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**POLSC-AD 160J: Social Media and Political Participation:  
January Term, 2016, NYU-New York  
Credit Hours: 4  
Prerequisites: None  
Political Theory and Institutions Track of Political Science Major**

In this course we examine the effect of social media on political participation. Social media is defined as any sort of internet-based two-way communication, often referred to as Web 2.0. The most well-known examples of social media are Facebook and Twitter, but includes a host of other platforms including Instagram, Snapchat, Google+, Weibo, YouTube, Tumblr, etc. Political participation is defined any activity taken by ordinary citizens (i.e., not “elite” political actors such as politicians) in the political realm. These action range from *low-cost* (e.g., signing a petition in a democracy on the Internet) to *medium-cost* (e.g. voting in an election) to *high-cost* (e.g., participating in a protest where there is significant threat to life or liberty). In this course, we will investigate the affect of social media on political participation at both the macro – or societal - level (e.g., does a higher proportion of people using Twitter in a country make protest more likely?) and at micro – or individual – level (does using Facebook make an individual more likely to vote in an election?). Students will work throughout the course towards a final project involving analysis of social media usage by a member of the United States congress – with data provided by the NYU Social Media and Political Participation ([smapp.nyu.edu](http://smapp.nyu.edu)) laboratory -- and will be taught how to use the programming tools necessary to analyze social media data themselves as part of preparing for this final project. We will also consider how that fact that social media are produced by commercial entities entails for both studies of the effects of social media and studies using social media data to study political participation.

### **Requirements**

The course meets on the afternoon of Monday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, and in separate morning and afternoon sessions from Tuesday January 5<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday, January 19<sup>th</sup>. All morning sessions are from 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM, and most afternoon sessions are from 2:00 – 4:00 PM (although see the schedule below for details and exceptions). There is a full day field trip on Wednesday, January 20<sup>th</sup> to Washington DC, a full day of open-lab on Thursday, January 21<sup>st</sup> to prepare your final assignment and presentation, and we will meet straight through on Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> from 10:00 AM – 2:30 PM for student presentations.

Grading is based on class participation and response papers (20%) an in-class mid-term (20%), lab assessments (10%), two writing assignments related to an original research project that each student will conduct during the second half of the course (20% each) and a 15 minute presentation of the original research project to the class on the final day (10%).

*Class Participation, Presentations, and Response Papers:* The morning sessions of this course will feature a lecture and discussion format. Attendance at all sessions is mandatory, and students will be assessed on the degree to which they participate. Each student will also need to write two (2) response papers of approximately 2 pages on one reading during the first half (pre-midterm) of the course and one reading during the second half (post-midterm) of the course. Students will sign up

for response papers at the first class, and further instructions on how to write a response paper will be given at that time. Participation and response papers will be worth 20% of the grade. All response papers must be submitted to Professor Tucker no later than 9:00 PM the night before class. Response papers should be submitted through NYU Classes, although please send me an email as well to tell me the paper has been uploaded. Similarly, your slides for your final presentation should be uploaded to NYU Classes the night before your presentation.

*Lab Assessment:* This course contains six two hour lab sessions in the afternoons to teach students how to analyze social media data. Participation in these lab sessions is mandatory, and some of the labs will contain assessments to make sure students understand what they have learned. Participation and assessment in lab sessions will be worth 10% of the grade.

*In Class Mid-Term:* The morning sessions of the course will be divided in two parts: five lectures on political participation, and then four seminars on social media. At the end of the first section, students will have an in-class mid-term on the materials covered in the political participation part of the course. This mid-term will be worth 20% of the grade, and there will be no additional readings or lectures that morning.

