Syllabus/Programme

Media Communication in the XXI century:
The Backbone of Democracy or a Tool of Social Oppression

	Andrey Kostyrev &Aksana Ulanovich	
When & Where:	**Off University Moodle**	**Wednesdays at 14:00 CET**
Hosted by:	**LMU University with 6 ECTS Certification***	
Department	**the Faculty of Political Sciences**	

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Successful completion of a course at Off University is certified by the host university. This means that you are able to use these credits at any university in the EHEA in a programme you are enrolled in, or you may count this as previous knowledge in a future study programme. In order to be sure that you can transfer the credits, we suggest you get written confirmation by your home university's students' office. And if you are not enrolled in any university programme: You are very welcome to join! All our courses are free of charge and open to anyone: students, scholars, activists.

Description:

In the current world, where information appears as the main value, the discourse about the media's role and place in socio-political processes is a cornerstone both for theorists – political scientists, sociologists, legal scholars, psychologists – and for practitioners – politicians, editors, journalists, bloggers – as well as for an engaged public. The question of how media can support democratic processes and foster communicative discourse, while avoiding manipulation and oppression, has become urgent due to the rapid evolution of online platforms.

The optimistic 1990s vision of the Internet as a catalyst for direct democracy has, since 2016, given way to warnings that social media "steal elections" and create distorted realities through fake news and emotionally charged propaganda. These challenges are particularly acute for societies in democratic transition, striving for liberation, sovereignty, and sustainable public trust.

This 14-week seminar course is designed as an interdisciplinary dialogue between scholarship and practice. Students will engage critically with theory and current events, exploring themes such as the essence of political communication, media power, the watchdog–chain dog dilemma, post-truth networks, and the aesthetics and rhetoric of political media. Through discussion, debate, and collaborative research, we will uncover the techniques, tactics, and means by which media shape – and are shaped by – democratic and authoritarian contexts.

The course moves from foundational theories of information and communication to advanced explorations of network society, post-politics, and post-truth realities, culminating in student-led presentations that synthesize and apply the insights gained.

Digital Self Defense

Our platform is dedicated to spread knowledge threatened by authoritarian and right-wing populist regimes and to put measures in place that enable people to practice digital self-defense.

We encourage all users to sign up for the platform anonymously and respect others' preferences for staying anonymous. **Please do not force anyone to share personal information or take screenshots of others without their knowledge.**

The courses take place on Off University's Moodle. The platform includes an encrypted video-call option, cloud storage, as well as a messaging system. We would like to remind all users that communication with other users outside of the platform (i.e. e-mail, Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp or other video conferencing tools) may put them at risk.

Course Purpose

This course examines the role of media communication in shaping political, social, and cultural realities of the 21st century. It aims to provide students with a critical understanding of how media can serve as both a guardian of democracy and an instrument of social oppression, with special attention to the transformative impact of digital platforms and networked communication. Students will engage with key theories, case studies, and contemporary debates, gaining the analytical, ethical, and practical skills needed to evaluate and influence media discourse in a globalized, data-driven world.

Aimed Outcomes

1. Interpret and compare key theories of information, communication, and political media systems.
2. Analyze mechanisms through which media influence political agendas, public opinion, and social cohesion.
3. Identify and critique forms of manipulative, oppressive, and aestheticized media communication.
4. Debate the roles of media within different political systems, from liberal democracies to authoritarian regimes.
5. Evaluate the impact of network society, post-truth communication, and algorithmic governance.
6. Propose value-based countermeasures against misinformation and polarization.
7. Analyzing the agency of the public in the formation of this media landscape and the counterstrategies to authoritarian and manipulative practices.

Skills & Competencies Gained

1. Critical analysis of complex media–politics interactions.
2. Interdisciplinary thinking spanning political science, sociology, psychology, and communication studies.
3. Media literacy & ethical awareness for evaluating credibility and bias.
4. Argumentation & deliberation skills for evidence-based debate.
5. Practical research skills for applying theory to real-world cases.
6. Strategic communication skills for creating narratives aligned with democratic values.

