

# Mass Communication Theory

JRSM 7050-001

Fall 2025

Class meeting: Tuesday 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Location: Meeman Room 106

## Dr. Jasper Fessmann

**Office:** Meeman Journalism Building Room #330

**Office hours:** Monday: 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM; 2.30-4.00 PM

Wednesday: 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM; 2.30-4.00 PM

If you'd like to meet with me for the office hours listed, please first reach out via email or text (at 706.399.1079) prior to dropping by so I can make sure I'm available for you and not with another student or in a meeting. I'm also available via Team outside of the listed office hours upon request.

**Email:** jcfssmnn@memphis.edu

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

Key concepts and development of theories offered to explain operation and effects of mass communication media; multidiscipline overview of theories dealing with advertising, broadcasting, print, and public relations messages, media, and effects.

### Prerequisites

Graduate status.

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Baran, Stanley J. and Dennis, K. Davis (2021) *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations Ferment and Future* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford University Press (2021). ISBN: 978-0190942779 / 0190942770

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.:

American Psychological Association. (have access to this, available from McWherter Library)

Additional course readings will be available via Canvas. A tentative list of readings is included in the syllabus; course readings may be altered during the semester.

### Classroom Format

This is a graduate seminar with lectures and class discussion. Each week, we will discuss a new topic. Please note that failure to attend class or to actively take part – even if all your assignments are turned in on time and done acceptably - could significantly affect your final grade. Be sure you have **read the material BEFORE class** and come prepared to discuss it.

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.

3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JRSM 7050 – S01 [or JRSM 8050-001) to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

### Course Evaluation

The evaluation of coursework will be based on the student's performance in four major areas, each of which constitutes a proportion of the final grade. The area and allocations for each are as follows:

• Participation & Weekly Written Questions	20%
• 2x Reflection Papers	20%
• Midterm Theory Paper	20%
• Pre-Final Paper Presentation	10%
• Final Paper: Research Proposal	30%

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A = 89.5 - 100%

B = 80 - 89.49%

C = 70 - 79.49%

D = 60 - 69.49%

F = 0 - 59.49%

*Letter grades for this course will be based on the total average earned over the term.*

### COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

#### Weekly Written Questions & Active Participation in Seminar Discussions (20%):

Each week, you will write **3 questions concerning** the assigned readings for that week. You must upload your questions as a MS Word file (see Canvas' Assignments function) *by midnight of that Monday*. **Late submissions will not be accepted.**

This is a seminar class and each class meeting will be devoted to discussion of the readings in depth. You are expected to attend and actively participate in each class. So you will do a considerable amount of the talking. You must do all the readings before class, give it significant thought, and regularly contribute to the discussion at every meeting. **Attendance is absolutely mandatory** for graduate courses. For each unexcused absence, students will lose 20% of their participation grade. You count as absent if you are more than 10 minutes late. If you **miss more than 4 lectures unexcused**, you will **automatically fail** the class.

#### 2x Think-piece Essays (20% total)

The purpose of the think pieces is to allow you to critically analyze one or more readings for that week's seminar. DO NOT just summarize the readings. I expect you to show your reaction to the reading(s) by critiquing the major argument and theoretical or empirical approaches. You must clearly express your opinion about the reading by discussing why you agree or disagree with the author(s). You need to also offer suggestions as to what the author(s) could do better to improve his/her argument. Each essay must be at least four-page long, double-spaced, 12-point font, and 1 inch-margins. Don't forget to put your name and page numbers in the paper. The essays are **due by 11:00 am on the day of the class**. Late submissions will not be accepted. Please upload your paper as a MS Word file via Canvas.

### Mid-Term Theory Paper Assignment [20%]

Write a paper that explicates the core concepts of a mass communications theory or paradigm. The three-fold purpose of the paper is to (a) define and justify mass communication theory, (b) trace its development and ongoing debates, and (c) advance an argument about theory.

