MEVIT4320, Fall 2023

Exam and grading guidelines

Instructors: Rune Karlsen, Jessica Yarin Robinson

Guidelines

- The exam consists of two questions.
- Both questions must be answered to fulfill the requirements of the exam.
- Each question makes up 50% 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. Misinformation and fake news
4. Social media, selective exposure, polarization, and echo chambers
5. Political communication and trust
6. Populist communication
7. Agenda setting in a digital news environment

The seminars have been structured to address each of these topics through a focus on only one academic article for each seminar. The students were divided into groups – each groups dissect and discuss the article based on four aspects 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 the type of exam questions used in the course.

See the course website for full syllabus:

https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/imk/MEVIT4320/h23/index.html

Question 1

First, using literature from the pensum, identify some of the strategies proposed for counteracting misinformation online. Then, discuss potential reasons why an approach focusing on the dissemination of factual information may or may not be effective in changing people's opinions and beliefs.

This question invites students to critically discuss the concept of misinformation and "fake news" in the context of digital platforms. Good essays will place the issue in this context. Students should then identify various strategies that have been floated, such as fact checks,

content warnings, and content moderation. In explaining the limitations of these approaches, students can draw in concepts such as motivated reasoning, mental maps, and confirmation/disconfirmation bias. The likely references for the essay are those from the week on misinformation:

Weeks BE, Gil de Zúñiga H. What's Next? Six Observations for the Future of Political Misinformation Research. Kim JN, Gil de Zúñiga H, red. The American behavioral scientist (Beverly Hills). 2021;65(2):277–289.

Walter N, Cohen J, Holbert RL, Morag Y. Fact-Checking: A Meta-Analysis of What Works and for Whom. Political communication. 2020;37(3):350–375.

Clayton K, Blair S, Busam JA, mfl. Real Solutions for Fake News? Measuring the Effectiveness of General Warnings and Fact-Check Tags in Reducing Belief in False Stories on Social Media. Political behavior. 2020;42(4):1073–1095.

Tandoc EC, Lim ZW, Ling R. Defining «Fake News»: A typology of scholarly definitions. Digital journalism.

Students may also use Jerit and Zhao (2020), which was referenced in two lectures on the topic of misinformation.

Very good essays will demonstrate more original thinking, and draw in other sources from the pensum (e.g. Karlsen et al., 2017). They will also make more connections with other issues, such as political trust, populism, and high-choice media environments.

Excellent essays, in addition to the features mentioned above, will make a well-reasoned original argument about possible root causes and solutions, and may also critique the underlying premise of the "crisis of fake news." These essays will not just summarize the literature, but synthesize the content and make sophisticated connections between concepts.

Question 2

First, what does it mean for the news media to have "agenda setting power"? Second, discuss what Harder et al.'s findings suggest about how social media could change such power dynamics.

This question invites students to discuss agenda setting, and how the theory has been challenged by changing conditions associated with the emergence of digital networks. Good essays will discuss this situation, before going on to critically discuss Harder et al.'s research. The Harder paper examines offline sources, online outlets, and Twitter, and is rich with findings relevant to the exam. Among these findings are that media outlets' publication frequency is an important factor in being first to a story, yet television and newspapers still appear to have more impact. The authors suggest that different mediums play different roles. Moreover, they find that journalists and news outlets are among the most influential Twitter actors.

As in Question 1, very good essays will demonstrate more original thinking, and draw in other sources from the pensum. They will also critically discuss Harder et al.'s findings, identifying limitations of the study and other potential explanations.

Excellent essays will additionally make a well-reasoned original argument about social media and agenda setting. These essays will not just summarize the literature, but synthesize the content and make sophisticated connections between concepts.