

**Global Digital Activism**  
2018  
(Web version)

Instructors:

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**Course overview**

This upper-level seminar examines the forms, causes, and consequences of global digital activism, defined broadly as activism associated with the use of digital media technologies (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones). The goal is to provide students with a tool-kit for analyzing digital activism and to develop a critical understanding of the nature of contemporary activism and its implications for global social change. Major cases to be examined include the "Occupy Wall Street" and "Black Lives Matter" movements in the US, the Arab Spring, the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong, internet activism in non-democratic contexts, feminist activism. Students are required to produce a research proposal on a contemporary case of global digital activism as their final assignment, which may be completed individually or in small groups (depending on the size of the class).

Part of class time will be devoted to developing research skills that students will be able to apply to other classes and research topics beyond digital activism. Depending on students' familiarity with different aspects of the research process, we will review citation practices, how to avoid plagiarism, how to select appropriate scholarly and non-scholarly sources, how to find information about research topics, how to select good research questions, etc.

**Required readings**

All the required readings will be available through Canvas or placed on Course Reserve at the Library. We will be using a combination of peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and (multi)media pieces.

**Grading/assessment**

Class participation: 15%

Work-in-progress presentation of case study: 25%

Final project: 40%

5 reading quizzes: 20%

**Class Participation.** I expect you to be a full participant in the class: attendance is thus required. You can miss up to two classes for any reason (I don't need an excuse). After 2 absences, I will start to deduct points from your participation grade; please use your missed days wisely. Just attending all classes will not translate into the highest participation grade. I also expect you to do the readings in advance and to come to class prepared to discuss and consider other opinions and points of view. And even more importantly, I expect you to be engaged, to participate and to challenge each other, but also to be kind and respectful towards your fellow students and myself.

**Research Proposal.** The final project for this class is a research proposal. Depending on the size of the class, the research proposals will either be prepared individually (10-12 double spaced pages) or in small groups (12-15 double spaced pages). The research proposal should explain how you would study empirically a case of global digital activism of your choosing. You will be given more details in class about what should be in

the proposal. In general, I am looking for a good explanation and contextualization of the case you chose, a discussion of relevant literature about global digital activism, a coherent research question and an explanation of the research methods you would employ to study the case. You will not have to conduct the actual study, just explain how you would do it. The research proposal should build on the work you do for the in-class presentation.

\*In-class activities will help students learn how to think about designing research about global digital activism, in ways that are applicable to other classes and research topics beyond digital activism. These non-graded class activities are marked by an asterisk in the syllabus. Recommended readings for these activities are listed at the end of this syllabus.

**Work in progress presentations.** We will use a session of the course for in-class student presentations. Each of you will prepare an 8 - 10 minutes presentation (PowerPoint not mandatory, but allowed – and you can also be creative!), which will be followed by a short discussion with the class. In this presentation, you should introduce the case of global digital activism that you have decided to study. You should be able to tell us who they are, what they stand for, what they do, how they use digital media, and what is the social and political context in which they operate. You should also explain why you think they are worth studying. In the discussion, the class will be engaged in asking questions to the presenters, but also suggest potential research questions or interesting angles that can be explored in relation to that particular case study. Please note that a part of your grade for this component will also depend on how well you interact with other students' presentations and whether you offer some constructive feedback and/or thoughtful questions. The goal is to get everyone to be involved and brainstorm potential research projects together.

**Reading quizzes.** Throughout the session you will complete 5 short quizzes (multiple choice, fill in the blank) on the readings to be completed for that session (e.g. the quiz on Wednesday will cover the readings assigned for that Wednesday). These quizzes are not there to trick you, but rather to make sure that we are all covering the basic elements of the readings. *If you thoughtfully complete the readings, you will do well on the quizzes!* I will not count the lowest quiz score towards your final grade.

**Communicating with the instructor.** Get in touch with me via Canvas and/or via email. I will do my best to answer your emails within 24 hours on weekdays. If you don't hear back from me after 48 hours, write again. I usually don't respond to emails between 5 pm and 8 am and during weekends. Also make sure you are signed up for notifications from Canvas. You can adjust the settings in Canvas by going to Account > Notifications. It is crucial that you get instant notifications for Announcements (that are sent out to the entire class) and Conversations (i.e. messages that can be specifically directed at you); I strongly suggest you also allow notifications for other activities on Canvas.

**Academic integrity.** I expect students to follow the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity. Visit [http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai\\_codeofacademicintegrity.html](http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html) for more information. We will discuss good citation practices and how to avoid plagiarism when we talk about the research process in class.