- The paper should be 5 to 7 double-spaced pages, excluding references.
- It is a summary paper, not an original research study. This is not a full-blown paper, so no title page or abstract is needed. Start the first page with the title on the top and start the paper on the next (double-space) line.
- The paper is an overview about the social sciences and mass communication; it is not discipline-specific (advertising, public relations, etc.).
- The paper will summarize what you have learned from the readings and class discussion, so you won't have many sources. Five is sufficient. You may consult other sources beyond those assigned, but you are not required to do so.
- Use primary sources whenever possible. However, secondary sources are OK for these topical papers. However, the paper should use only academic, peer-reviewed sources if at all possible.
- Cite all of your sources, but minimize citing class lectures. Published sources are always better than unpublished ones, and published academic sources are best.
- The paper must be written in APA (7th edition) style.
- Submit the paper as a Word document.

### Final Assignment: Research Prospectus (30%) & PPT Paper-Idee Presentation [10%]

You will write a research proposal. In the prospectus, you will briefly discuss your research question, the relevant literature, theoretical argument, and research design. In other words, your 8–10-page essay must clearly present what exactly you are writing on and what your completed research paper will look like. Your prospectus must be *at least 8 pages long* (double-spaced) and include *at least 8 major academic sources* (i.e., academic books and journal articles). You must upload your proposals as a MS Word file. I will accept late research proposals, but it will incur a stiff penalty. For each day late, 20% will be deducted from the grade. You will also give a 6-8 minute in-class presentation of your proposal and receive feedback from your classmates.

### Assignment Guidelines

- Use 12pt. Times New Roman font. Pages should have 1-inch margins all around. No bold or italicized type should dominate the page. Tabs should be no more than 1/4".
- Write in business-communication style. Do not use first-person unless the assignment specifically asks for your perspective and avoid passive voice when possible.
- When you use sources use APA citation and reference style.
- Proofread and spell check your paper before turning it in. Be sure to watch out for grammar and spelling errors. As writing is a critical public relations skill, points will be deducted for submissions that are poorly written and contain grammatical and spelling errors.

### Contacting me

All correspondence regarding the class needs to be addressed to [jcfssmnn@memphis.edu](mailto:jcfssmnn@memphis.edu). Please include in any email the class designation STRM 7050 so that I know which class you are writing about. During weekdays I will usually respond to emails within 24-48 hours. If you have not

received an answer after two days, please resend the email with a note that you are resending it. I will not respond on weekends but will address the concerns the following Monday.

## Course Information

### Quality of Work

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of strategic media is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points. I expect your work to be good and original, meaning it's yours. If you quote anything or get information from any other source, it should be fully cited. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources.

### Chat GPT / AI

You must obtain permission from the instructor before using ChatGPT or other AI tools to assist with assignments in this course. Once permission is granted, AI may only be used as directed. Assignment submissions may run through AI detection software. Unauthorized use may result in a failing grade or a request to resubmit an assignment. Be prepared to submit any prompts you used for assistance with your assignment as well as the original ChatGPT output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work.

### Repetition of Courses and Coursework

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student's online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the resume and logo).

### Questions about Grades

If you would like to ask about a grade, please make an appointment to meet with me outside of class time, as I will not discuss grades via email or during class. Additionally, you are responsible for tracking your grade and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your overall grade. Meeting early and often can help both parties involved find ways to improve student-instructor understanding and quality of work.

### Plagiarism & AI misuse policy

First offense: Redo for 50%, warning

Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo

Third offense: Automatic class fail

Final assignment, regardless of which offense: Automatic 0 on assignment

**\*\*Any instances of plagiarism may result in a note being added to your department file.**

### Late work

Strategic media is a job in which deadlines matter (as in your work is dead-on-arrival/worthless if not on time). I will **deduct 10% per day** that your **work is late** (0 after 10 days even if you still submit) – this ends with the beginning of finals weeks at which point no late work will be accepted at all. Waiting until the end of the semester and submitting everything at once is NOT an option.

