

## CM710 A1 MEDIA THEORY Fall 2025

Instructor: Denis Wu, Ph.D.  
Time: Wednesday 2:30 – 5:15 pm EST  
Classroom: COM 213  
Course Blackboard: <learn.bu.edu>

Office hours: Tuesday 1-3 pm or by appointment  
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### Objectives of the class

As one of the core courses in the media science program, Media Theory aims to introduce essential concepts about the media, particularly regarding their research, practices, and history as well as the participants and consumers in societies. The wide-ranging influence of the media on cultures and sociopolitical areas will also be included in the course. Additionally, students will learn how media theories and communication models are constructed, empirically tested, and revised for changeable media environment to help organize obtained knowledge and guide practices.

It is anticipated that after taking this class students will have a good grasp of the fundamental media concepts and subsequently update the existing ones with emerging phenomena in the changeable media ecosystem. Although this course focuses primarily on the social scientific approach to the media, it will encompass alternative epistemologies and perspectives when particular situations and problems demand.

In essence, students who successfully finish this course will have a better understanding of different communication and media theories and be able to develop theoretical frameworks for research as well as executive projects in widely different academic and professional settings. This class is also intended to lay the foundation for more topic-specific exploration and for producing a conceptually oriented and soundly executed research projects in the future. Thus, students are highly encouraged to incorporate their personal research interests into this class and solidify their conceptual foundation with the help from the instructor and fellow classmates. Students in the past had used this class to build a theoretical basis for their theses and research programs.

### Textbook & Readings

Required textbooks:

Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2021). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment, and future* (8<sup>th</sup> ed). Oxford University Press.

McCombs, M., & Valenzuela, S. (2021). *Setting the Agenda* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Polity.

Zhong, B. (2021). *Social media communication: Trends and theories*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Other readings:

Research articles that address various topics and issues are available on the Blackboard site.

**Course Requirements**

**Grades.**

Your final grade will be based on the following components and percentages:

Participation & engagement	20%
Abstract & presentation	10%
Assessment of knowledge (each 10%)	40%
Final paper & presentation	30%

Every assignment listed above will be evaluated on a 100-point scale. All of the scores will be included and calculated with the above percentages for final score, and then translated to letter grade based on the following formula:

94-100	A	73-76.99	C
90-93.99	A-	70-72.99	C-
87-89.99	B+	67-69.99	D+
83-86.99	B	63-66.99	D
80-82.99	B-	60-62.99	D-
77-79.99	C+	0-59.99	F

**Participation & engagement.**

You are required to attend each and every class session. Attendance is checked at the beginning of the class, thus be punctual. Three tardy attendances are equal to one absence. Because we only meet once a week, missing any class would result in potential disconnect with the class. Starting at 2<sup>nd</sup> absence, each single absence will result in *2% grade reduction*. Your attendance record will appear on Blackboard.

You are encouraged to actively participate in discussion and voice your informed opinion on the discussed subject in class or Blackboard discussion space. You are also advised to be prepared for each class by doing the assigned reading in advance. Informed answers will be highly appreciated and rewarded. It is worth noting that perfect attendance *will not* necessarily result in a perfect score of class participation – in addition to attendance, you must actively participate and voice

informed opinion in class and/or on Blackboard discussion space to earn your participation credits.

### **Abstract.**

Each student will select one reading assignment and write a synthesis of the chosen reading. An abstract should include the most important information about the reading and limit within 2 pages (single-spaced).

Each abstract must contain the authoring student's name, date, and course number on the top left corner, and include 1) complete citation of the assigned reading in the beginning of your abstract (in APA style), followed by 2) synthesis of the main concepts and key ideas conveyed in the readings, and then concluded with 3) your own comments, thoughts, or critique of the reading.

An example of the abstract format is available on the Blackboard site. You must also post your abstract on the Blackboard discussion's "**Abstract Central**" section and present and moderate discussion in class, which should last **less than 5 minutes**. Any audio-visual aids to illustrate the date's topics are welcome and can be uploaded to the designated Blackboard space prior to presentation time. The abstract evaluation form that will be used is on Blackboard.

Please go to [this site](#) to sign up for the reading of your choice.