### **Electronic devices policy**

We all live with and through our electronic devices. Unfortunately, [academic research](#) shows that laptops make it harder for people to concentrate in the classroom, and this applies not just to students using laptops but also to students sitting behind and next to those using laptops. We will have a laptop policy

discussion the first day of class and decide as a group how to handle the issue. If any of you feel that you need a laptop to succeed in the class and/or laptop use is part of your disabilities accommodations, please talk to me (in private, too).

No phones, please.

### **Accessibility**

Penn provides accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and been approved by the office of [Student Disabilities Services](#) (SDS). Please come talk to me about your accommodations and your needs.

If you have not yet contacted SDS, and would like to request accommodations or have questions, you can make an appointment by calling SDS 215.573.9235. The office is located in the [Weingarten Learning Resources Center](#) at Stouffer Commons 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300. All services are confidential.

### **Resources on Campus**

I am happy to help you navigate the resources that are available to you on Penn's Campus, just come talk to me. In addition to Student Disabilities Services (see above), here are some others:

The Office of Learning Resources at the [Weingarten Learning Resources Center](#) offers individualized instruction and a variety of workshops to guide Penn students towards more efficient and effective academic study skills and strategies. Professional staff provides free and confidential instruction in areas such as time/project management, academic reading and writing, exam preparation and test-taking strategies, and study strategies. The office is located in Stouffer Commons, 3702 Spruce Street. Stop by to use the study lounge or computer lab or to pick up self-help brochures and semester calendars. To schedule an appointment with a Learning Instructor, call (215) 573-9235 or visit in person.

The [Marks Family Writing Center](#) provides writing support to students. You can make an appointment or just show up for drop-in hours: check on the [website](#). The Writing Center is located at 3808 Walnut Street. You can call 215-573-2729.

[Counseling and Psychological Service for Students \(CAPS\)](#) offers a wide range of services including: individual and group counseling and therapy, crisis intervention, structured workshops, psychological testing, medication reviews, and consultation. Services are free to Penn students. What students discuss at CAPS remains private and confidential. CAPS is located at 3624 Market Street. You can call 215.898.7021 (including nights and weekends) or visit <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/caps/>.

[The Penn Women's Center](#) offers confidential crisis/options counseling as well as referrals related to a wide range of issues, including gender-based harassment, sexual violence, relationship violence discrimination, parenting issues. Walk-ins are welcome Monday-Friday 10am-4pm; appointments can be scheduled via email [vpul-pwc@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:vpul-pwc@pobox.upenn.edu) or phone 215-898-8611.

## Course plan

### Week 1

#### **Introduction to Comm270**

Gladwell, M. (2010) Small change: why the revolution will not be tweeted. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>

Shirky, C. (2010). The Political Power of Social Media. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media>

Gladwell, M. & Shirky, C. (2011). From Innovation to Revolution: Do Social Media Make Protests Possible? *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2011-01-19/innovation-revolution>

Wasik, Bill. (2011). Gladwell vs. Shirky: A year later, scoring the debate over social-media revolutions. *Wired*. <https://www.wired.com/2011/12/gladwell-vs-shirky/>

### Week 2

#### **What is global digital activism? Defining the terms**

Yang G (2016) Activism. In: Peters B (ed.), *Digital keywords: A vocabulary of information society and culture*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 1–17.

Vegh, S. (2003). Classifying forms of online activism: The case of cyberprotests against the World Bank. In M. McCaughey & M. D. Ayers (Eds.), *Cyberactivism: Online activism in theory and practice* (pp. 71–95). New York: Routledge.

Bennett, W. L. (2017). What is media activism? In V. W. Pickard & G. Yang (Eds.), *Media activism in the digital age* (pp. xiv–xvi). Routledge.

### Week 3 - READING QUIZ #1

#### **The long history of digital activism, or why we should care about the printing press**

McMillian, J. (2011). Introduction. In *Smoking typewriters: The Sixties underground press and the rise of alternative media in America* (pp. 1-12). New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Read one of the following:

Notes from Nowhere. (2003). Indymedia: Don't hate the media, be the media. In *We are everywhere: The irresistible rise of global anticapitalism* (pp. 228–243). London and New York: Verso.

or

Coyer, K. (2005). If it leads it bleeds: the participatory newsmaking of the Independent Media Centre. In W. De Jong, M. Shaw, & N. Stammers (Eds.), *Global activism global media* (pp. 165–178). London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.

