scent-Free Program
http://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/occupational-safety/scent-free.html

Learning and Support Resources

General Academic Support – Advising

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/advising.html
(Halifax)

https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/agricultural-campus/student-success-centre/academic-support.html
(Truro)

Fair Dealing Guidelines
https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office/guidelines/fair-dealing-guidelines.html

Dalhousie University Library http://libraries.dal.ca

Indigenous Students

Black Students

International Students
https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/international-centre.html

Student Health Services
https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness.html

Counselling

Copyright Office
https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office.html

E-Learning website
http://www.dal.ca/dept/elearning.html

Dalhousie Student Advocacy Services
http://dsu.ca/dsas


Writing Centre https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html

Faculty or Departmental Advising Support: Studying for Success
Program:http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html