### **Assessment.**

There will be four in-class assessments. The questions will be based on assigned readings, discussions, and materials presented in the class. Potential question formats include true/false, multiple choice, fill-in the blank, and short answer. Each one of the assessments will constitute about 15-20 questions. You will have access to your own 1-page *printed note*. A useful tip of preparation is to take notes while you do the readings and attend classes; furthermore, review your notes and abstracts prior to taking assessments. Make sure to bring in your pen for assessments.

### **Final Paper.**

Your final paper must focus on the communication/media aspects of a given research topic. The topic depends entirely on your interests. It can be a current issue facing your professional work, a communication agenda in a community or society, or application of a communication theory in professional practices. Your final paper must focus on one or two of the media theories covered in this class. It is always a good idea to discuss the direction and scope of your topic with me individually in advance.

It is important to remember that this final paper is different from most of the final

papers you have written – it is *inductive* in nature. In other words, your conclusion and proposed research questions/hypotheses should be made only after your thorough and comprehensive review of the relevant literature -- i.e., your literature review will guide your conclusion and provides a foundation for your future, potential inquiry (which you do not need to pursue for the class).

Your final paper must include the following six components and mark each section clearly:

- 1) Title - it is the most important message for your readers – please make it as detailed and specific as possible; if necessary, you can have a subtitle to provide more information.
- 2) Introduction of your research topic - you should explain clearly and convincingly why your chosen topic is relevant and important in a communication field; the real-world cases that have drawn your interest into the topic can be helpful.
- 3) Review of the relevant literature – this is the most critical part. At least 7 blind-reviewed, published works (books or research articles) should be discussed at length and cited adequately in the final paper. Conference presentations and online and social media sources can be cited in your paper, but they DO NOT count as part of the seven. Do not cite Wikipedia or use output generated by artificial intelligence directly in your final paper. It would be much better if you integrate and weave the existing works well into your organization of topics/arguments in your paper than simply list and discuss each of the relevant works without putting digesting effort.
- 4) Critique of the existing literature - you must discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature on the topic and what can be learned from them. In addition, you must discuss whether the existing literature can appropriately and fully *address the scope and facets of your interested topic*; you also should point out what kind of future studies would be needed. (If necessary, you may integrate this section with #3 part).
- 5) Potential questions and/or hypotheses for future research - based on what you found on the reviewed literature delineate the types of new research that should be conducted in the future. Furthermore, you can provide some ideas as to what kinds of empirical evidence would be needed to answer your primary inquiry in this area.
- 6) Complete, systematic references (in APA 7<sup>th</sup> style).

It is important for you to learn about the available databases in the BU library and literature search skills. Do not be afraid of paying literal or virtual [library visit](#) and do not limit your reference exclusively to digitized sources. After all, *not all* literature has been digitized, yet. The references in the textbooks would be a good starting point.

You should systematically follow the APA style in the final paper. There are free software for you to automatically list references in a specific style (e.g., RefWorks and Endnote). In addition, basic writing requirements - spelling, grammar, word usage, and organization of your paper - will be considered.

Your final paper must be prepared with Times font, size 12, single-spaced, one-inch margin, and run *no more than 8* pages (including references and other illustrations; please no cover page).

Do not try to inflate your final paper by including copious fillers or lengthy quotes – *succinct and insightful papers are superior to long but disconnected counterparts*. You are encouraged to organize your thoughts and put similar thoughts in separate sections (by using subheads, for example).

You are required to submit a one-page outline (hard copy, due **10/30**), in which you should delineate your topic in detail, rationale of your research topic, a primary media theory upon which your paper is based, and potential literature that will be used for your final paper. If you have any questions, you may also list them in the outline. You may not change your topic in your final paper unless you provide a compelling reason in writing.

Two additional tasks are required of your final paper:

- 1) Your final paper should be submitted via the Turnitin folder on the course Blackboard site by **12/6 noon**.
- 2) You must present your paper (5 minutes) on **12/4** during class time, for which, professionally prepared audio-visual aid is welcome. You are encouraged to practice and time it before the presentation time.