If at any point you feel yourself falling behind, please reach out to me as soon as possible so we can work together to make a plan for you to get caught up. I'm happy to help each and every student catch up and not fall behind, but that help requires you to take on the responsibility of communication. If I don't know, I can't help you.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### *Week 1: August 26: Social Science Research & Method*

Readings (on Canvas):

- Thomas Kuhn (1974): *Objectivity, Value Judgement and Theory Choice*
- Pamela J. Shoemaker (2004): *The Nature of Science*
- [PhD only] Newman et al. (2008): *The Seven Deadly Sins of Communication Research*

### *Week 2: September 2: Mass Communication & Theory*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 1 "Understanding and Evaluating Mass Communication Theory"
- Chaffee & Berger, (1987): *What Communication Scientist Do*
- McQuail's *Media and Mass Communication Theory* – Introduction
- [PhD only] Chaffee & Metzger (2001): *The End of Mass Communication?*

### *Week 3: September 9: 4 Mass Communication Trends, Mass Society & Propaganda*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 2 "The First Trend in Mass Communication Theory"
- Bryant & Miron (2004): *Theory and Research in Mass Communication*
- Patrick & Thrall (2007): *Beyond Hegemony: Classical Propaganda Theory and Presidential Communication Strategy After the Invasion of Iraq*
- [PhD only] Neuman & Guggenheim (2011): *The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Model of Cumulative Research*

Theory Presentations:

- *Propaganda theories of Harold Lasswell and Walter Lippmann*
- *John Dewey's Views on Propaganda & Society*

### *Week 4: September 16: Normative Theories*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 3 "Normative Theories of Mass Communication"
- Nyre (2009): *Normative Media Research: Moving from the Ivory Tower to the Control Tower*
- Kent, & Li (2020): *Toward a normative social media theory for public relations*
- [PhD only] Oluwasola (2020): *The Normative Theories of the Press in the Digital Age*

- [Optional] Walth et al. (2019): *A new reporting approach for journalistic impact Bringing together investigative reporting and solutions journalism*
- [Optional] Josephi (2005): *Journalism in the global age: Between Normative and Empirical*

Theory Presentations:

- *Libertarianism & Marketplace of Ideas*
- *Development, Revolutionary, Authoritarian and Communist Theories*
- *Social Responsibility of the Press*
- *Solutions Journalism*

#### *Week 5: September 23, Media Effects Trend*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 4 *"The Emergence of the Media Effects Trend"*
- Baran and Davis, Chapter 5 *"The Consolidation of the Media Effects Trend"*
- Valkenburg et al. (2016): *Media Effects: Theory and Research*
- Boulianne (2019): *Revolution in the making? Social media effects across the globe*
- [PhD only] Vargo, et al. (2017): *The Agenda-Setting Power of Fake News*

Theory Presentations:

- *Systems Theory of Communication*
- *Agenda Setting Theory*

#### *Week 6: September 30: Critical cultural Trend*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 6 *"The Emergence of the Critical Cultural Trend in North America"*,
- ]Horkheimer & Adorno (2002): *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*
- Chen (2013): *Don't Call Me That: A Techno-Feminist Critique of the Term Mommy Blogger*
- [PhD only] Hall (1989): *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*
- [PhD only] Fischman (2006): *Rethinking Marshall McLuhan: Reflections on a Media Theorist*

Theory Presentations:

- *Frankfurt School Theory of Media*
- *Stuart Hall's Media Theory*
- *Marshall McLuhan's Medium is the Message*
- *Feminists Critical Cultural Theory*

#### *Week 7: October 7: Social Learning & Kinderculture*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 7 *"Theories of Media and Social Learning"*,
- Baran and Davis, Chapter 8 *"Theories of Media and Human Development"*
- Ferguson (2013): *Violent Video Games and the Supreme Court Lessons for the Scientific Community in the Wake of Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association*
- Roedder (1981): *Age Differences in Children's Responses to Television Advertising: An Information-Processing Approach*
- [PhD only] Rosenstock et al. (1988): *Social Learning Theory and the Health Belief Model*
- [PhD only] Anderson & Dill (2000): *Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life*

Theory Presentations:

- *Catharsis Theory*

- *Social Cognitive & Social Learning Theory in Mass Communication*
- *General Aggression Theory*
- *Kinderculture*

*Week 8: October 14: Fall Break, No class!*

*Week 9: October 21: Audience Theories: Uses and Reception*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 9 “Audience Theories: Uses and Reception”
- Ruggiero (2000): *Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century*
- Quan-Haase (2012): *Is the Uses and Gratifications Approach Still Relevant in a Digital Society? Theoretical and Methodological Applications to Social Media*
- [PhD only] Huang & Su (2018): *Motives for Instagram Use and Topics of Interest among Young Adults*