*Writing Assignments:* Each student will be responsible for two writing assignments based on original research on the social media usage of a United States Member of Congress (parliament). The first assignment will be due Monday, January 18<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 PM, and will be based on reading the tweets and Facebook posts of the assigned member of congress. The second assignment will be due on Thursday, January 21<sup>st</sup> at 5:00 PM and will be based on quantitative analysis of the tweets and Facebook posts of the assigned member of congress using tools taught in the lab sessions and data from the NYU Social Media and Political Participation (SMaPP) lab, as well as information learned from interviewing someone from the Member of Congress's staff with responsibility for social media. Each assignment will be approximately 5-7 pages double spaced (12 point Times New Roman Font, 1 inch margins) plus figures and tables, and will each be worth 20% of the grade.

*Research Presentation:* Each student will give a 15 minute presentation of their research to the class on the last day of the course (Friday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> ) using slides (e.g., Powerpoint, Keynote, etc.). Further instruction about the presentation will be made available during class, but it will draw upon both writing assignments as well as the interviews conducted in Washington DC. The presentation will be worth 10% of the student's grade. This will be the culmination of your research project for the class, and will be your chance to share what you have learned with your classmates.

*Field Trips:* This course features two field trips. On Monday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, we will travel to the Facebook offices in New York City immediately after the morning class to meet with representatives of Facebook and Instagram in order to better understand the commercial models underlying the companies that produce social media, as well how they make their data publically available and/or any models for collaboration in the analysis of this data with others. We will also have a one-day trip to Washington DC on January 20<sup>th</sup> so that the students can interview members of Congress and/or their staff members regarding the social media strategy of the office. Students are not graded on these trips, but attendance is mandatory and any participation (such as question and answer sessions during presentations at the companies) will count towards the 20% of the participation grade. Students who fail to attend these field trips will have their overall grade for the course reduced.

## Learning Outcomes

Students in this course will learn about (a) theories and past research on political behavior, including elections and voting, partisanship, turnout, and protest; (b) theories and past research on social media, including users of social media, sentiment analysis, the use of social media by politicians and elites, political polarization of social media users, and the use of social media in protest; (c) how to download their own social media datasets; (d) how to analyze social media data using the programming language “R”; and (e) how to prepare a professional presentation analyzing social media data. These skills should prove valuable in preparing students for (i) further academic study in political science, political communication, or media studies; (ii) conducting their own research on a wide range of topics using social media data; and (iii) internship and job opportunities with social media firms, politicians and political consultants, and data scientist positions at a myriad of different companies.

## Teaching Methodologies

Students will be exposed to a variety of teaching methodologies, including traditional lectures, seminar-based discussions, field-trips to meet with practitioners working for social media companies, interactive methodological tutorials to learn how to collect and analyze social media data, problem sets to reinforce understanding of these new methodological tools, training and field-work interviewing politicians and/or their staff members, oral presentation of original research to the class, and written presentation of original research in short paper formats.

## Books

The following books are required for this course and have been ordered for you:

Chang, Winston. 2013. [\*The R-Graphics Cookbook\*](#)

Ackland, Robert. 2013. [\*Web Social Science\*](#)

Howard, Philip and Muzammil M. Hussain. 2013 [\*Democracy's Fourth Wave?\*](#)

Anduzia, Eva et. al, 2012. [\*Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide\*](#)

## TA and Office Hours

The laboratory sessions will be run by Drew Dimmery ([drewd@nyu.edu](mailto:drewd@nyu.edu)), a graduate student associate of the SMaPP laboratory. Drew will hold two hours of “virtual office hours” per day, during which he will be available by internet chat (to be determined – probably Google Hangout but perhaps something through NYU-Classes) to provide assistance with materials learned in the lab or in preparing for your final project; you can of course also arrange to meet with him in person.

Professor Tucker will be in his office (Room 430 in 19 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street) from 4:00 – 5:00 after every lab. He is also available by appointment.

## Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

NOTE: All AM sessions meet from 10:00 - 12:00 in the Saadiyat Room at 19 Washington Square North. The afternoon sessions with lab instruction will take place from 2:00 – 4:00 PM in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor computer lab at 19 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street (Politics Department). Non-lab afternoon meetings will take place in the Saadiyat Room at 19 Washington Square North, although see schedule below for exceptions and details.

