PMCb1010 Media effects
(Syllabus for Spring Term 2025)

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Classes: U35, Tuesday, 2:00-3:40 PM

Course Description

The course acquaints the students with the media effects theory and research, emphasizing the effects of mediated political communication. The course content is divided into three thematic modules. The first introduces research on the effects of media as a distinct tradition in communication research. It provides a brief historical overview of paradigm shifts in media effects research, and it introduces basic concepts, models, theories, and methods used in media effects research. The second module narrows the scope on political communication effects, and it surveys different types of effects on individuals, such as effects on opinion formation and change cognitive and behavioral effects, concluding with theoretical models proposing the conditionality of those effects. The final module focuses on the effects of political communication on political systems and institutions, such as political polarization or mediatization of politics. The focus will be on learning how to understand the effects of political communication rather than on memorizing a catalog of facts. Key insights relevant to professional practice will be emphasized.

Course aims

The course intends to develop students' understanding of political communication effects.

Learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, learners will be able to:
- Explain key concepts and theories of media effects and illustrate them using historical or contemporary examples.
- Describe and categorize specific effects of political communication.
- Identify audiences most susceptible to political communication effects.
- Apply core media effects theories and concepts to analyze various forms of mediated political communication.
- Critically evaluate different forms of mediated political communication, considering their potential impact on political systems.

Course Requirements

Students will be evaluated based on assignments and the final exam. The detailed breakdown of the assignments is listed below:
A) Open book short online test (10x)
B) Position paper (3x)
C) Final exam

Evaluation criteria and grading scale

Grade composition

Assignment	% of Grade	Points
Open book short online tests	10 %	10
Position paper	40 %	30
Final exam	50 %	40

To pass, students are supposed to get at least 50% of points for each type of assignment.

Grading scale
A: 73-80
B: 65-72
C: 57-64
D: 49-56
E: 41-48
F: 0-40

Teaching and learning methods

Classes combine lectures, discussions, and activities in pairs or small groups. Students are encouraged to ask questions and present arguments and alternative viewpoints during classes. Outside classes, students complete required readings (before class), work on position papers, and prepare for the final exam.

Study literature and material

The study literature is divided into required and recommended. The required literature comprises less demanding chapters from textbooks or academic encyclopedia entries. It provides basic knowledge on the subject and is a prerequisite for participation in the class. Completing required readings is verified through the semester with *Open book short online tests.*
The recommended readings extend the basic knowledge, primarily consisting of empirically oriented studies related to the class topic. These studies are helpful resources, particularly for *Position Paper 3.*
When possible, the literature will be provided by the instructor and made available in study materials via IS. The literature is also available in the library or through the E-resources of FSS Central Library. Occasionally, additional materials and resources may be assigned. These will be made available via IS.

Assessment methods

A) *Open book short online test* (10x) – assess if a student completed required reading before classes. Tests administered via the Information System take place before each class with the required reading. Each test is rated 0 to 1 points. More detailed information about the administration of *open-book short online tests* will be provided by the instructor.

B) *Position papers* (3x) – these assignments develop and evaluate advanced academic skills, including analysis, argumentation, interpretation, and application. Each position paper must be completed individually. Before using AI tools, please review Masaryk University's guidelines on AI usage in academic settings. This course prohibits using AI tools to produce the resulting content of a paper. However, students are encouraged to use AI tools to improve the use of language. For inquiries related to course content, students should rely on scientific databases rather than AI tools to ensure the validity of the information and proper sourcing. The instructor will provide detailed guidelines on the position papers, including grading criteria. Specific topics for all three position papers will be outlined in the study materials available via IS.

C) *The final exam* – assesses recall and understanding of basic concepts and key ideas presented in the course. It consists of 20 mainly close-ended questions. The final test is administered in the PC Lab. The instructor will provide more detailed information about the final test and its administration.

Course Contract

The syllabus serves as a contract between the instructor and the students. Every student is responsible for reading the entire syllabus at the beginning of the semester and complying with its terms. The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus during the course. Any changes will be made in writing, and students will be updated about them by email without delay.

Academic Integrity and Classroom Code of Conduct

Students are expected to act in accordance with the Masaryk University standards for academic integrity. Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. It includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification or deception. Such acts include but are not limited to plagiarism, cheating on examinations, pop quizzes, or assignments, and will not be tolerated in this class and dealt with according to standard University procedure.

