Media Manipulation and Disinformation Campaigns

Fall 2019
Location: Wexner 332

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

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Wednesdays 4:15PM – 7:00PM
Office Hours: to be announced

COURSE SUMMARY:

The internet is a tool, a tactic, and a territory, an accumulation of technologies that challenge relations of power globally. Studying the new vulnerabilities of networked media is fundamental to the future of healthy democracies. Broadly, this course addresses how social movements, political parties, governments, corporations, and other networked groups engage in active efforts to shape media narratives and disrupt social institutions. Recent research from science and technology scholars addresses the ways in which technology and media are used to produce social change, both positive and negative. Coordinated efforts to create misleading news coverage and falsely influence public perception online have become standard components of this new information landscape. These media manipulation and disinformation campaigns are organized for a variety of purposes, from influencing political elections to mainstreaming extremist worldviews. In this course, we will focus on the negative impacts of social change by analyzing current media manipulation tactics and techniques, and the detrimental effects disinformation campaigns have on political communication and civil society.

COURSE TOPICS INCLUDE:

- What is a manipulation campaign?
- When is manipulation likely to happen?
- How are manipulation campaigns coordinated online and off?
- What are the tactics of media manipulators?
    - Planting and/or amplifying misinformation and disinformation using humans digital tools (bots);
    - Targeting journalists or public figures for social engineering (psychological manipulation);
    - Gaming trending and ranking algorithms,
    - Coordinating action across multiple platforms to push topics, keywords, or questions into the public conversation
- What types of content and political issues are most likely to be manipulated?
- How should society fight against media manipulation and disinformation campaigns?

COURSE OUTLINE:

September 11	**Introduction to Media Manipulation and Disinformation**
September 18	**Information Crisis** ● Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. "The Spread of True and False News Online." *Science* 359, no. 6380 (March 9, 2018): 1146–51. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559. ● Wardle, Claire. "Fake News. It's Complicated." *First Draft News*, February 16, 2017. ● Silverman, Craig. "I Helped Popularize The Term 'Fake News' And Now I Cringe Whenever I Hear It." BuzzFeed News. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/i-helped-popularize-the-term-fake-news-and-now-i-cringe. ● Benkler, Yochai, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts. 2018. *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*. Oxford University Press. Introduction Chapter. ● CASE STUDY: "How Teens In The Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters With Fake News." BuzzFeed News. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo.
September 25	**Infrastructure Studies** ***Field Trip to JFK Jr. Forum 6PM event*** ● Star, Susan Leigh. "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 3 (November 1, 1999): 377–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/00027649921955326. ● Winner, Langdon. 1980. "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus* 109 (1): 121–36. https://www.cc.gatech.edu/~beki/cs4001/Winner.pdf ● Winner, Langdon. "How Technology Reweaves the Fabric of Society." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 4, 1993. https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Technology-Reweaves-the/73446. ● CASE STUDY: Donovan, Joan. "Toward a Militant Ethnography of Infrastructure: Cybercartographies of Order, Scale, and Scope across the Occupy Movement." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 48, no. 4 (August 1, 2019): 482–509. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241618792311.

October 2	**Political Communication** ● Acker, Amelia, and Brian Beaton. 2017. "How Do You Turn a Mobile Device into a Political Tool?" In Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/41436. ● Baraniuk, Chris. "Whatever Happened to the Phone Phreaks?" The Atlantic, 2013. http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/02/whatever-happened-to-the-phone-phreaks/273332/. ● Coleman, Gabriella. "From Internet Farming to Weapons of the Geek." *Current Anthropology* 58, no. S15 (November 22, 2016): S91–102. https://doi.org/10.1086/688697. ● Hobbs, R. (2013). The blurring of art, journalism and advocacy: Confronting 21st century propaganda in a world of online journalism. I/S: *A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society* 8(3), 625 – 638. https://kb.osu.edu/bitstream/handle/1811/73125/ISJLP_V8N3_625.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y ● CASE STUDY: Howard, Philip N., and Bence Kollanyi. "Bots, #Strongerin, and #Brexit: Computational Propaganda During the UK-EU Referendum." SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, June 20, 2016. https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2798311
October 9	**Social Movement Communication** **Due: Assignment 1 - Case Selection & Annotated Bibliography** ● Eagleton-Pierce, Matthew. 2001. "The Internet and the Seattle WTO Protests." *Peace Review* 13 (3): 331–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800120079027. ● McAdam, Doug. "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency." *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (1983): 735–54. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095322. ● Ganz, Marshall. "Why Stories Matter." Sojourners, March 1, 2009. https://sojo.net/magazine/march-2009/why-stories-matter. ● Donovan, Joan. "After the #Keyword: Eliciting, Sustaining, and Coordinating Participation Across the Occupy Movement." *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2018). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117750720. ● CASE STUDY: Monterde Mateo, Arnau, and John Postill. "Mobile Ensembles: The Uses of Mobile Phones for Social Protest by Spanish Indignados." In *The Routledge Companion to Mobile Media*. Routledge, 2014. http://openaccess.uoc.edu/webapps/o2/handle/10609/39161.

