

Comm St 375-0-20: The Sociology of Online News

Fall 2013; Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30 – 10:50; Frances Searle Building #2-370

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Office hours: Thursday 1:00 – 2:00 and by appointment

The schedule listed is tentative and could be subject to change.

The professor reserves the right to make any changes and/or additions to this document.

This version (last updated 2013.8.9) supersedes all previous versions both in print and online.

I. Objectives and organization

The goal of this upper-level undergraduate seminar is to survey sociological research on online news. This is an area of inquiry that examines the interpersonal, organizational, institutional, technological, political and cultural factors that shape the production and consumption of news online. This is a new and emerging area that draws from sociological studies of traditional (print and broadcast) media to understand the construction and use of online news. However, in comparison to the slow-moving sociology of news in traditional media, with its relatively established theories and objects of inquiry, scholarship about online news is a fast-moving area because both the phenomena under consideration and the ways of making sense of them have been in ongoing transformation since its inception. The content and organization of this seminar reflect the fast-moving character of the sociology of online news, emphasizing relatively recent texts but grounding their interpretation in longstanding debates in the sociology of traditional media.

The course is structured in three parts. The first one (classes 1 and 6) serves as an introduction to both the state of online news and of sociological perspectives on traditional and online news. The second part (classes 7 to 12) looks at some key research themes in the scholarship on the production of content. The third section (classes 13 to 20) examines the main areas of inquiry in the consumption of online news. Class 21 will bring together the main themes of the entire class.

II. Evaluation

1. Class participation: 40% of the grade. This course is organized as a seminar; thus your cooperation and willingness to participate actively are critical for creating the best learning environment. Come to class having done the readings and ready to share your thoughts. Learning is a collective enterprise, so everybody will benefit from an engaged, intense, and constructive conversation.
2. Short essays: 60% of the grade. There will be three short essays, 1,500 words each, that will assess your learning of the topics covered in each of the three parts of the course. Each essay will amount to 20% of the grade for the course.

III. University Policy Statements

- Students with disabilities. In compliance with Northwestern University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Request for academic accommodations need to be made during the first week of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations. For more information, visit:
<http://www.northwestern.edu/disability>
- Academic integrity at Northwestern. Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak to the instructor before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a loss of credit for that assignment—at a minimum. Other penalties may also apply. The guidelines for determining academic dishonesty and procedures followed in a suspected incident of academic dishonesty are detailed on the website. For more information, visit:
http://www.communication.northwestern.edu/programs/undergraduate/policies_procedures/academic_integrity
- Sexual harassment policy. It is the policy of Northwestern University that no male or female member of the Northwestern community—students, faculty, administrators, or staff—may sexually harass any other member of the community. Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute harassment when:
 - Submission to such conduct is made or threatened to be made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment or education; or
 - Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used or threatened to be used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual; or
 - Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating what a reasonable person would sense as an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment, educational, or living environment.
 - For more information, visit: <http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment/policy/index.html>

IV. Readings

The required readings are collected will be available on the Blackboard site for the course.

V. Schedule

FIRST PART: INTRODUCTION

Class 1 (Tuesday September 24). How online news matter.

a. Orientation:

- Introductions.
- Expectations.
- Course structure.
- Assignments.

b. How online news matter.

Mitchelstein, E., & Boczkowski, P. (2009). Between tradition and change: A review of recent research on online news production. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 10 (5), 562-568.

Mitchelstein, E., & Boczkowski, P. (2010). Online news consumption research: An assessment of past work and an agenda for the future. *New Media & Society*, 12, 1085-1102.

Class 2 (Thursday September 26). A primer on the sociology of news production and consumption.

Webster, J. (1998). The audience. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 42, 190-207.

Zelizer, B. (2004). *Taking journalism seriously: News and the academy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapter 3.

Class 3 (Tuesday October 1). A primer on the state of the media industry.

The state of the news media 2012. Overview: Key findings. *The Pew Research Center's Project of Excellence in Journalism*. Available at: <http://stateofthemedias.org/2013/overview-5/key-findings/>

Class 4 (Thursday October 3). A primer on the state of online news.