The methodology includes:

1. Lectures and Seminars,
2. Readings,
3. Discussions,
4. Case studying,
5. Discourse, pragmalinguistic and stylistic analysis,
6. Group and team work,
7. Reflective writing,
8. Creative research projects, presenting the results of investigating social issues within the course content.

The final grade for the course will be based on the following:

- Active participation & engagement in discussions (20%),
- Written assignments (30%): Case Study Analysis OR Reflection Paper
- Final presentation (50%): a 15-minute slide presentation followed by a 5-minute Q&A. Participants prepare this short research on a topic they choose within the course content. Topics must be grounded in scholarly literature but may focus on theoretical debates, comparative case studies, or critical analyses of contemporary events.

Presentations will be evaluated on content quality (clarity of argument, depth of analysis, integration of theory and evidence), delivery (clarity, engagement, time management), and visual communication (effective and purposeful use of slides). Students are encouraged to incorporate diverse media formats—images, video excerpts, data visualizations – where relevant, while maintaining academic rigor.

Organization of the course

Focus/Topic of the week & Reading List

Week 1– Introduction & Ice-Breaking: Framing the Questions

This opening session serves both as an orientation to the course and an opportunity to build an engaged learning community:

1. Self-introduction, sharing academic backgrounds, professional interests, and personal experiences with media in political or social contexts.
2. Ice-breaking activities to encourage dialogue across disciplines and perspectives, fostering the trust and openness needed for sustained seminar debate.
3. The course structure, objectives, and assessment methods, highliting the key concepts—media communication, democracy, social oppression, network society, etc. – that will guide our discussions.
4. Showcasing media coverage of recent events to frame the key dilemma: Is media the backbone of democracy or an instrument of control?
5. The two core paradigms that run through the course: the realistic (power-oriented) and idealistic (value-oriented) visions of media in politics.
6. Engaging the students in thinking about their final presentation topics, which must address a problem, a case, or theoretical debate related to the course issues.

Week 2 – Seminar: 'Information and We: Who Is a Creator?'

1. The contradictory nature of information as the basis for the discussion of the role of media in social sphere and politics, in particular.
2. Two main paradigms that explain the essential nature of information: attributive and functional.
3. The attributive paradigm: idealistic, materialistic and the intermediate approache to understanding information. Levels of information – divine, physical, biological, psychological, and technological. Debating whether information, since it transforms an object during interaction, also transforms the actor.
4. The functional paradigm: information as a product of human activity. Its functional properties: reflection, uncertainty reduction, knowledge creation, and value. Debating whether human-created information can be truly objective.
5. Spesifying naïve and creative views of information, which raises provocative questions: Do we create information, or does it create us? And, if information is a human function, how should we treat 'information' produced by artificial intelligence?

Reading materials:

- Kostyrev, A. (2024). *Political Communication: Theoretical background.* Textbook. Series Political Communication: Theories and Practices, Vilnius: European Humanities University, Kaunas: JSC Igmovila, pp. 7-18.
- Harari, Y. N. (2024). *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI,* New York: Random House, pp. 3-15.

Further reading:
- Webster, F. (2006). *Theories of the Information Society,* Third edition*,* Routledge, pp. 25-30.
- Information, (2025). Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information.

Week 3 – Seminar: 'Why and How We Communicate: Co-operation and Manipulation'

1. The essence and the aims of communication, beginning with its simplest definition: the transmission of information. Exploring how interpretations diverge along the attributive and functional paradigms of information.
2. The instrumentalist approach (communication as a tool to influence others) versus the social activity approach (communication as a collaborative process of meaning-making).
3. Debating the question: How to distinguish between informing, manipulating, and truly communicating?
4. Rethinking Lasswell's famous formula ("Who Says – What – to Whom – in What Channel – With What Effect?") to capture the nuances of persuasion, coercion, and collaboration in the digital era.

Reading materials:

- Kostyrev, A. (2024). *Political Communication: Theoretical background.* Textbook. Series Political Communication: Theories and Practices, Vilnius: European Humanities University, Kaunas: JSC Igmovila, pp. 19-34.
- Harari, Y. N. (2024). *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI,* New York: Random House, pp. 16-26.
- Castels, M. (2012). *Communication Power.* Oxford University Press, pp. 146-154.

