

## **Exam MEVIT 4320 2022**

*Professor Rune Karlsen*

- The exam consists of two (2) questions.
- Each question must be answered in order for you to have fulfilled the requirements of the exam.
- Each question make up one half of the final grade.

### **Teaching**

The course is based on seven lectures and seven seminars. The lectures had the following topics:

1. History of the field and key concepts
2. News and political knowledge
3. Social media, selective exposure, polarization, and echo chambers
4. Public agenda-setting
5. Populist communication
6. Political communication and trust
7. Summing up: political communication today

The seminars have been structured to address each of these topics through a focus on only one scientific article for each seminar. The students were divided into four group – each groups assigned one of four parts of the article to dissect and discuss 1) Research question 2) theory, earlier research, 3) research design 4) results and discussion. The aim of the strategy was to make the students more familiar with the structure of articles, and how even very good articles have shortcomings worth discussing. In addition, one seminar was dedicated to answering exam questions.

### **Syllabus**

#### **Key concepts**

Iyengar, Shanto (2017) A typology of media effects. I Kate Kenski & Kathleen Hall Jamieson (red.) The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

van Aelst, Peter, Jesper Strömbäck, Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Claes de Vreese, Jörg Matthes, David Hopmann, Susana Salgado, Nicolas Hubé, Agnieszka Stepińska, Stylianos Papathanassopoulos, Rosa Berganza, Guido Legnante, Carsten Reinemann, Tamir Sheafer, and James Stanyer (2017) Political Communication in a High-Choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy? *Annals of the International Communication Association* 1(1): 3–27.

#### **Political Knowledge**

Aalberg, Toril & James Curran (2012) *How media inform democracy*. London: Routledge. Chapters 1-4, 6-7, 12

Haugsgjerd, Atle, Stine Hesstvedt & Rune Karlsen (2021) Increased Media Choice and Political Knowledge Gaps. A Comparative Longitudinal Study of 18 Established Democracies. *Political Communication*.

Prior, Marcus (2005) News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps In Political Knowledge and Turnout. *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 577–92.

Zaller, John (2002) New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen, *Political Communication*, 20:2, 109-130

### **Social media, communication flow, and opinion processes**

Fletcher, Richard & Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2017) Are News Audiences Increasingly Fragmented? A Cross-National Comparative Analysis of Cross-Platform News Audience Fragmentation and Duplication. *Journal of Communication*. 67(4): 476-498.

Karlsen, Rune (2015) Followers Are Opinion Leaders: The Role of People in the Flow of Political Communication on and Beyond Social Networking Sites. *European Journal of Communication* 30:301–18.

Karlsen, Rune, Kari Steen-Johnsen, Dag Wollebæk & Bernard Enjolras (2017) Echo Chamber and Trench Warfare Dynamics in Online Debates. *European Journal of Communication*. 32(3) 257- 273.

Stroud, Natalie Jomini (2017) Selective Exposure Theories. In Kate Kenski & Kathleen Hall Jamieson (red.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Taber Charles S & Martin Lodge (2006) Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 755–769.

Thorson, Kjerstin ; Cotter, Kelley ; Medeiros, Mel ; Pak, Chankyung (2021) Algorithmic inference, political interest, and exposure to news and politics on Facebook. *Information, communication & society*. 24(2):183-200.

### **Political communication and trust**

Van Aelst, Peter (2017) Media Malaise and the Decline of Legitimacy. In Carolien van Ham, Jacques Thomassen, Kees Aarts, Rudy Andeweg (eds.) *Myth and Reality of the Legitimacy Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strömback, Jesper, Monika Djerf-Pierre & Adam Shehata (2016) A Question of Time? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Relationship between News Media Consumption and Political Trust. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21(1) 88-110.

Karlsen, Rune & Aalberg, Toril (2021) Social Media and Trust in News: An Experimental Study of the Effect of Facebook on News Story Credibility. *Digital Journalism*.

### **Populist communication**

Mudde Cas (2004) The populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition* 39(4), 542–563.

Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(3), 319– 345.

De Vreese, Claes, Frank Esser, Toril Aalberg, Carsten Reinemann & James Staney (2018) Populism as an Expression of Political Communication Content and Style: A New Perspective. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 23(4) 423-438.

Engesser, Sven, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser and Florin Büchel (2017) Populism and social media: how politicians spread a fragmented ideology. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(8):1109-1126.

### **Agenda-setting**

Broersma, M., & T. Graham, (2016) Tipping the Balance of Power Social Media and the Transformation of Political Journalism. I Axel Bruns, Eli Skogerbø, Christian Christensen, Anders Olof Larsson, Gunn Enli (eds.) *The Routledge companion to social media and politics*. London: Routledge.

