PSY427: Media Psychology (Fall 2021)

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Lectures:	Tuesday 12-3 pm
Location:	online on September 14 and 21; in person in SS1084 thereafter
Course Prerequisites:	PSY201 (or equivalent), PSY220
Course Website:	http://www2.psych.utoronto.ca/users/tafarodi/psy427
Instructor:	Prof. Romin Tafarodi
Drop-in Office Hours:	Tuesday 3:30-4:30 pm (online)
Phone:	416-946-3024
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Teaching Assistant:	Siobhan Flanagan
Drop-in Office Hours:	Wednesday 2-3 pm (online)
Phone:	416-946-5275
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Required Text:

Pavlik, J. V., & McIntosh, S. (2018). *Converging media: A new introduction to mass communication* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. (available for purchase at U of T Bookstore)

Ebook version available for purchase at:

https://www.redshelf.com/book/1699908/converging-media-1699908-9780197545614-john-v-pavlik-shawn-mcintosh

https://www.vitalsource.com/en-ca/products/converging-media-keith-chasse-v9780197545614

All Other Required or Additional Readings:

Downloadable within lecture modules on Quercus.

Videos:

Accessible through links within lecture modules on Quercus.
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Overview

"All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political,

economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered….Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without knowledge of the way media work as environments." Marshall McLuhan wrote these words in 1967, shortly after the CBC began colour television broadcasts. Media have evolved considerably since then, but the validity of McLuhan's belief in their transformative power remains undiminished in the digital age. This course in *critical media literacy* examines how we come to understand ourselves and our world, and learn to feel, evaluate, and act, through the simulative mediation of information and communication technologies. The aim is to provide students with a deeper understanding of the dynamic symbolic environment that surrounds them and in which they participate as both audience and producer. The approach is multidisciplinary, drawing not only from psychology but a broad range of influential perspectives in the social sciences and humanities. The topics explored reveal how developments in the world of media are central to understanding changing forms of public and private life in the 21st century.

Evaluation

Evaluation is based on two in-class tests (October 19 and December 7 from 12:10-2:50 pm), a formal term paper (due by 12:10 pm on November 30), and two thought papers (due by 12:10 pm on October 12 and November 23).

The first test accounts for 34% of the course mark, the second test for 25%, the term paper for 35%, and the thought papers for 3% each. Note that the second test will address only those topics covered since the first test.

Tests. Access to notes and readings is not allowed during the writing of in-class tests. Example test questions from previous years are available on Quercus to aid students in their preparations. These will provide familiarity with the sort of broad and encompassing questions that will be asked. Both tests will consist of three such questions, each worth 10 marks. Students are given the fullest latitude to bring together, interpret, and integrate content from the readings and lectures in responding to each of the test questions. Course content should be used to justify and support the position taken on the issue and the claims made in that regard. Students will not be evaluated on their positions and claims per se, but on how effectively they support them. The focus of evaluation is on quality of argument, not on the presence or absence of a target piece of course material. Students are expected to "make a case" in answering each question and will be judged on how convincingly they do so.

Each test response will be evaluated holistically, as a unified argument, and assigned a mark of 0-10. Quality will be assessed according to three equally-weighted criteria. These are:

1) comprehensive inclusion of relevant content from readings and lectures
2) sound interpretation and effective integration of that content
3) clear articulation of a summary position based on (1) and (2)

According to this scheme, there are no categorically "right" or "wrong" responses, only better and worse arguments for various positions that might be taken. Few important and enduring questions in the study of mind, society, and culture can be approached otherwise.

The tests will be marked by the TA, who will provide brief evaluative comments on each test response. Any concerns or questions about individual marks should be taken up with the TA. Only if there is a well-founded allegation of bias/prejudice or obvious error of judgment should the instructor be approached about a specific mark assigned by the TA. In such cases, the instructor will evaluate the test response independently and decide on a final mark. This final mark may be lower than, higher than, or the same as the original mark and is not open to further appeals to the instructor.

