Cyberspace, new generations, and new forms of political engagement

Course cod: 31P418  
Admin. Cod: POLA  
Credits: 10 (10 EC)  
Year: 2010-2011

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Objectives

The aim of the course is for students to acquire analytical knowledge and an understanding of the actual and potential impact of new technologies on politics.

Students will:

✓ Develop familiarity with the theoretical literature on the political dimension of new technologies  
✓ Prove an understanding of ‘real word’ phenomena to which the internet is becoming a fundamental dimension (electoral campaigns, voting choices, political competition and participation)  
✓ Expand their capacity to conduct empirical research on the topic, by oral presentations and research essays  
✓ Participate in online discussion fora, create wikis and user created content (UCC)

Contents

From the mid Nineties on there has been a widespread diffusion of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), primarily characterized by personal computer-based communication and their network connection: the internet has deeply changed modern societies in the past twenty years. Even though the vast majority of activities performed online do not have to do with either participation or political information, the political implications of the internet are widely recognized not only by intellectuals, professional politicians and academics but also by citizens
who perform a number of political activities online. Especially with the extensive use of Web 2.0 platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Youtube etc) during the 2008 US Presidential campaign, the political relevance of internet based technologies has emerged as a crucial phenomenon to understand current politics.

The course will combine the normative discussion on whether new technologies can truly bring about a change in the political world, with the empirical analysis of actual applications of such technologies for political purposes. On the theoretical level, the debate between web pessimists, skeptics and enthusiastic will be explored. The course will cover the debate between normalizers and optimists, by looking at a number of dimensions of online participation. We will investigate, combining normative and empirical elements, the extent to which the internet offers new (and possibly better) arenas for political engagement. In so doing we will investigate to which extent young people are actually more prone to participate via new technologies.

We will look at a number of political actors as social movements, policy advocacy groups and protest groups in order to explore the extent to which traditional actors and new mobilizing agent populate the web. The course will then turn to electoral politics, looking at both citizens and elites. We will explore elections from both the voters and the candidates’ perspective. With regard to the former, we will look at campaigns interactivity, political parties online and with regard to the latter we will investigate the use of Voting Advice Applications.

**Mode**

Discussion-based lectures (attendance compulsory), presentation sessions, and regular online component consisting of wiki-development and discussion fora.

**Assessment**

Class attendance, presentations (30%), term paper (70%). There is one grade for the whole course. **Term paper** is based on individual choice, to be discussed in class and with the lecturer. The other 30% is given on the basis on attendance (you will be downgraded if you miss more than two classes) participation in discussion of the readings, and assignments. The assignments are discussed in a separate document.
General Readings


Weekly Readings

There may be some changes, which will be communicated in class in due course.

W1. Introduction Tuesday February 1st

There are no readings to be done prior to our first meeting, but you are encouraged to browse the following websites (see list below) and to search online for websites/weblogs relevant to our discussions on cyberspace and political engagement.

ECPR Standing Group on Internet and Politics: http://internet‐politics.cies.iscte.pt/
Oxford Internet Institute: http://www.oi.ox.ac.uk/
Pew Internet Research Centre: http://www.pewinternet.org/
Andrew Chadwick’s website: http://www.andrewchadwick.com/
New Political Communication Unit: http://newpolcom.rhul.ac.uk/

W2. Theory. Tuesday February 8th


Recommended:
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W3. Empirical study of the internet. Tuesday February 15th


Recommended:

W4. Parties online a brief history. Tuesday March 1st


W5. Parties and representatives online. Tuesday March 8th


W6. Parties vs other actors. Tuesday March 15th

Wim van de DonK, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, Dieter Rucht, Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements, (2004). Chapter 1 and 5
W7. Online Citizenship. Tuesday March 22\textsuperscript{nd}


W8. Voting Advice Applications. Tuesday April 5\textsuperscript{th}


W9. Electoral campaigns I. Tuesday April 12\textsuperscript{th}


W10. Electoral campaigns II. Tuesday April 19th


W11. Electoral campaigns III. Tuesday April 26th


W12. Web 2.0 SNS Blogs. Tuesday May 3rd


W13. Web 2.0 SNS Blogs. Tuesday May 10th


Anstead, N & O’Loughlin, B (2009). ‘The Emerging Viewertariat: Explaining Twitter Responses to Nick Griffin’s Appearance on BBC Question Time’
W14. Young people. Tuesday May 17th


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## Calendar:

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