Further reading:
- Gordon, G. (2023). Communication. Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/communication/The-psychology-of-communication.
- Karppinen, K. (2019). What kinds of normative theories do we need? Ideal and non-ideal theories in communication research, in Murru, M. F. at all. (Eds.) Communication as the Intersection of the Old and the New, lumière Bremen, pp. 19-30.
- Lasswell's model of communication. (2023). Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lasswell%27s_model_of_communication#:~:text=The%20channel%20is%20the%20way,the%20case%20of%20mass%20communication.

Week 4 – Seminar: 'How Communications Construct Networks – and Networks Construct Communications'

1. The reciprocal relationship between communication and the networks it creates.
2. Formation and use of social structures – a distinctive feature of how political communication operates in the digital age.
3. The concept of the network society, where ties, trust, and values circulate across multimodal platforms.
4. Quantitative models (measuring network reach, density, and influence) and qualitative approaches (understanding meaning, trust, and value transfer) in communication studies.
5. The structure of effective networks – core, semi-periphery, and periphery; valuence as an integrated measure of communication power, combining trust, engagement, and scale.
6. Discussion over the key questions: Does networked communication encourage cooperation by building social capital, or does it more often foster manipulation and control? Can trust be measured without stripping it of its emotional and ethical dimensions?
7. Engendering understanding of how networks can either deepen democratic participation or entrench polarizing narratives by comparing examples from grassroots movements and coordinated propaganda campaigns.

Reading materials:

- Kostyrev, A. (2024). *Political Communication: Theoretical background.* Textbook. Series Political Communication: Theories and Practices, Vilnius: European Humanities University, Kaunas: JSC Igmovila, pp. 35-49.
- Castels, M. (2012). *Communication Power.* Oxford University Press, pp. 19-23.
- Harari, Y. N. (2024). *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI,* New York: Random House, pp. 338-446.

Further reading:
- Kostyrev, A. (2025). Constructing Effective Network Political Communication: Theoretical Models and Ukrainian Practices, Politologija, 1 (117): 90–122. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15388/Polit.2025.117.3.

Week 5 – Seminar: 'Who Makes Communication Political – How and Why?'

In this seminar, we will examine the forces and actors that turn communication into a political act.

1. Two enduring visions of politics: the realistic view, which sees politics as a competition for power and resources often reliant on coercion, strategic framing,

and short-term gains; and the idealistic view, which frames politics as a cooperative pursuit of the common good, grounded in shared norms, trust, and long-term vision.
2. Exploring how the Political Communication Formula works: What is informed? – the type and framing of political information; Who informs and to whom? – the relationships between rulers, institutions, and publics; In what channel? – the role of traditional versus networked media; For what purpose? – short-term electoral goals versus long-term policy outcomes; Based on what values?—from democratic ideals like liberté, égalité, fraternité to authoritarian control; and With what effect? – information, discursive, and communication power.
3. Grasping how communication power – the ability to set narratives, direct attention, and build trust – reshapes the relationship between authority and citizens in a digital, globalized public sphere.

Reading materials:

- Kostyrev, A. (2024). *Political Communication: Theoretical background.* Textbook. Series Political Communication: Theories and Practices, Vilnius: European Humanities University, Kaunas: JSC Igmovila, pp. 50-72.
- Castels, M. (2012). Communication Power. Oxford University Press, pp. 10-16.

Further reading:
- Blumler, J. G. (2017). The Shape of Political Communication. In K. Hall Jamieson and K. Kenski (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 47–58.
- Esser, F., & Pfetsch, B. (2020). Political Communication. In D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative Politics*. Fifth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 336-358.
- Roskin, M. et all. (2024). Political Communication (Chapter 9), in *Political Science: An Introduction*, 12th edition, Pearson, pp. 156-175.

Video:

- Sullivan, Zack (2021). Political Communication, PP12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xl_hhzclhg.
- Political Communication: Our Past(s), Our Present(s), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWos2UvPSqg.