Marks for the first test will be posted on Quercus within two weeks, along with evaluative comments by the TA. Marks and comments for the second test will be posted on Quercus within three weeks.

Make-up tests will *not* be offered, with the exception noted at the end of this section. Students who miss a test due to illness or other adversity beyond their control must email a letter of petition to the course instructor within one week of the missed test. The petition must be accompanied by either a properly completed [U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form](#) or proof of submission on ACORN's Absence Declaration Tool. The form or declaration must indicate that the student was unable to take the test because of a clearly debilitating or otherwise disabling condition. Claims that illness or adversity prevented adequate *preparation* for the test will not suffice in most cases. Late petitions will *not* be considered. Successful petitions will result in re-weighting of the remaining test and term paper. In the case of exemption from the first test, the second test will be re-weighted to 59% of the course mark to maintain the contribution of testing to the overall grade. Similarly, in the case of exemption from the second test, the first test will be re-weighted to 59%. Unsuccessful petitions will result in a test mark of zero.

In the unlikely event that a student is granted exemption from both tests, a make-up test worth 59% will be offered in the second instance so that the course mark does not depend only on the term paper and thought papers. The make-up test will be cumulative, addressing topics covered before *and* after the first test.

Please note that missing a term test is a serious matter. Exemption will be granted only in clearly legitimate and properly documented cases, in accordance with the guidelines of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Term paper. A similar frame of evaluation applies to the term paper, which must directly address some aspect of today's mediated world. The paper will be judged holistically on its merit as a carefully researched, well-conceived, cogent, and clearly presented argument and assigned a mark of 0-100.

An evaluative summary will be provided. The extent to which empirical "findings" (the results of formal scientific studies) are cited should depend entirely on their relevance to the argument. Consider the question, "Does heavy viewing of television contribute to the development of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children?" Clearly, the results of research aimed at testing this supposed causal connection are directly relevant as *evidence* for or against it and, as such, should be incorporated into the argument, even if only to be criticized or challenged.

But now consider the second question, "How has television coverage of ADHD since 1987 shaped the way we understand and respond to the disorder?" Here, the causal contingency is simply assumed on the basis of television's widely recognized power to shape public opinion. What is at issue -- the *meaning* of the representations that informed the public's understanding of ADHD -- is really a historical and interpretive matter. It is much less amenable, if at all, to scientific testing. The appropriate strategy for answering this kind of question would be to describe and critically *interpret* the changing representations of ADHD on television and in popular discourse since 1987, and provide a well-reasoned argument supported by historical data (e.g., notable broadcasts, epidemiological statistics, drug prescriptions, support group statements, legal decisions, policy changes) for connecting the latter to the former.

Finally, consider the question, "What is virtual reality?" Scientific tests and results will not provide an intelligent answer to this question. Nor will a standard encyclopedia entry for virtual reality make for a very good term paper. Rather, the question invites *conceptual analysis* and engagement with the profound technological, psychological, sociological, and even metaphysical concerns that issue from that analysis.

It should be clear from the above examples that there are many kinds of questions in media studies -- and as many approaches to answering them. Students should feel free to pose and answer any question that is of special interest to them within this wide spectrum of possibilities. The only restriction is that the question must directly address some aspect of our contemporary mediated world.

In writing the term paper, students should begin by identifying a phenomenon that concerns them deeply and posing an investigable *question* about it. After a few weeks of sustained reading and thought on the question, an answer in the form of a position or claim should start to take shape. This position or claim will form the central argument of the paper, which should be reflected in its title.

The next step is to select a single real-world example or instance of the broader phenomenon to use for developing and presenting the argument. For example, a student claiming that the popular appeal of singing competition reality television is based as much on its normalization and legitimation of the ethos of commercial entertainment as on the aesthetics of vocal performance might choose to make the case by focusing on *The Voice* (in one of its many international incarnations) as a

representative example.

Similarly, a student arguing for the reality and distinctive form of video game addiction in young adults may choose to explore *World of Warcraft* and its player community as an illustration.