Harder, R. A., J. Sevenans, J., & P. V. Aelst, (2017). Intermedia Agenda Setting in the Social Media Age: How Traditional Players Dominate the News Agenda in Election Times. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. 22(3), 275–293.

Walgrave, Stefaan & Peter Van Aelst (2006) The Contingency of the Mass Media's Political Agenda Setting Power: Toward a Preliminary Theory. *Journal of Communication*. 56 (1) 88–109.

Strömbäck, Jesper., & Lars Nord, (2006) Do Politicians Lead the Tango? A Study of the Relationship between Swedish Journalists and their Political Sources in the Context of Election Campaigns. *European Journal of Communication*. 21 (2): 147– 164.

### **Disinformation and misinformation**

Allcott, Hunt ; Gentzkow, Matthew ; Yu, Chuan (2019) Trends in the diffusion of misinformation on social media. *Research & politics* 6(2)

Osmundsen, M ; Bor, A.; Vahlstrup, P. B.; Bechmann, A.; Petersen, M B (2021) Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter. *The American political science review*. 115(3):999-1015.

## **General requirements for the exam**

### Question 1

Discuss if opinion leaders are important in keeping people informed about politics and societal affairs today. Substantiate your arguments based on the literature.

The most relevant literature is Karlsen (2015)

A typical paper would start with describing the concept of opinion leaders and their role in the “two step flow” of communication: ideas flow from mass media to opinion leaders, and from them to a wider population. Opinion leaders are active citizens, consume plenty of media content, have large social networks, found across social groups (influence people in the same socioeconomic layer of society). Most importantly, they pass on, interpret and contextualize messages. Developments in the media system has potentially increased their importance: they are active nodes in networks, and on social media they are ingrained as nodes in the network that defines the “medium”. Hence, they are essential for the flow of messages on social media. The natural second step is to discuss to what extent this development and their role is essential for keeping people informed. Here the candidates can rely on several pieces on the syllabus discussing knowledge and the cognitive effects of media use. For example that high choice makes can increase selective exposure levels and necessitate that people are exposed on social media. The most important thing is that the argument is coherent and makes sense based on the literature. Good papers will also discuss how opinion leaders can contribute to misinformation through their part in social media curation through less precise information, or even the spread of disinformation.

For opinion leaders the most relevant piece on the syllabus is

Karlsen, Rune (2015) Followers Are Opinion Leaders: The Role of People in the Flow of Political Communication on and Beyond Social Networking Sites. *European Journal of Communication* 30:301–18.

Also relevant

Thorson, Kjerstin ; Cotter, Kelley ; Medeiros, Mel ; Pak, Chankyung (2021) Algorithmic inference, political interest, and exposure to news and politics on Facebook. *Information, communication & society*. 24(2):183-200.

Allcott, Hunt ; Gentzkow, Matthew ; Yu, Chuan (2019) Trends in the diffusion of misinformation on social media. *Research & politics* 6(2)

Haugsgjerd, Atle, Stine Hesstvedt & Rune Karlsen (2021) Increased Media Choice and Political Knowledge Gaps. A Comparative Longitudinal Study of 18 Established Democracies. *Political Communication*.

+ other knowledge pieces

Stroud, Natalie Jomini (2017) Selective Exposure Theories. In Kate Kenski & Kathleen Hall Jamieson (red.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Osmundsen, M ; Bor, A.; Vahlstrup, P. B.; Bechmann, A.; Petersen, M B (2021) Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter. *The American political science review*. 115(3):999-1015.

## Question 2:

Both Prior (2005) and Haugsgjerd et al. (2021) aim to study if increasing media choice influence political knowledge gaps in society. Describe the results, and discuss to what extent and why the two studies find similar or dissimilar results.

A typical paper will start with a short intro about high choice and more people potentially avoiding news and knowledge gaps increasing. Then it will describe the results of the two studies. In short: Prior finds support for high choice increasing knowledge gaps, as the knowledge gap between the politically interested (high news preference) and the politically less interested is greater in a high choice environment than a low choice environment (where there is no gap). Haugsgjerd et al. (2021), on the other hand, find no increasing knowledge gaps over time (from the 90s until 2015), when choice has increased considerably. Hence, the results are somewhat conflicting. In discussing why, the students can take several approaches. A natural starting point is the different research designs. Prior studies one country (US) with a short time span. Hence, the difference between high and low choice is between people with or without access to cable and the internet. Haugsgjerd et al. study several countries over time. Prior has more comprehensive knowledge measures, Haugsgjerd et al. rely on left-right placement (and general knowledge items in the appendix).

The two most important texts are

Prior, Marcus (2005) News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps In Political Knowledge and Turnout. *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 577–92.

Haugsgjerd, Atle, Stine Hesstvedt & Rune Karlsen (2021) Increased Media Choice and Political Knowledge Gaps. A Comparative Longitudinal Study of 18 Established Democracies. *Political Communication*.