Week 6 – Seminar: 'Are Media Almighty and How Do They Get Their Power?'

This seminar challenges the assumption that media wield near-absolute power in politics, asking instead: if such power exists, how is it obtained, maintained, and limited?

1. The theories of media: the strong effects model (which presents media as capable of shaping perceptions, agendas, and behaviors directly), the limited effects model (which highlights the filtering influence of audience predispositions, interpersonal networks, and competing sources of information).

2. The key mechanisms of media coverage: agenda-setting (deciding which issues the public should think about), framing (shaping how those issues are interpreted), priming (influencing the standards by which political actors are judged).
3. The sources of media power: control of information flows, symbolic authority, ownership structures, technological innovation, professional norms, and alignment – or conflict – with political agendas.
4. Case studying to assess whether social media decentralizes media influence or concentrates it in the hands of new corporate and algorithmic gatekeepers, as well as state authorities.

Reading materials:

- Kostyrev, A. (2025). *Mediatization of Politics: Historical and Systems Analysis.* Textbook. Series Political Communication: Theories and Practices, Vilnius: European Humanities University, Kaunas: JSC Igmovila, pp. 46-65, 16-18,
- Blumler, J. G. (2015). Core Theories of Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted, *Communication Theory.* 25: 426–438, doi:10.1111/comt.12077.
- Iyengar , S. (2017). A Typology of Media Effects, In K. Hall Jamieson and K. Kenski (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 70-80.

Further reading:

- Heywood, A. (2019). The Media and Politics (Chapter 9) in *Politics*, 5th Edition, Red Globe Press, pp. 362-382.
- Kurian, G. T. (2011). Media and Politics *in The Encyclopedia of Political Sciences*, CQ Press, pp. 965-967.
- McQuail, D. (2009). McQuail's Mass Communication Theory, London: Sage.
- Strömbäck, J, & Esser, F. (2014). Mediatization of Politics: Towards a Theoretical Framework, in J. Strömbäck, & F. Esser (Eds.) *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3-30.
- Shehata, A., & Strömbäck, J. (2014). Mediation of Political Realities: Media as Crucial Sources of Information, in J. Strömbäck, & F. Esser (Eds.) *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 93-113.
- Strömberg, D. (2015). *Media and Politics*, Institute for International Economic Studies, Stockholm University.
- Toynbee, J. (2008). Media making and social reality in D. Hesmondhalgh & J. Toynbee, *The Media and Social Theory*, Routledge, pp. 265-279.

Week 7 – Lecture: 'Oppressive Communication in the Media: A Subtle Face of Social Oppression'

1. The concept of oppression and its five "faces" in modern societal formations (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence). Basic concepts of power relations and social oppression practices (oppressive rule, oppressive politics, oppressive law, oppressive education, oppressive society, etc).
2. The mechanisms and the logic of oppressive media communication (which is, "politics of perception"), its rhetoric (abusive and hurtful language), its overall impact on individuals and society (namely, cognitive and human agency disruption).
3. The politics of perception – a mechanism of influencing the mind through taming humans' subtlest senses, bodily reactions and affections.
4. Oppressive media rhetoric – hurtful, offensive and derogatory language, imagery and narratives that have the power of exhausting mental capacity, hampering human agency and public resilience.
5. The ultimate psychological outcome of oppressive communication: erosion of trust, critical capacity disruption, internalized oppression; societal effects – polarization, marginalization, dehumanization of certain groups.
6. Encouraging students to critically think about their own media consumption and consider strategies for counteracting oppressive communication in democratic and authoritarian contexts alike.

Reading materials:

- Young, Iris M. (2014) Five Faces of Oppression, *The Philosophical Forum*, 19(4), P. 270-290. (abridged version supplied).