Finally, a student claiming that "attack" ads in electoral politics have a specific context-sensitive profile of advantages and limitations may choose to examine a particular party's online ad campaign in the *2021 Canadian federal election* as a case in point.

Note that in all three of these examples, the theories, perspectives, research findings, etc., that are adduced to make the argument may not (and in most cases will not) themselves narrowly and specifically address the real-world example focused on in the paper. Rather, broader theory and distinct but related evidence and analysis must be sought out in the literature and applied to the chosen example.

This should give you some idea as to what is expected. Keep in mind that the question you choose to investigate should above all reflect your personal interests and concerns. The answer to that question is yours to freely develop through self-directed research and consideration. To confirm that the starting *question* you have chosen is appropriate for this course, please email it to either the TA or the instructor by October 14. Although this confirmation is not a credited requirement, it is *strongly* recommended. Students who do not bother to gain approval of their question run the risk, however small, of choosing one that is ill-suited to the aims of the course. A poor choice of question will be reflected in the term paper mark.

As we all know, email is not the most reliable medium of communication. As such, do *not* assume that your question was received and approved until you receive a reply from us. Normally, this will occur within a few days.

A few additional pointers on writing a good term paper:

- begin reading and organizing information early; this is a *long-term* project and the quality of your argument will reflect the time you devote to conceiving and developing it
- feel free to approach the TA or instructor if you need advice in developing your ideas
- outline your argument in capsulized form near the beginning of the paper so the reader has a map of where you intend to go
- state and defend any debatable assumptions that are crucial to your argument
- do not include material that is not directly pertinent to your central argument; do not digress
- present your argument as a logical and well-ordered progression of ideas
- argue in as clear and convincing a manner as possible
- avoid circular argument and other forms of bad reasoning
- be specific about which mediated phenomenon or phenomena you are referring to; do not write in vague generalities (for example, do not write loosely about "the media")

- focus on one specific, well-described example in presenting and supporting your argument; you can generalize from it as appropriate toward the end of the paper

The term paper must conform to APA format (refer to *Publication Manual of the APA*, 7th ed.) and consist of 2,500-3,500 words of text excluding the title page, references, and any tables/figures/appendices. Do *not* include an abstract. Please don't ask us "how many" bibliographic references your paper should have. That is a misguided question. We won't be counting your references. You shouldn't either. The number of works cited in a paper is not an indicator or quality one way or another. Some arguments invite more extensive citation than others. If you spend the term seriously researching your question, as is expected, you should have no reason to worry about how many references you end up including in your paper.

Term papers must be submitted before the deadline through Quercus. E-mailed papers will not be accepted. Papers submitted late will be accepted with a 5%-per-day penalty.

Normally, students will be required to submit their term papers to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their papers to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation website.

Unlike the tests, the paper is a long-term project requiring sustained effort over many weeks. Therefore, requests to submit late papers without penalty will in most cases be denied. Please plan and work accordingly. Marks and evaluative comments for the term papers will be posted on Quercus within three weeks of submission.

Thought papers. The two thought papers are structured opportunities for students to relate the issues explored in the videos to their own lives. They are personal explorations, not scholarly reports, and should not include any formal references or citations. Each paper must be 500-600 words in length. Each should be based on one of the optional videos listed in the syllabus. This means that you will need to watch at least *two* of these videos. You are free to choose the ones that interest you most. The first thought paper must be submitted through Quercus by 12 pm on October 12. The second must be submitted by 12 pm on November 23. The question to be addressed in each thought paper is:

What is the main argument, observation, or interpretation offered in this film? Do you feel that this argument, observation, or interpretation is relevant to your own life or the lives of those you know well? Why or why not?