## Week 4

### **Locating the Arab Spring**

Lim, M. (2012). Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 231–248. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01628.x>

Kraidy, M. (2016). *The naked blogger of Cairo: Creative insurgency in the Arab World*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press. Pages 3-21.

Zuckerman, E. (2015). Cute cats to the rescue? Participatory media and political expression. In D. Allen & J. Light (Eds.), *From voice to influence: understanding citizenship in a digital age* (pp. 131–154). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

*In class viewing: "The Square"*

## Week 5

### **Global indignation: Occupy Wall Street & Indignados**

Castells, M. (2012). Occupy Wall Street: Harvesting the salt of the earth. In *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*, pp. 156-191. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). Introduction. In *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*, pp. 1-17. Pluto Press.

Mattoni, A. (2013, February 14). Beyond Celebration: Toward a More Nuanced Assessment of Facebook's Role in Occupy Wall Street. <http://culanth.org/fieldsights/84-beyond-celebration-toward-a-more-nuanced-assessment-of-facebook-s-role-in-occupy-wall-street>

\*Research workshop part 1 & 2: Learning how to search for information about cases of global digital activism (through a current case) and how to approach the academic literature.

## Week 6 - READING QUIZ #2

### **Black Lives Matter**

Jackson, S. J., & Foucault Welles, B. (2016). #Ferguson is everywhere: initiators in emerging counterpublic networks. *Information Communication and Society*, 19(3), 397–418. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1106571>

Bonilla, Y., & Rosa, J. (2015). #Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States. *American Ethnologist*, 42(1), 4–17. <http://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12112>

\*Research workshop part 3: Turning potentially interesting topics into good research questions.

## Week 7

### **Methods & Ethics for global digital activism research**

*This class will run in a workshop seminar. Students will be able to choose one pair of readings,*

corresponding to a research method of their choosing. More information will be provided in Week 6.

Mandatory reading for all:

Hintz, A., & Milan, S. (2010). Social science is police science: Researching grass-roots activism. *International Journal of Communication*, 4, 837–844.

#### 1) Interviews

Croucher, S. M., & Cronn-Mills, D. (2014). Interviewing. In *Understanding Communication Research Methods: A Theoretical and Practical Approach* (pp. 155-167). Taylor & Francis.

Penney, J., & Dadas, C. (2013). (Re)Tweeting in the service of protest: Digital composition and circulation in the Occupy Wall Street movement. *New Media & Society*, 16(1), 74–90.

<http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813479593>

#### 2) Ethnography

Croucher, S. M., & Cronn-Mills, D. (2014). Ethnography. In *Understanding Communication Research Methods: A Theoretical and Practical Approach* (pp. 133-147). Taylor & Francis.

Dunbar-Hester, C. (2009). “Free the spectrum!” Activist encounters with old and new media technology.

*New Media & Society*, 11(1–2), 221–240. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808100160>

#### 3) Focus groups

Croucher, S. M., & Cronn-Mills, D. (2014). Focus groups. In *Understanding Communication Research Methods: A Theoretical and Practical Approach* (pp. 173-184). Taylor & Francis.

Della Porta, D. (2005). Making the polis: social forums and democracy in the global justice movement. *Mobilization*, 10(1), 73–94.

#### 4) Content analysis

Croucher, S. M., & Cronn-Mills, D. (2014). Content Analysis. In *Understanding Communication Research Methods: A Theoretical and Practical Approach* (pp. 205-216). Taylor & Francis.

Ferrari, E. (2016). Social media for the 99%? Rethinking social movements’ identity and strategy in the corporate web 2.0. *Communication and the Public*. <http://doi.org/10.1177/2057047316642608>

#### 5) Surveys

Croucher, S. M., & Cronn-Mills, D. (2014). Surveys. In *Understanding Communication Research Methods: A Theoretical and Practical Approach* (pp. 222-237). Taylor & Francis.

Tufekci, Z., & Wilson, C. (2012). Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 363–379.

<http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01629.x>

#### 6) Network analysis

[Note: because these readings are more complex, I am asking students to pick just one]

Caiani, M. (2014). Social network analysis. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Methodological practices in social movement research* (pp. 368-396). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

OR

Gonzalez-Bailon, S. (2014). Online social networks and bottom-up politics. In M. Graham & W. H. Dutton (Eds.), *Society and the Internet. How Networks of Information and Communication are Changing Our Lives* (pp. 209–222). Oxford University Press.