Week 8 – Lecture: 'Aestheticization of Media Communication and the Aestheticized Society'

1. Aestheticization as a multidimensional process that occurs in all areas of social space and is manifested in the increasing emphasis on the imagery, emotional appeal, effect, sensually perceived qualities of the forms of knowledge, information, lifestyles, relations and media communication, in particular.
2. Contextualizing aestheticization in a broad social context, where politics, science, history, war, and even violence are reframed in ways that prioritize formal expression and emotional resonance over substantive content.
3. Major effects of aestheticization – empowering or manipulation.
4. Aestheticezed media rhetoric: the language, stylistics, semantics, pragmatics.
5. Debating on whether aestheticization is an inevitable evolution of communication in a media-saturated world or a practice that can (and should) be resisted in favor of more substantive democratic discourse.

Reading materials:

- Eagleton, T. (1988). The Ideology of the Aesthetic, *Poetics Today*, 9(2): 327-338. (abridged version supplied).
- Arceo, C. (2021). Aestheticization of violence and politics of perception, *Academia Letters*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.20935/AL2289 (PDF supplied).

Week 9 – Lecture: 'Metaphorization of Modern Media Rhetoric: Framing as Communication Technology'

1. The power of metaphor as both a cognitive tool and a rhetorical weapon in political media communication. The power of conceptual metaphors to frame the way we perceive, interpret, and evaluate events.
2. The structure and mechanisms of the metaphor in political rhetoric; how they function to simplify complex realities, mobilize support, or stigmatize opponents.
3. Case studying to reveal how metaphors are strategically utilized to frame assertions, ideas, to create myths, to shift blame or credit, thus shaping public perception and opinion.
4. Measuring the risks of metaphorization: oversimplification, stereotyping, and the potential to mislead.
5. The key metaphorical models in political discourse: 'artifactual', 'natural', 'anthropomorphic', 'anthropological', 'esoteric' metaphors.
6. Debating whether metaphor is an inevitable and necessary part of political communication and whether ethical boundaries should be drawn to prevent its manipulative effect.

Reading materials:

- Hetmański, M. (2021). Cognitive-methodological functions of metaphors, *Argument, 11* (1): 93-109. DOI: 10.24917/20841043.11.1.5. (abridged version supplied).
- Lapka, O. (2021). Language of persuasion: analysis of conceptual metaphors in political discourse, *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies, 28*: 85-110. DOI: 10.17561/grove.v28.6607 (abridged version supplied).

Week 10 – Lecture: 'The Art of Verbal Humor in Media Rhetoric: Challenging Narratives'

1. Humor – a powerful tool in political discourse. Genres of verbal humor (jokes, wit, irony, satire, sarcasm), their cognitive, emotional, and social effects in media communication.
2. Main theories of humor's origins (incongruity, superiority, relief), how these mechanisms function in communication.

3. Functions of humor in public messaging: identification, clarification, enforcement, differentiation (after J.C. Meyer). Functions of humor within the framework of political communication strategies (self-presentation, delegitimization).
4. Analyzing how humor can serve as a form of soft resistance, undermining official narratives, exposing hypocrisy, and encouraging critical thinking. Conversely, how it can be weaponized to marginalize, ridicule, or delegitimize individuals and groups, often with lasting reputational impact.
5. Contextualizing the capacity of humor to both disrupt and reinforce political power (through examples from opinion, late-night, comedy shows, political memes, and social media satire).
6. The ethical boundaries of humor in political communication – when it provokes constructive dialogue, and when it deteriorates into abuse, offense and just shire bullshit.

Reading materials:

- Meyer, J. C. (2000) Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication, *Communication theory, 10* (3): 310–331, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00194.x (PDF supplied).

Week 11 – Seminar: 'Media and Political Communication: New Trends in Rhetoric and Persuasion'

1. Examining how contemporary political rhetoric adapts to and exploits evolving media ecosystems.
2. Changes in actors (from party leaders to influencers), channels (broadcast news to livestreams), message types (policy-focused to emotionally charged), and communicative tactics (fact-based persuasion to microtargeted emotional appeals). Assessing how the changing media communication landscape influences political persuasion, focusing on the interplay between credibility, emotional resonance, and technological mediation.
3. Convergence of political and commercial persuasion strategies.
4. Debating whether these new trends enhance democratic participation by making politics more accessible and relatable, or whether they erode deliberative democracy by prioritizing spectacle and viral impact over substantive debate.
5. Case studying to grasp the persuasive techniques at play in contemporary political campaigns.