Office Consultation

Students interested in office consultation are welcome in the office 5.45 during my consultation hours by prior arrangement by email.

Personal Communication Devices Policy

Students are expected to refrain from using personal communication devices during class time for purposes other than class-related academic purposes.

Brief course outline

Week 1	18.02.	Introduction to the course
Week 2	25.02.	Introduction to scientific study of media effects
Week 3	04.03.	Scientific (r)evolutions in media effects research: overview of media effects research history
Week 4	11.03.	Narrowing the scope: Classification of political communications effects
Week 5	18.03.	Effects on political opinions formation and change
Week 6	25.03.	Cognitive political effects: Agenda-setting, Priming, Framing, and Knowledge Gain
Week 7	01.04.	Effects on perception of political system: Systemic Perceptions, Causal attribution, Climate of Opinion
Week 8	08.04.	Day of the Faculty
Week 9	15.04.	Behavioural Effects on Voter Turnout, Citizen Engagement, Civic Participation and Socialization
Week 10	22.04.	Conditionality of political communications effects
Week 11	29.04.	Effects on political polarization
Week 12	06.05.	Mediatization effects on politics
Week 13	13.05.	Summarization of the course

Course outline

Week 1	**Introduction to the course**
	Introduction to the course content and organization.
Week 2	**Introduction to scientific study of media effects**
	Key concepts*: media effects, causality and correlation, media effects typology, media use/exposure, information filtering, processing, and meaning making*
	Key questions
	What is a media effect?
	How can we conceptualize media effects?
	What types of media effects can we distinguish?
	Key readings
	Chapters "What Is a Media Effect?" and "Media Influence" in POTTER, W. J. (2012). *Media Effects* (Pp. 33-63). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
	Additional readings
	SPARKS, G. G. (2015). Chapters 1 "A Scientific Approach to the Study of Media Effects" and Chapter 2 "Scientific Methods in Media Effects Research" in *Media effects research: A basic overview* (Pp. 1-53). Australia: Wadsworth.
Week 3	**Scientific revolutions in media effects research: overview of media effects research history**
	Key concepts: *strong media effects, magic bullet model, hypodermic needle model, limited-effects paradigm, two-step flow of communication, selective exposure to communication, the rediscovery of strong media effects, cultivation theory, conditional effects paradigm, transactional models*
	Key questions
	How has the scientific understanding of media effects evolved over time?
	Which theories turned out to be most prevalent, and what are their main ideas on media effects?
	Key readings
	SPARKS, Glenn Grayson, 2015. Chapter 3 "A Brief History of Media Effects Research". Pp. 54-75 in *Media effects research: A basic overview*. Fifth edition. Australia: Wadsworth. ISBN 978-1305077478.
	Additional readings
	NEUENDORF, K. A., & JEFFRES, L. W. (2017). Media effects: Accounts, nature, and history of. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, 1-13.
	BENNETT, W. L., & IYENGAR, S. (2008). A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication. *Journal of Communication, 58*(4), 707–731. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x
	VALKENBURG, P. & BETH OLIVER, M. (2020). "Media Effects Theories". In OLIVER, M. B., RANEY, A. A., & BRYANT, J. (Eds.). Media effects (pp. 16-36). Routledge.
Week 4	**Narrowing the scope: Classification of political communications effects**

