

MASS COMMUNICATION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Journalism and Mass Communication 801 – Fall 2025
5013 Vilas Communication Hall
Monday 12:30-3:00 P.M.

Instructor: Dhavan Shah, McLeod Professor/Maier-Bascom Chair
Office: 5152 Vilas Communication Hall
Telephone: 608-262-0388
Email: dshah@wisc.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Course Description:

This course examines theory and research on the social psychological foundations of individuals' relationship with mass media. The course will consider the cognitive, attitudinal, affective, motivational, biobehavioral, and neurological processes underlying individuals' use of mass media and their interactions with media content and one another. Topics include attention and encoding, schema use, attitudinal structure, heuristic processing, persuasion and attitude persistence, memory-based and online processing models, emotional and functional approaches, physiological responses, the attitudes-behavior connection, attribution and cultivation processes, and social neuroscience. For each of these topic areas, we will consider communication research that embraces and often expands upon the psychological theory. Adopting this approach, we will consider media psychology research on race, ethnicity, news, social media, politics, entertainment, information campaigns, health interventions, media violence and pornography, and representations of gender. In addition, we will (a) cover methodological issues involved in the construction and evaluation of communication theory, (b) trace connections to communication research emanating from Wisconsin, and (c) discuss the move toward computational communication science in the field. Seminar participants will gain a sense of the issues and sources in each area, along with tools for their own research. This course aims to convey basic theory in social psychology and connect it to serve as a building block for original research. It is intended to provide new insights about the social psychological basis of media influence.

Required Texts:

- Bryant, J. & Oliver, M. B. (Eds.) (2009) *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, New York, Routledge
- Finkel, E. J. & Baumeister, R. F., (Eds.). (2019, 2nd ed.). *Advanced Social Psychology: The State of the Science*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Course Requirements:

Grades in the class will be based on your performance on the following requirements: (a) final research paper — 50%, (b) two review reports as class discussant — 20%, (c) five comment papers — 20%, and (d) participation in seminar discussion — 10%.

Final Research Paper: The major requirement for this course is an original research paper written individually by each student and presented to other seminar participants. The paper should stem from one or more of the topical areas covered in the course. The goal of the paper is to contribute, however modestly, to research in on the social psychology of the media. The paper should not simply be a literature review. It must propose and begin the process of testing theory. Doctoral students are expected to present actual research findings, or a coherent proposal for dissertation research. Masters' students may develop thesis proposals or opt to write a *New Yorker* or *Atlantic Monthly*-style argumentative research review and policy synthesis. For most of you, the goal for the final paper should be submission and acceptance to an academic conference. If you wish to extend work developed in previous classes or research groups, consult with me first.

The originality of your paper and its implications for theory in media psychology will be the key criteria for evaluation. As long as your research reflects some original departure from ideas we have encountered in class, and is not a simple recapitulation of past work, you can build directly on existing theory. A two-page prospectus for your seminar paper is due **WEEK 7**. You will make a presentation of your paper on **WEEK 13 OR 14**. Based on comments you receive from other seminar participants you may revise your paper and submit a final draft for grading on **December 16th** by 4:00. This paper will be worth 50 percent of your final grade.

If you opt for an academic paper, it should contain the following sections: (1) brief introduction, (2) literature review, (3) statement of hypotheses, propositions, or research model, (4) actual or proposed methodology, (5) results of analysis or proposed analytic approach, (6) concluding discussion about what was or will be learned. Students may present findings based on existing data sets (e.g., National Election Study, General Social Survey, MRI Data Archive, WCES Data, etc.) or collect original data. While papers should focus on media psychology, they need not be quantitative.

Seminar Discussants: Each student will be required to serve as a discussant for two class sessions. In class, discussants will work with the professor to keep the conversation moving forward, providing examples from the reading when appropriate and posing questions for all seminar participants to answer. Discussants will also be required to write an 8 to 10-page summary, synthesis, and critique

of the week's readings and provide a brief list of questions to facilitate discussion. This report should be posted to the class e-mail list by **8:00 AM on the morning of class** so that other seminar participants have a chance to review your comments and questions for the class session. Ideally, you will choose a week that coincides with your interests so that your review of the readings will serve as a foundation for your research paper. This work will be worth 20 percent of your final grade.