Reading materials:

- Podkowińska, M. (2018) Media And Political Communication, *Roczniki Nauk*
- *Społecznych, 10* (3): 109-121. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rns.2018.46.3-8 (PDF supplied).

Week 12 – Seminar: 'Media: Watchdog of Democracy or Authority's Chain Dog'

1. Grasping the dual and often conflicting roles of the media in democratic life: as a watchdog, guarding the public interest, holding power to account, and enabling informed citizenship, and as a potential chain dog of authority, amplifying official narratives, legitimizing dominant power structures, and marginalizing dissent.
2. The normative-value (social-axiological) approach: what values – truth, accountability, pluralism, or stability, order, and national unity – should guide media in political contexts, and how these values are negotiated or compromised in practice.
3. Debating whether media systems function independently, symbiotically, or subordinately to political institutions, and how these relationships vary across liberal, polarized pluralist, and authoritarian environments.
4. Examining the shift from the mass-society model of liberal democracy, with its universalist aspirations and centralized public sphere, toward the network-society paradigm, which is characterized by fragmented public, algorithmic mediation, and "deep sovereignty," where both state and corporate actors compete for control over communication flows.
5. Discussing whether digital connectivity strengthens media's watchdog capacity by enabling transparency and citizen journalism, or whether it creates new dependencies – economic, political, and technological; whether the democratic function of the media can be preserved or renewed in an era when the boundaries between scrutiny and servitude are increasingly blurred.

Reading materials:

- Kostyrev, A. (2025). *Mediatization of Politics: Historical and Systems Analysis.* Textbook. Series Political Communication: Theories and Practices, Vilnius: European Humanities University, Kaunas: JSC Igmovila, pp. 9-14, 43-46, 66-93.
- Skudra, O., Šulmane, I., & Dreijere, V. (2022). The Media in the Democratic Society. https://www.academia.edu/15647580/The_Media_in_a_Democratic_Society?auto=download&email_work_card=download-paper.
- Harari, Y. N. (2024). *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI,* New York: Random House, pp. 172-185, 447-510.
- Castels, M. (2012). *Communication Power.* Oxford University Press, pp. 264-298.

Further reading:
- Persily, N. & Tucker, J. A. (Eds.) (2020). Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform, Cambridge University Press.
- Beus de, J. (2011). Audience Democracy: An Emerging Pattern in Postmodern Political Communication, in K. Brants & K. Voltmer (Eds.) *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy: Challenging the Primacy of Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 19-38.
- Tenove, Ch. et all. (2018). *Digital Threats to Democratic Elections: How Foreign Actors Use Digital Techniques to Undermine Democracy*, Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, UBC.

- Giannakopoulos, A. (Ed.) (2019). *Media, Freedom of Speech, and Democracy in the EU and Beyond,* The S. Daniel Abraham Center for International and Regional Studies, Tel Aviv University.
- Jebril, N., Matthew Loveless, M., & Stetka, V. (2015). Media and Democratization: Challenges for the Emerging Sub-Field, *Media Studies*, 6 (11): 84-98.
- Kostyrev, A. (2021). Liberal Democracy: from the Mass Society Broad Universalism toward the Network Society Deep Sovereignty. Sciences of Europe, 60: 19-28. DOI: 10.24412/3162-2364-2020-60-3-19-28.

Week 13 – Seminar: 'Post-Politics in Networks of Post-Truth'

1. Debating how political life changes when it moves from the structured arena of traditional media into the fragmented, interactive space of post-truth networks.
2. Examining how interactivity, constant information overload, and the prioritization of emotional resonance over factual accuracy reshape public discourse, making personal beliefs and identity markers more decisive than shared evidence.
3. The rise of polarization, the clustering of like-minded communities, and the emergence of "bubble democracy": how these dynamics feed into post-politics, where ideological contestation is replaced by technocratic management.
4. By drawing contemporary network society theory, exploring whether today's digital sphere expands democratic engagement or locks it into echo chambers, and what values must underpin any defence against the corrosive effects of post-truth communication.