	Key concepts: *political communication, typologies of political communication effects, democracy-related media use outcomes*
	Key questions
	What political effects does the media have?
	What are the effects of political communication?
	How can we conceptualize and classify those effects?
	Key readings
	Chapter 9 "The Effects of News and Political Content" In SPARKS, G. G. (2015). *Media effects research: A basic overview* (pp. 225-252). Australia: Wadsworth.
	MCLEOD, D. M., KOSICKI, G. M., & MCLEOD, J. M. (2009). Political communication effects. In *Media effects* (pp. 244-267). Routledge.
	Additional readings
	SCHULZ, W. (2015). Political Communication. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), T*he International Encyclopedia of Communication* (pp. 1–13). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecp051.pub2
	STRÖMBERG, D. (2015). Media and Politics. *Annual Review of Economics, 7*(1), 173–205. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-041101
	TSFATI, Y., & WALTER, N. (2019). The world of news and politics. In Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research.
Week 5	**Effects on political opinions formation and change**
	Key concepts: *attitude, attitude change, functional approach to attitude change, elaboration likelihood model, factors influencing the persuasion process, effects of political campaigning on voting intentions and partisan attitudes*
	Key questions
	What influence does political and media communication have on attitude change?
	Do political campaigns matter?
	Which factors determine the effectiveness of persuasion?
	Key readings
	Chapter 8 "Persuasive Effects of the Media" In SPARKS, G. G. (2015). *Media effects research: A basic overview* (pp. 189-224). Australia: Wadsworth.
	Additional readings
	Chapters "Studying political campaigns and their effects" and "Do political campaigns matter? Yes, but it depends" In FARRELL, D. M., & SCHMITT-BECK, R. (Eds.). (2003). *Do political campaigns matter?: campaign effects in elections and referendums* (pp. 1-21, 183-193) Routledge.
	KATZ, D. (1966). Attitude formation and public opinion. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *367*(1), 150-162.
	O'KEEFE, D. J. (2016). *Persuasion: Theory and Research*. SAGE Publications. [In particular chapters 1, 8-12]
	PETTY, R. E., BRINOL, P., PRIESTER, J. R. (2009). Mass media attitude change: implications of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In BRYANT, J. & OLIVER, M. B. (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (pp.125-164). Routledge.
Week 6	**Cognitive political effects: Agenda-setting, Priming, Framing, and Knowledge Gain**

	Key concepts: *agenda setting and agenda building, media salience, priming, media framing, political knowledge gain*
	Key questions How does the media shape our understanding and interpretations of politics and social events? Does the consumption of news increase citizens' political knowledge? Do people learn about politics from social media?
	Key readings MCCOMBS, M. (2005). A Look at Agenda-setting: Past, present and future. *Journalism Studies, 6*(4), 543–557. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500250438 DE VREESE, C. H. (2005). News framing: Theory and typology. *Information design journal, 13*(1), 51-62. https://doi.org/10.1075/idjdd.13.1.06vre
	Additional readings Chapter "Knows Little? Information and Choice" In NORRIS, P. (2003). *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies* (pp. 208-233). Cambridge Univ. Press. ENTMAN, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of communication, 43*(4), 51-58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x EVELAND, W. P., HAYES, A. F., SHAH, D. V., & KWAK, N. (2005). Understanding the Relationship Between Communication and Political Knowledge: A Model Comparison Approach Using Panel Data. *Political Communication, 22*(4), 423–446. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600500311345 AMSALEM, E., & ZOIZNER, A. (2023). Do people learn about politics on social media? A meta-analysis of 76 studies. *Journal of Communication, 73*(1), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqac034
Week 7	**Effects on perception of political system: Systemic Perceptions, Causal attribution, Climate of Opinion** **Key concepts:** *media malaise, spiral of cynicism, strategy framing, spiral of salience, climate of opinion* **Key questions** Should journalists be blamed for spreading political cynicism and scepticism among citizens? What are the dynamics of public opinion formation? What is the role of media in shaping a climate of opinion? **Key readings** Schuck, A. R. T. (2017). Media Malaise and Political Cynicism. In P. Rössler, C. A. Hoffner, & L. Zoonen (Eds.), The International Encyclopaedia of Media Effects (pp. 1–19). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0066 **Additional readings** STRÖMBÄCK, J., & SHEHATA, A. (2010). Media malaise or a virtuous circle? Exploring the causal relationships between news media exposure, political news attention and political interest. *European Journal of Political Research, 49*(5), 575–597. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.01913.x

BOUKES, M. (2022). Episodic and Thematic Framing Effects on the Attribution of Responsibility: The Effects of Personalized and Contextualized News on Perceptions of Individual and Political Responsibility for Causing the Economic Crisis. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 27*(2), 374–395. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220985241

NEWTON, K. (2006). May the weak force be with you: The power of the mass media in modern politics. *European Journal of Political Research, 45*(2), 209–234. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00296.x

STRÖMBÄCK, J., DJERF-PIERRE, M., & SHEHATA, A. (2016). A Question of Time? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Relationship between News Media Consumption and Political Trust. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 21*(1), 88–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161215613059

PATTERSON, T. E. (2015). Game versus Substance in Political News (K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson, Eds.; Vol. 1). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.43

