SYLLABUS

Sociology of Fake News

SOC 295-001: Topics in Sociology
FALL 2019
Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:30-4:00pm – 1401 Mason Hall

Instructor

Hailey Mooney
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Course Overview

Course Description

Welcome to the Sociology of Fake News! In this course, we will explore how information disorder and the more particular phenomenon of fake news are social problems. We will use a sociological lens to analyze the modern information environment; broadly, to understand what we determine to be the "truth"—and specifically to examine the interplay of social reality, information, and the public good. A central theme that we will encounter throughout the course is the relationship between information, democracy, and capitalism. This will include examination of the role of information technology and other social forces in the current post-truth polarized era.

The ultimate goal of this course is to develop our capacity to be informed and engaged citizens who are lifelong learners and members of the voting public. Through a sociological discussion of fake news and information disorder, we will bolster our ability to *be informed* and knowledgeable; to navigate the available information in order to reach an understanding of current events and how our society works.

As a result of taking this course, you will be able to:
- Analyze the role of information and information technology in a democratic society
- Recognize bias in information creators, interpreters, and processes of dissemination
- Reflect on personal information behaviors and current awareness strategies, and how they are shaped by social contexts

About the Instructor

Hailey Mooney is the Psychology & Sociology Librarian at the University of Michigan, Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library. I am an Ann Arbor townie and a U-M graduate, having earned my Bachelor's degree here with a major in Sociology. I also have a Master of Library and Information Science from Wayne State University in Detroit.

I have a decade of experience as a librarian, first at Michigan State University and now here at the University of Michigan. I purchase materials for the library, provide support to researchers, serve on professional committees, and engage in my own research and publication projects. The majority of my instructional experience to-date comes from working with students and other researchers one-on-one, in small groups, and in workshop settings. I am excited to have the opportunity to explore the topics that I am passionate about with you over the course of a semester.

My goal for this class is for us to learn from each other as we engage with and discuss the course material. I am committed to fostering an inclusive and caring classroom environment, wherein we share an attitude of mutual respect for each other and the range of ideas that we will encounter in the class readings and from our personal experiences and interpretations. Please know that you are welcome to reach out to me to discuss any questions and concerns about the course and assignments.

I want everyone to succeed in this class! You are ultimately responsible for your own learning and academic success; that includes reaching out for assistance from me or other university support services if you need it. If you are experiencing academic or personal issues that interfere with your ability to participate and complete course assignments, please let me know as soon as possible. I will work with you to help you manage the situation.

Course Norms & Expectations

Student Expectations	Instructor Expectations
- Actively participate and engage with the class, course materials, and assignments. - Listen and respect others. - Arrive on time for class. - Turn off digital distractions and be fully present during class. - Complete all assignments. - Be prepared for class by completing readings and homework. - Discuss class concerns either after class or during office hours.	- Be active and enthusiastic to facilitate student learning. - Listen and respect students' views. - Start class on time. - Silence cell phone. - Grade objectively, consistently, and in a timely manner. - Be prepared for class. - Be available to talk individually with students after class and/or during office hours. - Accommodate differences in students' learning needs.

Respect & Diversity in the Classroom

In this class, we will be reading and discussing ideas that are controversial and recognizing a range of viewpoints and interpretations. It is important that our discussions are focused on exploring the merits of different ideas, not personal attacks on each other or reducing arguments to polarizing political party lines. We can create a supportive learning environment for everyone by recognizing diversity as a benefit to learning and through practicing mutual respect and civility. The U-M Commitment to Diversity statement describes this core value as "an abiding commitment to sustaining a community in which the dignity of every individual is respected. Key to this value is fostering an environment of civility and mutual respect by preventing acts of bias, discrimination and harassment on our campus."

Course Assignments & Grades

Attendance/Participation (50%)

Showing up, doing the readings, engaging and contributing positively to the class.