October 16	**Methods for Investigation** ● Coleman, E. Gabriella. "Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010): 487–505. ● Acker, Amelia, and Joan Donovan. "Data Craft: A Theory/Methods Package for Critical Internet Studies." *Information, Communication & Society* 0, no. 0 (July 20, 2019): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1645194. ● Myles, David, Florence Millerand, and Chantal Benoit-Barné. "Solving Crimes Online: The Contribution of Citizens on the Reddit Bureau of Investigation." *Réseaux* No 197-198, no. 3 (July 6, 2016): 173–202. file:///Users/jod5680/Downloads/E_RES_197_0173.pdf ● CASE STUDY: Brabham, Daren. "The Boston Marathon Bombings, 4Chan's Think Tank, and a Modest Proposal for an Emergency Crowdsourced Investigation Platform." *Culture Digitally* (blog). http://culturedigitally.org/2013/04/boston-marathon-bombing-and-emergency-crowdsourced-investigation/.
October 23	**Trolling Cultures / Cultures of Trolls** ● Beran, Dale. "4chan: The Skeleton Key to the Rise of Trump." *Medium.com*, February 14, 2017. https://medium.com/@DaleBeran/4chan-the-skeleton-key-to-the-rise-of-trump-624e7cb798cb. ● Coleman, Gabriella. (2014). *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*. New York: Verso Books. Chapter 1: On Trolls, Tricksters, and the Lulz: https://ia802607.us.archive.org/4/items/HackerHoaxerWhistleblowerSpy_201411/Coleman_Gabriella_Hacker_Hoaxer_Whistleblower_Spy_The_Story_of_Anonymous.pdf ● Phillips, Whitney. "The House That Fox Built: Anonymous, Spectacle, and Cycles of Amplification." *Television & New Media* 14, no. 6 (November 1, 2013): 494–509. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476412452799. ● Phillips, Whitney, Jessica Beyer, and Gabriella Coleman. "Trolling Scholars Debunk the Idea That the Alt-Right's Shitposters Have Magic Powers." *Motherboard*, March 22, 2017. https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/trolling-scholars-debunk-the-idea-that-the-alt-rights-trolls-have-magic-powers. ● CASE STUDY: "The Black Feminists behind #YourSlipIsShowing, a Campaign against Twitter Trolls Masquerading as Women of Color with the Fake Hashtag #EndFathersDay." https://slate.com/technology/2019/04/black-feminists-alt-right-twitter-gamergate.html.

October 30	**Algorithmic Manipulation** **Due: Assignment 2 - Research Proposal** ● Caplan, Robyn, Lauren Hanson, Joan Donovan, and Jeanna Matthews. n.d. "Algorithmic Accountability: A Primer." *Data & Society* (blog). Accessed October 3, 2018. https://datasociety.net/output/algorithmic-accountability-a-primer/. ● Nadler, Anthony, Matthew Crain, and Joan Donovan. "Weaponizing the Digital Influence Machine." *Data & Society*, 2018. https://datasociety.net/output/weaponizing-the-digital-influence-machine/. ● Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. 1 edition. New York: NYU Press, 2018. (Chapter 2, Searching for Black Girls) ● Søe, Sille Obelitz. "Algorithmic Detection of Misinformation and Disinformation: Gricean Perspectives." *Journal of Documentation* 74, no. 2 (December 7, 2017): 309–32. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-05-2017-0075. ● CASE STUDY: Google Bombing Bar-Ilan, Judit. "Google Bombing from a Time Perspective." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (April 1, 2007): 910–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00356.x.
November 6	**Anatomy of a Manipulation Campaign** ● Donovan, Joan. Friedberg, Brian. "Source Hacking." Data & Society, 2019. https://datasociety.net/output/source-hacking-media-manipulation-in-practice/ ● Holiday, Ryan. *Trust Me, I'm Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator*. New York: Penguin, 2012. Chapter 2. ● Pomerantsev, P. 2019. *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*. New York, NY: Public Affairs. Chapter 1 *Cities of Trolls.* ● CASE STUDY: Philippines Troll Farm Ong, J. C., and J. V. A. Cabanes. "Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines." Monograph, February 9, 2018. http://newtontechfordev.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ARCHITECTS-OF-NETWORKED-DISINFORMATION-FULL-REPORT.pdf.