The state of the news media 2013. Digital developments. *The Pew Research Center's Project of Excellence in Journalism*. Available at: <http://stateofthemedias.org/2013/digital-as-mobile-grows-rapidly-the-pressures-on-news-intensify/>

--Please note: Assignment I will be handed in at the end of this class, and will be due on Thursday October 10 at 8:00 am--

Class 5 (Tuesday October 8). Bringing it all together I.

There will be no reading assigned for this class. Instead, we will watch the documentary "Page one: Inside *The New York Times*" in class.

Class 6 (Thursday October 10). Bringing it all together II.

There will be no reading assigned for this class either. We will draw upon the readings in classes 1-4 to discuss both the documentary on *The New York Times* and Assignment I.

SECOND PART: PRODUCTION**Class 7 (Thursday October 15). History.**

Boczkowski, P. (2004). *Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

Class 8 (Thursday October 17). Innovation.

Steensen, S. (2009). What's stopping them? Toward a grounded theory of innovation in online journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 10, 821-836.

Class 9 (Tuesday October 22). Convergence.

Robinson, S. (2011). Convergence crises: News work and news space in the digitally transforming newsroom. *Journal of Communication*, 61, 1122-1141.

Class 10 (Thursday October 24). Speed and Imitation.

Boczkowski, P. (2010). *News at work: Imitation in an age of information abundance*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

--Please note: Assignment II will be handed in at the end of this class, and will be due on Thursday October 31 at 8:00 am--

Class 11 (Tuesday October 29). Occupational dynamics.

Usher, N. (2012). Ignored, uninterested, and the blame game: How *The New York Times*, *Marketplace*, and *TheStreet* distanced themselves from preventing the 2007-2009 financial crisis. *Journalism*.

Class 12 (Thursday October 31). Recap on news production themes.

There will be no reading assigned for this class. We will draw upon the readings in classes 7-11 to discuss issues regarding online news production in general and those addressed in Assignment II in particular.

THIRD PART: CONSUMPTION**Class 13 (Tuesday November 5). Interactivity I: Blogs, user-generated content and citizen journalism.**

Anderson, C. (2013). *Rebuilding the news: Metropolitan journalism in the digital age*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Chapter 4.

Class 14 (Thursday November 7). Displacement, complementarity or both?

Tewksbury, D., & Rittenberg, J. (2012). *News on the Internet: Information and citizenship in the 21st century*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 2.

Class 15 (Tuesday November 12). The news that people want to consume online.

Boczkowski, P., & Mitchelstein, L. (2013). *The news gap: When the information preferences of the media and the public diverge*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Chapter 2.

Class 16 (Thursday November 14). Interactivity II: Clicking, emailing and commenting.

Boczkowski, P., & Mitchelstein, L. (2013). *The news gap: The news gap: When the information preferences of the media and the public diverge*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Chapter 5.

Class 17 (Tuesday November 19). Homogenization.

Hindman, M. S. (2008). *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 5 and 6.

Class 18 (Thursday November 21). Fragmentation and polarization.

Tewksbury, D., & Rittenberg, J. (2012). *News on the Internet: Information and citizenship in the 21st century*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 7.

--Please note: Assignment III will be handed in at the end of this class, and will be due on Tuesday December 3 at 8:00 am--

Class 19 (Tuesday November 26). Back to the future: Online news in the 2012 U.S. presidential election.

Boczkowski, P., & Mitchelstein, L. (2013). *The news gap: The news gap: When the information preferences of the media and the public diverge*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Coda.

The state of the news media 2013. The media and campaign 2012. *The Pew Research Center's Project of Excellence in Journalism*. Available at:

<http://stateofthemedias.org/2013/special-reports-landing-page/the-media-and-campaign-2012/>

Class 21 (Tuesday December 3). Recap on news consumption themes.

There will be no reading assigned for this class. We will draw upon the readings in classes 13-19 to discuss issues regarding online news consumption in general and those addressed in Assignment III in particular.

Class 21 (Thursday December 5). Bringing it all together: The future of (online) news.

Readings TBA.