Attendance & In-Class Participation

You are expected to attend and participate in every class meeting, and arrive on time. Attendance is very important to the success of this class. However, sometimes unavoidable conflicts occasionally arise; therefore you may miss two classes for any reason without penalty provided you send me a notification/acknowledgement of your absence. Please let me know if you need attendance-related accommodations due to religious holidays or extended illness.

Course Readings Reflection Journal

You will keep a journal to record notes and reflections about the course readings. This will ensure that everyone comes to class prepared to discuss the day's topic. Guidance on how to structure the entries will be provided. Journal entries are due at the beginning of class period for the day the reading is due.

Required Readings

There is no textbook for this class. All readings will be made available via CANVAS. You are strongly encouraged to print out articles and read them in hard copy format (rather than on the computer). Reading in print facilitates deep reading comprehension and makes it easier to mark up and navigate the text.

Projects/Papers (50%)

About Me

Brief and informal paper that will help your instructor learn about the experiences, attitudes, and expectations that you and your fellow students are bringing to the class this semester.

Information Creators (Mid-Term Project)

A set of related assignments including: (1) a reflection on your news and media diet, (2) news sources profile, and (3) news headlines comparison.

Information Interpreters

A fact-checking and online verification tutorial, *Check Please!*, and a reflection paper.

Information Landscape

An 8-Day Data Detox activity with some written reflections that will require you to examine your use of digital information technologies. You will complete modules from Tactical Tech's Data Detox Kit and undergo a three-day social media fast.

Final Reflection Paper

The final exam will take the form of a final reflection paper. This paper will ask you to synthesize the course content and respond to the thematic topic questions that have been posed over the course of the semester.

Extra Credit Opportunities

- Perfect attendance (1 point)
- Reading and taking notes in print (up to 2 points)
  - Reading in print (1 point) – must be able to show print copies of *all* course readings that show evidence of having been read (e.g., underlining, highlighting, annotations)
  - Taking *all* class notes longhand (1 point) – must be able to show in-class notes in own handwriting

Late Assignments

If you notify me on or before the due date that you need an extension for a legitimate reason, we can then determine together an appropriate extension and you will not have any points deducted. If I am not notified or if multiple assignments are late, then points will be deducted for each day the assignment is late. Grading deadlines may prohibit my ability to provide a deadline extension.

Grades & Points

Criteria	Points	Percentage
Attendance & In-Class Participation	26 points (There are 28 class sessions; you may earn 1 extra point for perfect attendance)	25%
Reading Reflection Journal Entries	26 points (26 class sessions with readings x 1 point each)	25%
Subtotal: Attendance/Participation	*52 points*	*50%*
About Me	2 points	1.9%
Information Creators (Mid-Term Project)	12 points	11.5%
Information Interpreters	10 points	9.6%
Information Landscape	10 points	9.6%
Final Reflection Paper	18 points	17.4%
Subtotal: Projects/Papers	*52 points*	*50%*
Total	**104 points**	**100%**
Extra Credit: Perfect Attendance	1 point	1%
Extra Credit: Reading and Taking Notes in Print	2 points	2%

Letter Grade Scale

A = Excellent (exceeds typical/average)
(97.00-100=A+; 93.00-96.99=A; 90.00-92.99=A-)

B = Good (typical/average)
(87.00-89.99=B+; 83.00-86.99=B; 80.00-82.99=B-)

C = Acceptable/Adequate (below typical/average)
(77.00-79.99=C+; 73.00-76.99=C; 70.00-72.99=C-)

D = Deficient, but passed
(67.00-69.99=D+; 63.00-66.99=D; 60.00-62.99=D-)

E = Not passed, performance is inadequate
(below 60.00)

Additional Course Policies

Academic Integrity

It is imperative that we all adhere to the highest levels of academic integrity. Academic misconduct will not be tolerated; any cases of misconduct will be reported to the Office of Student Academic Affairs and are grounds for a failing grade. LSA outlines [examples of academic misconduct](#), including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, and classroom disturbances.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; http://ssd.umich.edu) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Student Mental Health & Wellbeing

University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** at (734) 764-8312 and https://caps.umich.edu/ during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult **University Health Service (UHS)** at (734) 764-8320 and https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources.