November 13	**Disinformation** ● Golovchenko, Yevgeniy, Mareike Hartmann, and Rebecca Adler-Nissen. "State, Media and Civil Society in the Information Warfare Over Ukraine: Citizen Curators of Digital Disinformation." International Affairs 94, no. 5 (September 2018): 975–994. https://doi.org/10.1093/ ia/iiy148 ● Kao, Jeff. "More than a Million Pro-Repeal Net Neutrality Comments were Likely Faked." Hackernoon, November 23, 2017. https://hackernoon.com/morethan-a-million-pro-repeal-net-neutrality-commentswere-likely-faked-e9f0e3ed36a6 ● Monaco, Nicholas J. "Computational Propaganda in Taiwan: Where Digital Democracy Meets Automated Autocracy" No. 2017.2. Project on Computational Propaganda Working Paper No. 2017.2, Oxford, UK, 2017. http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-Taiwan-2.pdf ● Starbird, Kate. 2017. "Examining the Alternative Media Ecosystem through the Production of Alternative Narratives of Mass Shooting Events on Twitter." In Eleventh International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media: 230–39. https://aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM17/paper/view/15603 ● CASE STUDY: Phillipine Drug War- Alba, Davey. "How Duterte Used Facebook To Fuel the Philippine Drug War." Buzzfeed News, September 4, 2018. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/daveyalba/facebook-philippines-dutertes-drug-war
November 20	**Social Engineering and Influence Operations** ● Kellner, Douglas. "Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle." *Razón y Palabra, ISSN 1605-4806, Nº. 39, 2004* 1 (January 1, 2005). https://doi.org/10.32855/fcapital.200501.004. ● López, Ian Haney. 2015. *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*. Reprint edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Preface and Chapter 2) ● Wiant, Fredel M. "Exploiting Factional Discourse: Wedge Issues in Contemporary American Political Campaigns." *Southern Communication Journal* 67, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 276–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940209373236. ● CASE STUDY: "Lessons to Be Learned from the ROF Florida Shooting Hoax." Southern Poverty Law Center. https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/02/20/lessons-be-learned-rof-florida-shooting-hoax.

November 27	**No Class 🦃 Thanksgiving Break 🦃**
December 4	**Memetic Warfare** ● Wall, Travis, and Teodor Mitew. "Swarm Networks and the Design Process of a Distributed Meme Warfare Campaign." *First Monday* 23, no. 5 (April 30, 2018). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i5.8290. ● Nissenbaum, Asaf, and Limor Shifman. 2017. "Internet Memes as Contested Cultural Capital: The Case of 4chan's /b/ Board." *New Media & Society* 19 (4): 483–501. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815609313. ● Zannettou, Savvas, Tristan Caulfield, Emiliano De Cristofaro, Michael Sirivianos, Gianluca Stringhini, and Jeremy Blackburn. "Disinformation Warfare: Understanding State-Sponsored Trolls on Twitter and Their Influence on the Web." *ArXiv:1801.09288 [Cs]*, January 28, 2018. http://arxiv.org/abs/1801.09288. ● CASE STUDY: Haddow, Douglas. "Meme Warfare: How the Power of Mass Replication Has Poisoned the US Election." *The Guardian*, November 4, 2016, sec. US news. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/political-memes-2016-election-hillary-clinton-donald-trump.
December 11	**FINALS WEEK ⚡** **Due: Assignment 3 - Final Research Paper**

COURSE MATERIALS & TOOLS:

Text:
(optional) Bazzell, Michael. *Open Source Intelligence Techniques: Resources for Searching and Analyzing Online Information*. 5th ed. USA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.