Comment Papers: The next 20 percent of your class grade will be based on the production of five brief comment papers on readings for weeks that you are not the discussant. These comment papers should be 1-2 pages. Papers should reflect your reactions to one or more of the readings from that week. Some of you may use these comment papers to summarize the key points of each of the readings into notes for future use. Others may organize their comments into critical essays or critiques on the general themes of the week. Yet others may focus on detailed reviews of a single reading, digging deeply into a topic of particular interest. You will bring these comment papers to class and submit them at the end of each session. These will not be graded, but each completed report will be worth 4% toward the total 20 percent of your final grade.

Seminar Participation: The final 10 percent of your class grade will be based on participation in seminar discussion. It is not enough that you just come to class. You must actively discuss the readings and engage in exchanges with other seminar participants. I will not formally lecture, because the function of a seminar is to encourage interaction among participants. Therefore, each student must contribute to the development of a classroom environment where ideas are debated.

Course Policies:

If a student cannot complete an assignment at the scheduled time, arrangements must be made in advance with the instructor. Failure to do so will result in the reduction of one grade level (at a minimum) from the earned score. Exemptions may be made for unusual circumstances.

Permission for a student to receive an incomplete grade (I) is at the discretion of the instructor and must be accompanied by a written contract for completion of course requirements. Failure to take exams, complete assignments, or attend class is not acceptable reasons for an incomplete.

This class will follow University and L&S guidelines concerning scholastic misconduct and grievance procedures. Be particularly clear on the rules concerning plagiarism.

Weekly Readings

Week 1 (9/9): Introduction to the Course

Overview of the course and discussion leader assignments

Week 2 (9/16): Studying Mass Media from a Social Psychological Perspective

Discussants: Sybil Wang, Dongni Li

McLeod, J., Kosicki, G., & Pan, Z. (1991) On understanding and misunderstanding media effects. In Curran & Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society*. 235-266. London, Edward Arnold.

Slater, M. D. (2007). Reinforcing spirals: The mutual influence of media selectivity and media effects and their impact on individual behavior and social identity. *Communication Theory*, 17(3), 281–303.

In Bryant & Oliver (2009), Shah, Rojas, & Cho, *Media and Civic Participation: On Understanding and Misunderstanding Communication Effects*, Chap 10

Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Walther, J. B. (2016). Media effects: Theory and research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 67(2016), 315-338.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Reis, *A Brief History of Social Psychology*. Chap. 2

Sundar, S. S. (2020). Rise of machine agency: A framework for studying the psychology of human–AI interaction (HAII). *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 25(1), 74–88.

Week 3 (9/23): Schema Theory, Media Stereotyping, and Racial and Ethnic Discrimination

Discussants: Chelsey Sarante

Dixon, T. & Maddox, K. (2005): Skin tone, crimes news, and social reality judgments: Priming the stereotype of the dark and dangerous black criminal. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 35: 1555-1570.

In Bryant & Oliver (2009), Mastro, *Effects of Racial and Ethnic Stereotyping*, Chap 16

Schemer, C. (2012). The influence of news media on stereotypic attitudes toward immigrants in a political campaign. *Journal of Communication*, 62(5), 739-757.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Dovidio & Jones, *Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination*. Chap. 12

Zhang, Y., Shah, D., Foley, J., Abhishek, A., Lukito, J., Suk, J., Kim, S. J., Sun, Z., Pevehouse, J., & Garlough, C. (2019). Whose lives matter? Mass shootings and social media discourses of sympathy and policy, 2012–2014. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 24(4), 182-202.

Freelon, D., Bossetta, M., Wells, C., Lukito, J., Xia, Y., & Adams, K. (2022). Black trolls matter: Racial and ideological asymmetries in social media disinformation. *Social Science Computer Review*, 40(3), 560-578.

Week 4 (9/30): Mental Structure and Communication Influence on Political Judgments

Discussants: Barry Zhao, Adriana Loeberl, Tianan Lin

In Bryant & Oliver (2009), McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, *Political Communication Effects*, Chap. 11

McLeod, D. M., & Shah, D. V. (2014). *News Frames and National Security: Covering Big Brother*. Chap 1. Cambridge University Press.

Bode, L., & Vraga, E. K. (2015). In related news, that was wrong: The correction of misinformation through related stories functionality in social media. *Journal of Communication*, 65(4), 619–638.

Bail, C. A., Argyle, L. P., Brown, T. W., Bumpus, J. P., Chen, H., Hunzaker, M. F., ... & Volfovsky, A. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(37), 9216-9221.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Fiske, *Social Cognition*. Chap. 4

Van Duyn, E., & Collier, J. (2019). Priming and fake news: The effects of elite discourse on evaluations of news media. *Mass Communication and Society*, 22(1), 29-48.