Thought papers should be well-written, thoughtful, and well-reasoned. Each paper will be evaluated by either the instructor or the TA and assigned a summary score of 0-5 mark in accordance with the following scheme:

0 • no submission before deadline
1-2 • example does not meet instructional requirements
3 • meets requirements but is limited by poor understanding of the film and/or weak writing
4 • good comprehension, writing, and quality of thought
5 • excellent comprehension, writing, and quality of thought

Marks for each thought paper will be posted on Quercus within two weeks of its submission deadline. Brief comments will be provided along with the mark. Students are welcome to seek elaboration or clarification from the marker during office hours. Late thought papers will generally not be accepted. Please plan and work accordingly.

The ability to write effectively is key to academic and professional success in the information age. To find resources aimed at helping you develop your writing skills, start by visiting Writing at the University of Toronto.

Lectures

PowerPoint slides used in lectures will be posted on Quercus within a day following each lecture. The two online lectures (September 14 and 21) will be recorded and made available afterward on Quercus. Even so, students are expected to attend these two lectures *live* in their entirety so that they can actively participate in class discussion, which is a vital part of the learning experience in this course. In-class lectures (which start on September 28) will *not* be recorded and students are expected to attend in person.

Please note that there are no prepared lecture notes for this course. It is strongly recommended that you arrange a notes partnership with a fellow student. You and your partner can then turn to each other for notes from any missed lectures.

As the overlap of lectures with readings will vary considerably across topics, you must complete all required readings *and* attend lectures to perform adequately in this course.

Readings and Videos

Some of the readings may be challenging and require highly focused attention. The effort invested will be repaid with a deeper understanding of the mediated world. Allow yourself sufficient time to read and consider the material. Readings should be completed not with a mind to memorizing incidental details or references but in an attempt to understand the main arguments, positions, and/or frameworks presented by the authors. Make notes accordingly. As you read, you should be asking yourself the following questions:

> • What major questions, concerns, or issues are being addressed in this

reading?
- What are the authors claiming about these?
- What is the logical, conceptual, or empirical basis of these claims?
- Do I agree or disagree with these claims? Why?
- How would I express my position in dialogue with others?

A helpful online resource for clarifying many of the concepts and ideas mentioned in the readings and elsewhere in the course is the International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology. Wikipedia is often a good option as well.

The required readings must be completed *before* **each lecture, which will be difficult to follow and participate in otherwise.** There are *two* required readings to be completed before each substantive lecture except the last on November 30, for which there is only one. An additional, *optional* reading is assigned for each lecture except the last. This reading is intended for those students who are especially interested in the topic and would like to explore it further, as well as those who want to excel in the course and prefer more content to draw from in supporting their positions on the term tests.

The videos are optional, with the qualification that at least two must be viewed to write the thought papers. Each video is best viewed prior to the corresponding lecture. Students are not required to watch more than two of the videos. But again, those wanting to further their understanding of specific topics or issues will profit from watching more of them. Let your personal interests guide you in this.

Finally, note that this is not a course you can "coast" through or "cram" for overnight. If you fail to keep up with the reading schedule, attend lectures, and submit the thought papers and term paper on time, you are bound to end up frustrated and disappointed with your experience in this course. Please plan accordingly.

Lecture, Reading, and Viewing Schedule

September 14 – Introduction

Live lecture will take place online through Zoom.

September 21 – Understanding Media

Live lecture will take place online through Zoom.

Required readings:

Pavlik & McIntosh – Chapters 2 & 13

Additional (optional) reading:

Rettew, D. C., Althoff, R. R., & Hudziak, J. J. (2019). Your brain on video games: The neuroscience of media. In E. V. Beresin & C. K. Olson (Eds.), *Child and adolescent psychiatry and the media* (pp. 133-140). Elsevier.

Optional video: Nik Wansbrough's (2020) *The Great Acceleration: Rise of the Machines.*

September 28 – Representation

Required readings:

Beltrán, M. (2018). Representation. In M. Kackman & M. C. Kearney (Eds.), *The craft of criticism: Critical media studies in practice* (pp. 97-108). Routledge.

Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2019). *Media/society: Technology, industries, content, and users* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (pp. 225-266)

Additional (optional) reading:

Dill-Shackleford, K. E., Ramasubramanian, S., Behm-Morawitz, E., Scharrer, E., Burgess, M. C. R., & Lemish, D. (2017). Social group stories in the media and child development. *Pediatrics*, *140*(Supplement 2), S157-S161.