Tools:

- Make a Meme (templates, tools)
- Know Your Meme (meme library)
- Meme Generator (templates)

GRADING:

- Reading reflection: 10%
- Assignment 1: Case Selection & Annotated Bibliography: 10%
- Assignment 2: Research Proposal: 30%
- Assignment 3: Final Research Paper: 30%
- Class participation: 20%*

(*includes preparation, discussion, and class presentations)

COURSE DELIVERABLES:

>> READING REFLECTIONS

The **reading reflection** is due on the day you are scheduled to present in class and lead class discussion. It should be one page in length (single spaced, times new roman 12point font), with 5 bullet points outlining the main argument, and then 2 paragraphs reflecting on how it ties into the theme of the week, prior readings, and/or current events. You must include 2-5 questions for discussion. You must print out enough copies for your classmates and bring them to class on the day you are presenting.

>> RESEARCH PAPER

1. **October 9, 2019: Case Selection & Annotated Bibliography**
    a. You will select a case study of media manipulation and submit 3-5 well-constructed research questions along with an annotated bibliography referencing primary and secondary sources. Questions must be broadly related to some aspect of disinformation and media manipulation campaigns, answerable with data you can access, and make an original contribution to the field. You will have an opportunity to narrow and revise your research question in the research prospectus.

2. **October 30, 2019: Research Proposal**
    a. Introduce your general topic area and research question. Remember to conceptualize your variables and concepts. (1-3 paragraphs)
    b. Provide a short literature review on your topic and the major findings of previous research. The key is to show that you are proposing to answer a question that has not been addressed by scholars to date. Are you going to extend the theory of a researcher to a new case? Are you going to show how your case does not confirm to other theories? Will you develop your own theory from a case that has yet to be studied? You may want to use the "Web of Science" database to identify what scholars or articles are most cited in that field. (2-3 paragraphs)
    c. Describe your research method and how you plan to gather and analyze data. In this section, illustrate how the method helps you identify important aspects of your object of study and how your analysis will answer your research question. (2-4 paragraphs)
    d. Your conclusion should contain a write up of your expectations and how your project will advance knowledge in your area of study. (1-2 paragraphs)
    e. Bibliography

3. **December 11, 2019: FINAL Research Paper**
    a. Introduce your general topic area and research question. Remember to conceptualize your variables and concepts. (3-4 paragraphs)
    b. Provide a literature review on your topic and the major findings of previous research. The key is to show that you are proposing to answer a question that either has never been answered or is under-researched. Are you going to extend the theory of a researcher to a new case? Are you going to show how your case does not confirm to

other theories? Will you develop your own theory from a case that has yet to be studied? (4-6 paragraphs)

c. Describe your research method and how you plan to gather and analyze data. In this section, illustrate how the method helps you identify important aspects of your object of study and how you will answer your research question. Describe the data used in your analysis (2-4 paragraphs)
d. Write up your analysis by drawing support for the academic literature from your data. If your data contradicts the academic literature, provide examples. (4-6 paragraphs)
e. Your conclusion should contain a write up of your expectations and how your project will advance knowledge in your area of study. (1-2 paragraphs)
f. Bibliography

Your research question will be approved prior to undertaking the research project. You may reuse edited portions of the research proposal for the final paper. Final research papers will be 10-15 pages in length and graded for both style and content, with grading emphasis on the clarity of explanation, ability to synthesize course materials with independent research, and originality.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

You are a member of an academic community at one of the world's leading research universities. Universities like Harvard Kennedy School create knowledge that has a lasting impact in the world of ideas and on the lives of others; such knowledge can come from an undergraduate paper as well as the lab of an internationally known professor. One of the most important values of an academic community is the balance between the free flow of ideas and the respect for the intellectual property of others. Researchers don't use one another's research without permission; scholars and students always use proper citations in papers; professors may not circulate or publish student papers without the writer's permission; and students may not circulate or post materials (handouts, exams, syllabi--any class materials) from their classes without the written permission of the instructor.

Any test, paper or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor. In all of your assignments, including your homework or drafts of papers, you may use words or ideas written by other individuals in publications, web sites, or other sources, but only with proper attribution. If you are not clear about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or examination, be sure to seek clarification from your instructor or GSI beforehand.

Finally, you should keep in mind that as a member of the campus community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors and will be evaluated on your own merits. The consequences of cheating and academic dishonesty—including a formal discipline file, possible loss of future internship, scholarship, or employment opportunities, and denial of admission to graduate school—are simply not worth it

Note about syllabus modification:

The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics or the need for additional attention to a class theme. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of the agenda. I will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations, but assume that the syllabus as written accurately reflects what you can expect week-to-week.