### Day 1: Monday, January 4:

AM: NO MEETING – NYU-NY Orientation

PM: (Saadiyat Room) *Course Introduction: What is Political Behavior? What are social media? What are the requirements for this course?*

### Day 2: Tuesday, January 5

AM: *Partisanship and Party Identification*

Readings:

Dalton 2014, Chapter 9 “Partisanship and Voting”, p.183-205

Brader, Ted, Joshua Tucker, and Dominik Duell. 2013. “Which Parties Can Lead Opinion? Experimental Evidence on Partisan Cue Taking in Multiparty Democracies”, *Comparative Political Studies*. 46: 1485-1517.

PM: *Lab #1: Introduction to R*

### Day 3: Wednesday, January 6

AM: *Elections and Voting I: Sociological and Rational Approaches*

Readings:

Dalton, 2014, Chapter 8 “The Social Bases of Party Support”, p.155-182

George Rabinowitz and Stuart Elaine Macdonald. 1989. “A Directional Theory of Issue Voting.” *American Political Science Review* 83:93-121.

Recommended:

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley., Chapter 12, “Membership in Social Groupings”, p.295-332

Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*.

PM: *Lab #2: Intro to Statistical Analysis Using R*

#### **Day 4: Thursday, January 7**

AM: *Elections and Voting II: Economic Voting and Strategic Voting*

Readings:

Powell, G. Bingham and Guy D. Whitten (1993). "A Cross-National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(2): 391-414.

Cox, Gary W., (1997) *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*, Chapters 2 & 4 (p.13-36, 69-98)

Recommended Readings:

Tucker, Joshua A. 2006. *Regional Economic Voting: Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, 1990-99*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, Christopher J. 2007. "**THE END OF ECONOMIC VOTING?** Contingency Dilemmas and the Limits of Democratic Accountability", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10:271-96

PM: (Tentative): Guest presentation on Data Analytics and the Democratic National Committee (times TBA)

#### **Day 5: Friday, January 8**

AM: *Turnout*

Readings: Morton, Rebecca B. 2006. *Analyzing elections*. 1st ed. New York: Norton., ch.2 "Understanding Turnout," p.19-61.

PM Lab #3: Introduction to Twitter and the Twitter API

Lab Assignment: Tweet Coding over the weekend

#### **Day 6: Monday, January 11**

AM: *Protest*

Readings:

Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics*, 5(3): 537-553.

Kuran, Timur. 1991. "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989." *World Politics*. 44(1): 7-48.

PM: Field Trip to Facebook/Instagram. IMPORTANT: Will depart immediately after class and will include lunch.

## **Day 7: Tuesday, January 12**

AM: IN CLASS MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Readings: None

PM: Lab #4: Introduction to Facebook Public Pages, Facebook API, and SMaPP Facebook scraping tool.

Assignment in Lab: Downloading all data from your politician's FB page and storing data in appropriate database

## **Day 8: Wednesday, January 13**

AM: *What is Social Media, and Who is Using it?*

Readings: Ackland, *Web Social Science*, Preface and Chapter 1 (p.xiii-18).

Anduzia et al., *Digital Media*. Chapters 1, 2, 4,

Barberá, Pablo, and Gonzalo Rivero. "Understanding the political representativeness of Twitter users" *Social Science Computer Review*, 2015, 33 (6), 712-729.

Social Media Update 2014: Pew Research Center

*Additional (non-required) readings*

Mislove, A., Lehmann, S., Ahn, Y., Onnela, J., and Rosenquist, J. (2011). Understanding the demographics of twitter users. In *Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*.

Kaplan, A. and Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! the challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business horizons*, 53(1):59-68.