Week 5 (10/7): Social Encoding and Judgmental Processing: Social Perceptions of Reality

Discussants: Sybil Wang

In Bryant & Oliver (2009), Shrum, *Media Consumption and Perceptions of Social Reality*, Chap. 4.

Noar, S. M., Harrington, N. G., & Aldrich, R. S. (2009). *The role of message tailoring in the development of persuasive health communication messages*. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 33(1), 73–133.

Bakshy, E., Messing, S., & Adamic, L. A. (2015). Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. *Science*, 348(6239), 1130-1132.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Vohs & Luce, *Judgement and Decision Making*. Chap. 19

Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2019). Lazy, not biased: Susceptibility to partisan fake news is better explained by lack of reasoning than by motivated reasoning. *Cognition*, 188, 39–50.

Guess, A. M., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2020). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(5), 472–480.

Week 6 (10/14): Attitude Formation & Change: Risk and Learning about Science and Health

Discussants: Leanor Hidalgo, Ji Soo Choi

In Bryant & Oliver (2009), Petty, Briñol, & Priester, *Mass Media Attitude Change: Implications of the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion*, Chap. 7.

Kahlor, L., & Rosenthal, S. (2009). If we seek, do we learn? Predicting knowledge of global warming. *Science Communication*, 30(3), 380–414.

Yang, Z. J., Aloe, A. M., & Feeley, T. H. (2014). Risk information seeking and processing model: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Communication*, 64(1), 20-41.

Shen, F., Sheer, V. C., & Li, R. (2015). Impact of narratives on persuasion in health communication: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Advertising*, 44(2), 105-113.

Braddock, K., & Dillard, J. P. (2016). Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. *Communication monographs*, 83(4), 446-467.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Petty et al., *Attitude Structure and Change*. Chap. 6

Week 7 (10/21): Affective Processes and Emotional Responses through Media

Discussants: Barry Zhao, Maria Pettit, Maddy O'Neill

Han J.Y., Shah D.V., Kim E. et al. (2011) Empathic exchanges in online cancer support groups: distinguishing message expression and reception effects. *Health Communication*, 6: 185-197.

Weeks, B. E. (2015). Emotions, partisanship, and misperceptions: How anger and anxiety moderate the effect of partisan bias on susceptibility to political misinformation. *Journal of Communication*, 65(4), 699-719.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Mendes, *Emotion*. Chap. 14

Nabi, R. L., & Myrick, J. G. (2019). Uplifting fear appeals: Considering the role of hope in fear-based persuasive messages. *Health Communication*, 34(4), 463–474.

Garrett, R. K., Gvirsman, S. D., Johnson, B. K., Tsifti, Y., Neo, R., & Dal, A. (2019). Implications of pro- and counter-attitudinal information exposure for affective polarization. *Human Communication Research*, 45(4), 435–469.

Boulianne, S., Koc-Michalska, K., & Bimber, B. (2020). Right-wing populism, social media and echo chambers in Western democracies. *New Media & Society*, 22(4), 683-699.

Week 8 (10/28): Motivational Approaches to a Customizable Media Ecology

Discussants: Tianan Lin, Jingqi Yang

In Bryant & Oliver (2009), Rubin, *Uses-and-Gratifications Perspective of Media Effects*, Chap. 8

Toma, C. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2013). Self-affirmation underlies Facebook use. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(3), 321-331.

Rojas, H., Barnidge, M., & Abril, E. P. (2016). Egocentric publics and corrective action. *Communication and the Public*, 1(1), 27-38.

Yang, S., Maloney, E. K., Tan, A. S., & Cappella, J. N. (2018). When visual cues activate moral foundations: Unintended effects of visual portrayals of vaping within electronic cigarette video advertisements. *Human Communication Research*, 44(3), 223-246.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Baumeister, *The Self*. Chap. 5; Skitka & Conway, *Morality*, Chap. 13

Bayer, J. B., Triêu, P., & Ellison, N. B. (2020). Social media elements, ecologies, and effects. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 71, 471-497.

Week 9 (11/4): (Mis)information, Social Neuroscience, and Attitude-Behavior Links

Discussants: Leanor Hidalgo, Maddy O'Neill

In Bryant & Oliver (2009), Brown & Walsh-Childers, *The Effects of Media on Personal and Public Health*. Chap. 21.