## **SONA credits**

The College of Communication is committed to involving students in scholarly research so that they may understand the importance of generating new knowledge at Boston University as a major research institution. Students of this course must participate for one hour in SONA research and have the option to earn up to 3 SONA credits, worth 3% of your entire course grade. The completion of 1 research credit is equivalent to participating in a ~60-minute study, ½ research credit is equivalent to participating in a ~30-minute study.

To create a participant account or log in to an existing account, please visit the COM SONA site: <https://bucom.sona-systems.com>. Information about the times and dates of specific studies and the number of credits that will be awarded for participating in each study will all be available through this site and via email from the SONA Administrator <comsona@bu.edu>. Studies and events will occur periodically throughout the entire semester.

The SONA website will also allow you to select the course to which you would like credit(s) applied. It is your responsibility to regularly check the SONA website and your email to keep track of the completion of your research credits, deadlines, and

dates of the posted events and studies. For more information about research participation policies, visit: <http://sites.bu.edu/crc/research-resources/SONA/>.

## Important Policies

*These policies are extremely important to you. Please read carefully and remember that these policies will be upheld throughout the semester. It is your responsibility to keep these policies in mind at all times.*

All Boston University students are bound by the [Academic Conduct Code](#). Please review it to ensure you are acting responsibly and ethically in regard to your academic conduct. First, any kind of academic misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) will result in the filing of academic misconduct charges. Any suspicious act/material will be investigated to the fullest extent possible and those found guilty will be punished accordingly. In addition, it is imperative to understand plagiarism in detail:

“Plagiarism is the act of representing someone else’s creative and/or academic work as your own, in full or in part. It can be an act of commission, in which one intentionally appropriates the words, pictures or ideas of another, or it can be an act of omission, in which one fails to acknowledge/document/give credit to the source, creator and/or the copyright owner of those words, pictures or ideas. Any fabrication of materials, quotes or sources, other than those created in a work of fiction is also plagiarism. Plagiarism is the most serious academic offense that you can commit and can result in probation, suspension, or expulsion.”

Your written reports will be examined with Turnitin on Blackboard, an online software to identify and locate suspicious plagiarized copy. You are encouraged to run Turnitin yourself to ensure your personal writing or co-authored copy for any assignment is not plagiarized. Any copy included in your report generated from artificial intelligence is also considered plagiarism in this class. It is important to also note that everyone in this class is responsible for any turned-in report that bears their name.

If you cannot take an assessment or submit an assignment on the scheduled date, you have the full responsibility to report to me (via email) *in advance* with legitimate excuse/evidence. You will be penalized if you turn in your assignment late: Your grade on that given assignment will be subtracted 20 points for every day late. You should also keep in mind *where* exactly the assignment is due; assignments turned into other venues will not be graded. You do not have the option to submit extra work or project to gain bonus credit.

Any class you miss will not be offered or summarized afterwards at a one-on-one basis – you are entirely responsible for any class you miss. It is presumed that you fully understand the material covered on the day(s) you miss and that you can grasp the content and skills *on your own*. Therefore, you are strongly advised to

follow the schedule in the syllabus and participate in each class session to ensure you comprehend the subject and obtain full benefit of this class.

For those of you who are working full time, having various part-time jobs, or participating in extra-curricular activities while taking this class at the same time, it is important to keep in mind that this class may be time-consuming and challenging to some students. If your job or other commitments demand a lot of time and energy, you should be aware of the risk. Jobs or activities related excuses are not acceptable.

Foreseeable events (e.g., trips or vacation), controllable accidents or incidents (e.g., computer/printer crashes) will not be accepted as excuses for delayed work or a change in assessment time. You should take all necessary and sufficient precaution to protect your precious work from being destroyed by any entity, low- and high-tech malfunction and interruption. Also, you are strongly advised to plan your trips wisely to avoid any potential conflict with the class schedule.

If you had any question about the grade you receive of any assignment or assessment, you must put your inquiry and explanation *in writing* so that I can have sufficient time to review the assignment and your answer(s), respond to your question(s), or change your grade if your request proved justified. I will not take individual verbal inquiry about grade during class time, which would likely waste other students' time.