Reading materials:

- Kostyrev, A. (2025). *Mediatization of Politics: Historical and Systems Analysis.* Textbook. Series Political Communication: Theories and Practices, Vilnius: European Humanities University, Kaunas: JSC Igmovila, pp. 14-21, 34-39.
- Harari, Y. N. (2024). *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI,* New York: Random House, pp. 283-337, 529-592.
- Castels, M. (2012). *Communication Power.* Oxford University Press, pp. 54-136.

Further reading:
- Cooper T., Thomas J. (2019). *Nature or Nurture: A Crisis of Trust and Reason in the Digital Age.* London: Albany Associates.
- Johansson, E. (2019). Social media in political communication: A substitute for conventional media? in K. M. Johansson & G. Nygren (Eds.) *Close and distant: Political executive–media relations in four countries*, pp. 149-174. Goteborg: Nordicom.
- Kostyrev, A. G. (2021). Post-Politics in Post-Truth Networks. Polis (Political Studies), 2: 64-75. DOI: 10.17976/jpps/2021.02.05.
- Verdegem, P. (Ed.) (2021). *AI for Everyone? Critical Perspectives.* London: University of Westminster Press.

Video:

- New Media and Political Communication, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6l5QGuHqOY&list=PLhXgCt5YFUGPGsNbkf74EC6HJI0A7rOFY.
- Bonney, V. How Social Media is Shaping Our Political Future, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Kd99IIWJUw.

Week 14 (15) – Participant Presentations and Final Examination

Participant-led presentations of the results of the individual research work, which serve as the course's summative assessment.

This session will also function as a reflective closing discussion. Together, we will revisit the course's central questions: Is media the backbone of democracy or an instrument of oppression? How should democratic societies address the tensions between freedom of communication and the risks of manipulation? Students will be invited to share how their perspectives have evolved and to identify the skills and insights they will carry into their future research, professional practice, or civic engagement.

Assessment and Grading Rubric

Seminar Participation (20%)
- Excellent (90–100%): Demonstrates consistent preparation, makes insightful contributions linking theory and practice, actively engages peers with questions.

- Good (75–89%): Prepared and participates regularly, offers relevant contributions but with limited depth or connection to readings.

- Satisfactory (60–74%): Participates occasionally, contributions are basic or descriptive, limited evidence of preparation.

- Poor (≤59%): Rarely participates or contributions lack relevance and preparation.

Case Study Analysis (30%) *(Optional/Adjustable)*
- Excellent (90–100%): Thorough analysis; demonstrates critical thinking, clear argumentation, and integration of theoretical concepts; original insights supported with evidence.

- Good (75–89%): Solid analysis; applies relevant theories with minor gaps in argumentation or evidence.

- Satisfactory (60–74%): Basic analysis; limited theoretical application; description outweighs evaluation.

- Poor (≤59%): Superficial or incomplete analysis; little to no theoretical engagement.

Reflection Paper (30%) *(Optional/Adjustable)*
- Excellent (90–100%): Sophisticated synthesis of course content and personal insights; well-structured, critical, and original.

- Good (75–89%): Clear and coherent reflection with some critical insights; minor weaknesses in depth or originality.

- Satisfactory (60–74%): Basic summary of course content; little personal engagement or critical depth.

- Poor (≤59%): Minimal effort, unclear writing, or no meaningful reflection.

Final Presentation (40%) (Exam Equivalent)
- Excellent (90–100%): Clear, structured, and original; demonstrates mastery of readings, critical engagement with theory, and strong visual/oral delivery. Engages audience in discussion.

- Good (75–89%): Well-organized presentation; applies course material effectively but with less originality or depth. Delivery competent but may lack engagement.

- Satisfactory (60–74%): Basic coverage of topic; limited theoretical framing; delivery uneven or unengaging.

- Poor (≤59%): Disorganized, descriptive rather than analytical, or lacking integration with course content.