Cha, Meeyong et al. "Measuring User Influence in Twitter: The Million Follower Fallacy". *Proceedings of the Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*

Code, Jillianne R. and Nick Zap. 2009. "Chapter VII: Social Identities, Group Formation, and the Analysis of Online Communities"

Zhang, Shaoke et. Al. 2010. "Social Identity in Facebook Community Life". *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking*. 2(4): 66-78.

PM: 2:00 – 4:00: Move: *The Square* (Saadiyat Room)

## **Day 9: Thursday, January 14**

AM: *The Use of Social Media by Politicians and Political Elites*

Readings:

Ackland, *Web Social Science*, Chapter 8

Kreiss, Daniel, 2014. Seizing the moment: The presidential campaigns' use of Twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle. *New Media and Society*. p.1-18.

Vaccari, C. and Nielsen, R. (2012). What drives politicians' online popularity? an analysis of the 2010 us midterm elections. Paper presented at the 2012 MPSA Conference.

Cormack, Lindsey. "Gender and Vote Revelation Strategy in Congress" (Manuscript)

Recommended:

Barberá et al. 2015. *Is There Anybody Out There? The Effects of Legislators' Communication with their Constituents*. Manuscript in progress.

Farrell, Henry. 2012. "The Consequences of Internet Use for Politics". *Annual Review of Political Science*.

PM: 2:00 PM-4:00 PM: Training session on interviewing your member of congress (Saadiyat Room)

**Thursday NIGHT: DINNER AT PROFESSOR TUCKER'S APARTMENT: 6:30 PM**

## **Day 10: Friday, January 15**

AM: *Protest and Social Media*

Guest Lecturer/Presenter: Megan Metzger, NYU SMaPP lab.

Readings:

Howard and Hussain. 2013. *Democracy's Fourth Wave*. All.

Tucker, Joshua A., Jonathan Nagler, Megan Metzger, Duncan Penfold-Brown, and Richard Bonneau, 2016. "Big Data, Social Media, and Protest: Foundations for a Research Agenda", in Alvarez, Michael, ed., *Data Analytics in Social Science, Government, and Industry*, Cambridge University Press.

Pablo Barberá, Ning Wang, Richard Bonneau, John T. Jost, Jonathan Nagler, Joshua A. Tucker, and Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon 2015, "The Critical Periphery in the Growth of Social Protests", with, *PLOS One*, DOI:[10.1371/journal.pone.0143611](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0143611).

PM: Lab #5: Analyzing Facebook Public Page Data I: General Examples (tentative)

## **Monday, January 18**

### **NO CLASS BECAUSE OF US HOLIDAY**

Assignment #1 Due at 5:00 PM through NYU Classes

## **Day 11: Tuesday January 19**

AM: *Online and Offline Political Participation*

Guest Lecturer/Presenter: Alexandra Seigel, NYU SMaPP lab.

Boulianne, Shelly, 2015. "Social media use and participation: a metaanalysis of current research" *Information, Communication, and Society*, 18:5, 524-538, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542

Atwan, Adel Bari. 2015. *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*. Introduction and Chapter 1, p.9-31

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts. 2014, "Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participant observation" *Science* 345(6199).

Recommended Reading:

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts. 2013. How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression. *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (May): 1-18. Copy at <http://j.mp/LdVXqN>

Vacarri et al. 2014. "Social Media and Political Discussion: A survey of Twitter political users during the 2013 Italian general elections campaign". *Italian Political Science Review*

Ackland, *Web Social Science*, Chapter 7

PM: Lab #6: Analyzing Facebook Public Page Data II: Examples from Student Projects

## **Day 12: Wednesday, January 20**

*All Day Field Trip to Washington DC to conduct interviews on social media usage by Congressional Offices.*

## **Thursday, January 21**

AM&PM: Open Lab with TA: Work on Projects (Morning and Afternoon)

Assignment #2: Due at 5:00 PM through NYU Classes

## **Friday, January 22**

10:00 AM – 2:30 PM: Student Presentations in Saadiyat Room, 19 Washington Square North (lunch provided; make sure you pack the night before!)