In this class, we will be discussing our relationship to news and information technology. Research indicates that overexposure to digital media and information can have negative health effects. Phenomena such as information overload, technostress, Internet addiction, social media fatigue, and burnout begin to indicate the range of challenges that people can experience when they have extended interaction with digital technologies. Balancing or limiting exposure, such as to hard news content that focuses on negative and violent events, may increase well-being. Engaging in non-screen focused activities can also enhance well-being: spending time outdoors, exercising, meditating, etc.

Students are strongly encouraged to print out class readings, write reading reflection journals in longhand with pen and paper, and take class notes on actual paper. Working with hard copy readings and taking notes by hand can increase retention and understanding while reducing distractions and overall screen time.

Course Schedule & Readings

Date	Topic	Readings *(Read before class)*	Assignments Due
		Section A: Background	
Week 1			
Wed 9/4 Class #1	Course Introduction		
Week 2			
Mon 9/9 Class #2	Information Disorder and Fake News - *What is information disorder and fake news?*	Pages 4-28. Wardle, Claire, and Hossein Derakhshan. "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking." Council of Europe Report. Council of Europe, September 27, 2017.	**About Me** Journal: reading reflection
Wed 9/11 Class #3		Caplan, Robyn, Lauren Hanson, and Joan Donovan. "Dead Reckoning: Navigating Content Moderation after 'Fake News.'" Data & Society Research Institute, February 2018.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 3			
Mon 9/16 Class #4	Threat to Democracy - *Why is information disorder and fake news perceived as a threat to democracy?*	Mills, C. Wright. "On Politics." In *The Sociological Imagination*, 177–94. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 9/18 Class #5		Schudson, Michael. "The Social Construction of the 'Informed Citizen.'" *The Good Society* 9, no. 1 (1999): 30–35.	Journal: reading reflection

Week 4			
Mon 9/23 Class #6	Why now? This isn't new! - *How has the Internet shaped the current fake news problem?*	Tantner, Anton. "Before Google: A Pre-History of Search Engines in Analogue Times." In *Society of the Query Reader: Reflections on Web Search*, edited by Rene Konig and Miriam Rasch, 121–38. INC Reader 9. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2014.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 9/25 Class #7		Earp, Jeremy, dir. *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet against Democracy*. DVD & streaming video. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2018.	Journal: reading reflection
Section B: Information Creators			
Week 5			
Mon 9/30 Class #8	Attack on the Mainstream Media	Jhally, Sut, dir. *The Myth of the Liberal Media: The Propaganda Model of News*. DVD, streaming video. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1997.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 10/2 Class #9	- *Are the mainstream media biased?*	Schudson, Michael. "Chapter Two: Does News Matter? (Media Effects, Part 1)" In *The Sociology of News*, 8–25. Contemporary Societies, xxi. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011. ———. "Chapter Three: Media Bias (Media Effects, Part 2)." In *The Sociology of News*, 26–56. Contemporary Societies, xxi. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 6			
Mon 10/7 Class #10	All Governments Lie -	Peabody, Fred, dir. *All Governments Lie: Truth, Deception, and the Spirit of I.F. Stone.* DVD, streaming video. New York, N.Y.: First Run Features, 2016.	Journal: reading reflection