Week 8	**Day of the Faculty**
Week 9	**Behavioural Effects on Voter Turnout, Citizen Engagement, Civic Participation and Socialization** **Key concepts:** voter turnout, citizen engagement, civic participation, socialization **Key questions** Does media coverage of the election campaign have an effect on turnout? Do Internet and social media use affect engagement and participation? **Key readings** NORRIS, P. (2003). *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies*. Cambridge Univ. Press. [Chapter "Stays Home?Political Mobilization", pp. 255-278] **Additional readings** EKMAN, J., & AMNÅ, E. (2012). Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology. *Human Affairs, 22*(3), 283–300. https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-012-0024-1 BOULIANNE, S. (2009). Does Internet Use Affect Engagement? A Meta-Analysis of Research. *Political Communication, 26*(2), 193–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600902854363 BOULIANNE, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(5), 524–538. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542 BOULIANNE, S. (2020). Twenty Years of Digital Media Effects on Civic and Political Participation. *Communication Research, 47*(7), 947–966. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218808186
Week 10	**Conditionality of political communications effects** **Key concepts:** *moderation, mediation, OSOR model, political sophistication and involvement, partisanship, worldviews and values, attention, information-processing strategies* **Key questions**

To the extent that political communication has some effects, does it always have the same effects on everyone and under any circumstances?
Which factors play a role?

Key readings

OLIVER, M. B. (2009). "Individual Differences in Media Effects" In BRYANT, J. & ZILLMANN, D. (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (pp. 507-524). Routledge.

Additional readings
LEE, N. (2017). Communication Mediation Model. In P. Rössler, C. A. Hoffner, & L. Zoonen (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects* (pp. 1–9). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0093
DE VREESE, C. H., & BOOMGAARDEN, H. G. (2006). Media Message Flows and Interpersonal Communication: The Conditional Nature of Effects on Public Opinion. *Communication Research, 33*(1), 19–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650205283100
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. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650217713066
PARK, C. S., & GIL DE ZÚÑIGA, H. (2021). Learning about Politics from Mass Media and Social Media: Moderating Roles of Press Freedom and Public Service Broadcasting in 11 Countries. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 33*(2), 315–335. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edaa021

Week 11	**Effects on political polarization**

Key concepts: *echo chambers, balkanization, polarization*

Key questions
Can the media contribute to a deepening of political cleavages in society?
Is there an association between the platformization of the public sphere and increased political polarization?
How did the emergence of communication echo chambers and the balkanization of media audiences influence the political system?

Key readings
PRIOR, M. (2013). Media and Political Polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science, 16*(1), 101–127. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-100711-135242

Additional readings
MACKOVÁ, A., NOVOTNÁ, M., ČEJKOVÁ, L., & HRBKOVÁ, L. (2024). One way or another? Discussion disagreement and attitudinal homogeneity on social networking sites as pathways to polarization in Czechia. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 21*(1), 54–68.
https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2023.2202650
Chapter "Polarization" In SUNSTEIN, C. R. (2017). *#Republic: Divided democracy in the age of social media* (pp. 59-97). Princeton University Press.
SHEHATA, A., EKSTRÖM, M., & TRYGGVASON, P. O. (2022). Selective Exposure and New Political Cleavages: Media Use and Ideological Reinforcement Over Time. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19401612221112003. https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221112003

Week 12	**Mediatization effects on politics**
	Key concepts: *mediatization, media logic, political logic, personalization and spectacularization of politics, infotainment,*
	Key questions What is the media logic? How does the media logic influence politics? How does mediatization affect people's perceptions of a political system? Should mediatization be considered a challenge to democracy? Why?
	Key readings MAZZOLENI, G. (2008). Mediatization of Politics. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecm062
	Additional readings ESSER, F., MATTHES, J. (2013). Mediatization effects on political news, political actors, political decisions, and political audiences. In KRIESI, H. et al. (Eds.), *Democracy in the age of globalization and mediatization* (pp. 177-201). Springer. MAZZOLENI, G., & SCHULZ, W. (1999). 'Mediatization' of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy? *Political Communication, 16*(3), 247–261. https://doi.org/10.1080/105846099198613 ESSER, F. (2013). "Mediatization as a challenge: Media logic versus political logic" In KRIESI, H. et al. (Eds.), *Democracy in the age of globalization and mediatization* (pp.155-176). Springer. STREET, J. (2005). Politics Lost, Politics Transformed, Politics Colonised? Theories of the Impact of Mass Media. *Political Studies Review, 3*(1), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-9299.2005.00017.x
Week 13	**Summarization of the course. Q&A session.**