### Week 8

#### **WORK-IN-PROGRESS STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

### Week 9 - READING QUIZ #3

#### **#MeToo and feminist digital activism**

Clark, R. (2016). "Hope in a hashtag": the discursive activism of #WhyIStayed. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(5), 788–804. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1138235>

Durham, A. (2017). Analog girl in a digital world: Hip hop feminism and media activism. In V. W. Pickard & G. Yang (Eds.), *Media activism in the digital age* (pp. 205–215). Routledge.

\*Research workshop part 4: Finding the appropriate research methods to answer research questions.

### Week 10

#### **Digital activism in non-democratic contexts**

Guobin Yang. 2013. "Power and Transgression in the Global Media Age: The Strange Case of Twitter in China." In Marwan Kraidy ed., *Communication and Power in the Global Era: Orders and Borders*. London: Routledge, 166-183.

Lee, F. L. F. (2015). Media communication and the Umbrella Movement: Introduction to the special issue. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 8(4), 333–337. <http://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2015.1090154>

Tsui, L. (2015). The coming colonization of Hong Kong cyberspace: government responses to the use of new technologies by the umbrella movement. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 8(4), 1–9. <http://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2015.1058834>

### Week 11

#### **Internet policy activism**

Prasad, R. (2018). Ascendant India, digital India: how net neutrality advocates defeated Facebook's Free Basics. *Media, Culture and Society*, 40(3), 415–431. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717736117>

Logie, J. (2014). Dark days: understanding the historical context and the visual rhetorics of the SOPA/PIPA blackout. In M. McCaughey (Ed.), *Cyberactivism on the participatory* (pp. 20–40). New York and Oxon: Routledge.

#### Week 12 – READING QUIZ #4

##### **Satire and culture jamming as activism**

Day, A. (2012). Satire and dissent: a theoretical overview. *Comunicazione Politica*, (1), 19–42.

Ferrari, E. (2017). Fake accounts, real activism: Political faking and user-generated satire as activist intervention. *New Media & Society*, 20(6), 2208–2223. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817731918>

#### Week 13

##### **Digital activism and the extreme right**

Daniels, J. (2009). Introduction. In *Cyber racism: White supremacy online and the new attack on civil rights*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

*Note: this reading is written in a very informal style, but its authors are well respected academic experts in these topics.*

Phillips, W., Beyer, J. L., & Coleman, G. (2017, March 22). Trolling scholars debunk the idea that the alt-right's shitposters have magic powers. *Motherboard*. Retrieved from [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/z4k549/trolling-scholars-debunk-the-idea-that-the-alt-rights-trolls-have-magic-powers](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/z4k549/trolling-scholars-debunk-the-idea-that-the-alt-rights-trolls-have-magic-powers)

#### Week 14 – READING QUIZ #5

##### **The dark side of digital activism: surveillance, harassment, commodification**

Terranova, T., & Donovan, J. (2013). Occupy social networks: The paradoxes of corporate social media for networked social movements. In G. Lovink & M. Rasch (Eds.), *Unlike us reader: Social media monopolies and their alternatives* (pp. 296–311). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

Tactical Technology collective. (2018). *Online harassment of politically active women*.

<https://xyz.informationactivism.org/en/online-harassment-of-politically-active-women-overview>

Optional:

Feigenbaum, A., & McCurdy, P. (2017). Activist Reflexivity and Mediated Violence: Putting the Policing of Nuit Debout in Context. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 1–20.

#### Week 15

##### **Wrap up**

Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Preface and introduction, ix-xxxi.

\* Group activity: Following the provided scenarios, give advice to activists by drawing on the readings, class discussions and your personal knowledge.

### **Recommended reading on research skills**

Available on Canvas

#### *Good sources, bad sources*

Bourhis, J., Adams, C., & Titsworth, S. (2006). *Style manual for communication studies* (Second). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Pub. Co. Excerpt: pp. 15-24

Ó Dochartaigh, N. (2012). *Internet research skills* (Third). London, UK: Sage. Chapter 8, pp. 147-157.

McAdoo, M. L. (2015). *The student's survival guide to research*. Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman. Excerpts: pp. 53-79, pp. 121-139.

#### *Asking good research questions*

White, P. (2009). Chapter 1. In *Developing research questions: a guide for social scientists*. Macmillan International Higher Education: pp. 5-26.

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., Colomb, G. G., Williams, J. M., & Williams, J. M. (2003). Chapter 3. In *The craft of research*. University of Chicago Press: pp. 33-48.

#### *Using sources and avoiding plagiarism*

Purdue Online Writing Lab "[Quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing](#)", "[Avoiding plagiarism](#)".