Wed 10/9 Class #11	*What is the role of journalism in a democratic society?*	Schudson, Michael. "Chapter Eleven: Law, Democracy, and News." In *The Sociology of News*, 188–204. Contemporary Societies, xxi. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 7			
Mon 10/14	No Class – Fall Study Break		
Wed 10/16 Class #12	Propaganda - *Who creates propaganda and why?*	*Toxic Sludge Is Good for You: The Public Relations Industry Unspun*. DVD, streaming video. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2002. Pages 29-41. Wardle, Claire, and Hossein Derakhshan. "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking." Council of Europe Report. Council of Europe, September 27, 2017.	Journal: reading reflection **Mid-Term Project: Information Creators**
Section C: Information Interpreters			
Week 8			
Mon 10/21 Class #13	This I Believe -	Ellul, Jacques. "Information and Propaganda." *Diogenes* 5, no. 18 (June 1, 1957): 61–77.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 10/23 Class #14	*What do I believe to be true and why?*	Smith, Llewellyn, dir. *American Denial*. DVD, streaming video. Boston, MA: Vital Pictures, 2014.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 9			
Mon 10/28 Class #15	Truth Decay - *How does public discourse and the social environment effect individual ability to discern the truth?*	Kavanagh, Jennifer, and Michael D. Rich. "Summary." In *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life,* ix-xx. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. ———. "Chapter Five. The Consequences of Truth Decay." In *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life*, 191–222. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018.	Journal: reading reflection

Wed 10/30 Class #16		———. "Chapter Four. Drivers: What Is Causing Truth Decay?" In *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life*, 79–190. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 10			
Mon 11/4 Class #17	Establishing Credibility - *How do I know what information to trust?*	Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz, and John Cook. "Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 13, no. 3 (December 2012): 106–31.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 11/6 Class #18		Pages 41-8. Wardle, Claire, and Hossein Derakhshan. "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking." Council of Europe Report. Council of Europe, September 27, 2017.	Journal: reading reflection **Information Interpreters**
Section D: The Information Landscape			
Week 11			
Mon 11/11 Class #19	Just Google It - *How do algorithms impact what we know?*	Vaidhyanathan, Siva. "Two. Google's Ways and Means: Faith in Aptitude and Technology." In *The Googlization of Everything (and Why We Should Worry),* Updated ed., 51–81. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 11/13 Class #20		Gillespie, Tarleton. "The Relevance of Algorithms." In *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, edited by Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J Boczkowski, and Kirsten A Foot, 167–93. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 12			
Mon 11/18 Class #21	Surveillance Capitalism -	Boote, Werner, dir. *Everything's Under Control: Surveillance, Privacy and Security in a Digital World*. Streaming video. Paris, France: Doc & Film International, 2015.	Journal: reading reflection

Wed 11/20 Class #22	*What is the extent of digital surveillance and how does it impact information-seeking and online behavior?*	Zuboff, Shoshana. "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization." *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 75–89.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 13			
Mon 11/25 Class #23	Fakebook - *What is the impact of social media on public information?*	Pages 49-56. Wardle, Claire, and Hossein Derakhshan. "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking." Council of Europe Report. Council of Europe, September 27, 2017. Tufekci, Zeynep. "As the Pirates Become CEOs: The Closing of the Open Internet." *Daedalus* 145, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 65–78.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 11/27 Class #24		Vaidhyanathan, Siva. "6. The Politics Machine." In *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*, 146–74. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. ———. "7. The Disinformation Machine." In *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*, 175–95. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.	Journal: reading reflection **Information Landscape**
		Thanksgiving Break, 11/28-29	
Week 14			
Mon 12/2 Class #25	Synthesis - *What is the relationship*	Selections from Han, Byung-Chul. *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, translated by Erik Butler, 1–12. London: Verso Books, 2017.	Journal: reading reflection

Wed 12/4 Class #26	between (digital) information and power?	Chapter 16. "Of Life in the Hive." in Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. New York: Public Affairs, 2019.	Journal: reading reflection
Week 15			
Mon 12/9 Class #27	What Now? - *Are there any solutions to the problems of information disorder? How can I apply knowledge of information disorder to my life?*	Pages 57-85. Wardle, Claire, and Hossein Derakhshan. "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking." Council of Europe Report. Council of Europe, September 27, 2017.	Journal: reading reflection
Wed 12/11 Class #28		Flex day (Tentative) Workshop for final paper	
Final Exam			
Fri 12/20 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm			**Final Reflection Paper**

Please note that this syllabus and course schedule is subject to change based on circumstances arising throughout the course of the semester. The most up-to-date information will be posted on the course website.