Cascio, C. N., O'Donnell, M. B., Tinney, F. J., Lieberman, M. D., Taylor, S. E., Strecher, V. J., & Falk, E. B. (2016). Self-affirmation activates brain systems associated with self-related processing and reward and is reinforced by future orientation. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 11(4), 621-629.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Wheatly, *Social Neuroscience*, Chap. 15; Robles., *Health, Stress, and Coping*. Chap. 18

Southwell, B. G., Niederdeppe, J., Cappella, J. N., Gaysynsky, A., Kelley, D. E., Oh, A., Peterson, E. B., & Chou, W. Y. S. (2019). Misinformation as a misunderstood challenge to public health. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 57(2), 282-285.

Borah, P., Hwang, J., & Hsu, Y. C. (2021). COVID-19 vaccination attitudes and intention: Message framing and the moderating role of perceived vaccine benefits. *Journal of Health Communication*, 26(8), 523-533.

Week 10 (11/11): Attributional Processes, Hostile Media Perceptions, and Presumed Influence

Discussants: Bengisu Simsek, Chelsey Sarante, Jingqi Yang

Tsfati, Y. (2007). Hostile media perceptions, presumed media influence, and minority alienation: The case of Arabs in Israel. *Journal of Communication*, 57(4), 632-651.

Niederdeppe, J., Shapiro, M. A., Kim, H. K., Bartolo, D., & Porticella, N. (2014). Narrative persuasion, causality, complex integration, and support for obesity policy. *Health communication*, 29(5), 431-444.

Feldman, L., Hart, P. S., Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., & Roser-Renouf, C. (2017). Do hostile media perceptions lead to action? The role of hostile media perceptions, political efficacy, and ideology in predicting climate change activism. *Communication Research*, 44(8), 1099-1124.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Brewer., *Intergroup Relations*. Chap. 11

Barnidge, M., Gunther, A. C., Kim, J., Hong, Y., Perryman, M., Tay, S. K., & Knisely, S. (2020). Politically motivated selective exposure and perceived media bias. *Communication Research*, 47(1), 82-103.

Perloff, R. M., & Shen, L. (2023). The third-person effect 40 years after Davison penned it: What we know and where we should traverse. *Mass Communication and Society*, 26(3), 384-413.

Week 11 (11/18): Media Cultivation, Personality and Aggression, and “Dangerous” Content

Discussants: Adriana Loeberl, Bengisu Simsek

Nabi, R. L., & Riddle, K. (2008). Personality traits, television viewing, and the cultivation effect. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(3), 327-348.

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2009). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material and sexual satisfaction: A longitudinal study. *Human Communication Research*, 35(2), 171-194.

Oliver, M. B., & Raney, A. A. (2011). Entertainment as pleasurable and meaningful: Identifying hedonic and eudaimonic motivations for entertainment consumption. *Journal of Communication*, 61(5), 984-1004.

Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Signorielli, N. (2015). Yesterday's new cultivation, tomorrow. *Mass Communication and Society*, 18(5), 674-699.

Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2018). Media violence and the general aggression model. *Journal of Social Issues*, 74(2), 386-413.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Bushman, *Aggression*. Chap. 8; Carver, *Personality*, Chap. 20

Week 12 (11/25): Communication Mediation and Social Influence: Untangling Effects

Discussants: Maria Pettit, Ji Soo Choi

Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature*, 489(7415), 295-298.

Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, communication & society*, 18(5), 524-538.

Shah, D. V., McLeod, D. M., Rojas, H., Cho, J., Wagner, M. W., & Friedland, L. A. (2017). Revising the communication mediation model for a new political communication ecology. *Human Communication Research*, 43(4), 491-504.

In Finkel & Baumeister (2019), Cialdini & Griskevicius, *Social Influence*. Chap. 7

Yamamoto, M., & Morey, A. C. (2019). Incidental news exposure on social media: A campaign communication mediation approach. *Social Media+ Society*, 5(2), 2056305119843619.

Valenzuela, S., Halpern, D., Katz, J. E., & Miranda, J. P. (2019). The paradox of participation versus misinformation: Social media, political engagement, and the spread of misinformation. *Digital Journalism*, 7(6), 802-823.

Week 13 (12/2): Class Paper presentations (May need to start early)

Week 14 (12/9): Class Paper presentations (May need to start early)

Three papers per hour – 12-15 minute presentation + Q&A