Theory Presentations:

- *Uses & Gratifications Theory*
- *Entertainment Theory*

Assignment:

- **Theory Paper due Sunday October 27.**

*Week 10: October 28: Media Cognition and Information Processing*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 10 “Theories of Media Cognition and Information Processing”, Canvas articles
- Perloff (2017): *Processing Persuasive Communications [Book Chapter]*
- Hamby et al. (2016): *A Conceptual Framework of Narrative Persuasion*
- [PhD only] Petty et al. (2005): *To Think or Not to Think: Exploring Two Routes to Persuasion*

Theory Presentations:

- *Schema Theory*
- *Elaboration Likelihood Model*
- *Narrative Persuasion*
- *Neuroscience Perspective*

*Week 11: November 4: Media Theories on Knowledge, Information and Perception of Social Issues*

Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 11 “Media Theories on Knowledge, Information and Perception of Social Issues”
- Hwang & Jeong (2009): *Revisiting the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis: A Meta-Analysis of 35 Years of Research*
- Coombs et al. (2014). *New Directions in Agenda-Setting Theory and Research*
- [PhD only] Vargo et al. (2017): *The agenda-setting power of fake news: A big data analysis of the online media landscape from 2014 to 2016*

Theory Presentations:

- *Knowledge Gap Hypothesis*
- *Information/Innovation Diffusion Theory*

- *Social Marketing & Public Interest Communications Theory*
- *Grunig's Strategic Management Function of PR and Situational Theory of Publics*
- *Agenda Setting, Priming, and Agenda Building*
- *Spiral of Silence*

#### *Week 12: November 11: Media Theories on Community and Everyday Culture*

##### Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 12 "*Media Theories on Community and Everyday Culture*"
- Potter (2010): *The State of Media Literacy*
- Jamieson & Romer (2014): *Violence in Popular U.S. Prime Time TV Dramas and the Cultivation of Fear: A Time Series Analysis*
- [PhD only] Cavalcante (2018): *Affect, emotion, and media audiences: the case of resilient reception*
- [PhD only] Mena (2019): *Principles and Boundaries of Fact-checking: Journalists' Perceptions*

##### Theory Presentations:

- Cultivation of Fear
- Active Inoculation Theory
- Media Literacy
- Fact Checking

#### *Week 13: November 18: Media and Culture: Making Meaning in a Social World*

##### Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 13 "*Media and Culture: Making Meaning in a Social World*"
- *McQuail's Media and Mass Communication Theory – V Media-Society Theories*
- Benford & Snow (2000): *Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment*
- [PhD only] Saleem et al. (2021): *Social Constructivism: A New Paradigm in Teaching and Learning Environment*
- [PhD] Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007): *Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models*

##### Theory Presentations:

- *Symbolic Interactionism*
- *Social Construction Theory of Media*
- *Pragmatism*
- *Prospect Theory*
- *Framing Theory*

##### Assignment:

- **Paper-Idee Presentation due Sunday**

#### *Week 14: November 25: Paper-Idee Presentations (PPT)*

##### Readings & Theory Presentations: Non

#### *Week 15: December 2: Mediatization theory & Concluding Remarks*

##### Readings:

- Baran and Davis, Chapter 14: "*Media Cultures Theories: Commodification of Culture and mediatization*"
- Bolin (2018): *Media Use and the Extended Commodification of the Lifeworld*



- Finemann (2011) *Mediatization theory and digital media*
- [PhD] Cook et. al. (2017) *Neutralizing misinformation through inoculation: Exposing misleading argumentation techniques reduces their influence.*

Theory Presentation:

- *Commodification of Culture*
- *Mediatization Theory*
- *Mis- & Disinformation*
- *Active Inoculation*

*Finals: Thursday December 11:*

Assignment:

- ***Final Papers due at midnight.***

## JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

### Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

### Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

### Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

### AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

### Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

### Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

### Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

### **Online SETEs**

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the “Student Pages” dropdown menu and select “My Resources” and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

### **Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.