Optional video: Global Media Monitoring Project's (2011) *Who Makes the News?*

October 5 – Advertising

Required readings:

Pavlik & McIntosh – Chapter 10

Ha, L. (2020). Advertising effects and advertising effectiveness. In M. B. Oliver, A. A. Raney & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (4th ed., pp. 275-289). New York: Routledge.

Additional (optional) reading:

Iqani, M. (2018). Consumer culture and media. In O. Kravets, P. Maclaran, S. Miles, & A. Venkatesh (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of consumer culture* (pp. 275-289). Sage.

Optional videos:

Matthew Hill's (2020) *Amazon: What They Know About Us*

Larry Weinstein's (2019) *Propaganda: The Art of Selling Lies*

October 12 – Journalism and Politics

Thought paper 1 due.

Required readings:

Pavlik & McIntosh – Chapters 8 & 14

Additional (optional) reading:

Tsfati, Y., & Walter, N. (2020). The world of news and politics. In M. B. Oliver, A. A. Raney & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (4th ed., pp. 36-50). New York: Routledge.

Optional videos:

Mario Troncoso's (2020) *Fake: Searching for Truth in the Age of Misinformation*

Nanfu Wang's (2021) *In the Same Breath*

October 19 – Test 1

No lecture.

October 26 – Violence

Required readings:

Sanborn, F. W., & Harris, R. J. (2019). *A cognitive psychology of mass communication* (7th ed.). New York: Routledge. (pp. 268-305)

Smith, S., & Ferguson, C. J. (2019). The effects of violent media on children. In E. V. Beresin & C. K. Olson (Eds.), *Child and adolescent psychiatry and the media* (pp. 1-9). Elsevier.

Additional (optional) reading:

Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2018). Media violence and the general aggression model. *Journal of Social Issues*, *74*, 386-413.

Optional video: CNBC's (2019) *The Debate Behind Video Game Violence*

November 2 – Sexuality

Required readings:

Sanborn, F. W., & Harris, R. J. (2019). *A cognitive psychology of mass communication* (7th ed.). New York: Routledge. (pp. 306-338)

Cawston, A. (2019). The feminist case against pornography: A review and re-evaluation. *Inquiry*, *62*(6), 624-658.

Additional (optional) reading:

Attwood, F. (2018). *Sex media.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. (pp. 112-137)

Optional video: Vice Broadly's (2016) *Inside the Torturous Fight to End Revenge Porn*

November 16 – Interactivity

Required readings:

Pavlik & McIntosh – Chapter 6

Sundar, S. S., & Oh, J. (2020). Psychological effects of interactive media technologies: A human-computer interaction (HCI) perspective. In M. B. Oliver, A. A. Raney, & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (4th ed., pp. 357-372). Routledge.

Additional (optional) reading:

Kalyanaraman, S., & Bailenson, J. (2020). Virtual reality in media effects. In M. B. Oliver, A. A. Raney, & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (4th ed., pp. 404-418). Routledge.

Optional videos:

Hao Wu's (2019) *People's Republic of Desire*

Jeff Orlowski's (2020) *The Social Dilemma*

November 23 – Social Media

Thought paper 2 due.

Required readings:

Pavlik & McIntosh – Chapter 7

Briggs, A., Burke, P., & Ytreberg, E. (2020). *A social history of the media* (4th ed.). Polity Press (pp. 321-354).

Additional (optional) reading:

Humphreys, L. (2018). *The qualified self: Social media and the accounting of everyday life.* The MIT Press. (pp. 51-71)

Optional videos:

Jehane Noujaim & Karim Amer's (2019) *The Great Hack*

Nick Bilton's (2021) *Fake Famous*

November 30 – Retrospective

Term paper due.

Required reading:

Pavlik & McIntosh – Chapter 11

December 7 – Test 2

No lecture.