The instructor will take grammar and style of your assignments and assessments into consideration. Please use standard American English language in all assignments. You are advised to consult stylebook and other resources for guidance. The [Writing Center in COM](#) and in other BU units can be helpful if you are not confident with your writing. It is a good idea to seek editorial guidance before turning in your written work. All communication inside the classroom, on Blackboard, and writing should be conducted in English. It is a courtesy to use the commonly shared language throughout the class to prevent the potential sentiment of being excluded.

Other university-wide policies:

-Boston University is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and our school policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which regards sexual misconduct – including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Confidential support and academic advocacy resources can be found with the Center for Sexual Assault Response & Prevention (SARP) at <http://www.bu.edu/safety/sexual-misconduct/>.

-BU has strict guidelines on classroom behavior and practices when it comes to treatment of students and guests on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, mental or physical disability, genetic information, military service, national origin, or due to marital, parental, or veteran status. Discrimination for any of these reasons is prohibited. Please refer to the [Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Policy](#) for details.

-At your discretion, please alert me to anything related to preferred pronouns, preferred name, or any extenuating circumstances that might impact your classroom experience.  
 -If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the [Office of Disability and Access Services \(DAS\)](#) to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests.

As long as you are registered in this class after reading these policies on the first day, the instructor will assume that *you agree completely and entirely with these class policies and that you will uphold them throughout the semester.* You should keep this syllabus in mind and revisit these policies when needed. These policies will not be reviewed again during the class.

## Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Please follow the class and Blackboard for updates. It is advised that students finish the assigned reading *prior to* each class.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
9/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction of the class. Explanation of the syllabus.</li> <li>▪ Getting acquainted. First-class survey of students.</li> <li>▪ The fundamentals of communication theories; theory construction and usage.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Get all textbooks</li> <li>-Browse the topics of the class</li> <li>-Decide on the reading to do your abstract</li> </ul>
9/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Context, history, and formation of communication theories.</li> <li>▪ Scientific methods, theory building, and paradigm.</li> <li>▪ Mass society and mass culture in relation to media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Baran &amp; Davis, chaps 1, 2</li> </ul>	
9/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Medium concepts.</li> <li>▪ Social media, legacy media, and streaming services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ #1 Littlejohn &amp; Foss, 2008, chap 1</li> <li>☞ #2 Lotz, Eklund, &amp; Soroka, 2022</li> </ul>	-Visit a new media/medium and share your experience on Blackboard
9/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Media effects theory: An overview.</li> <li>▪ Models of communication process and effect.</li> <li>▪ Propaganda; persuasion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ #3 Bennett &amp; Iyengar, 2008</li> <li>☞ #4 McQuail &amp; Windahl, chap 7</li> </ul>	<b>Assessment #1</b>

	theories: HSM and ELM.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Petty, Cacioppo, &amp; Schumann, 1983</li> <li>☞ Baran &amp; Davis, chaps 4-5</li> </ul>	
10/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Media's agenda-setting effect.</li> <li>▪ Three levels of media agenda.</li> <li>▪ Agenda-building and agenda-melding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ McCombs &amp; Valenzuela, chaps 1-2</li> <li>☞ #5 McCombs &amp; Valenzuela, chaps 3-4</li> <li>☞ #6 McCombs &amp; Valenzuela, chaps 5-6</li> </ul>	
10/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Frame and framing.</li> <li>▪ Mediated or social construction (of the reality).</li> <li>▪ Priming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ #7 Entman, 1993</li> <li>☞ #8 Iyengar &amp; Simon, 1993</li> <li>☞ #9 McGraw &amp; Ling, 2003</li> <li>☞ Baran &amp; Davis, chap 13</li> </ul>	
10/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultivation theory.</li> <li>▪ Media and social capital.</li> <li>▪ Media literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Media use/ screen management</li> <li>○ Disinformation and misinformation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Baran &amp; Davis, chap 12</li> <li>☞ #10 McCombs &amp; Valenzuela, chaps 7-8</li> <li>☞ #11 Hermann, Morgan, &amp; Shanahan, 2021</li> <li>☞ #12 Martins &amp; Harrison, 2012</li> </ul>	Assessment #2
10/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Knowledge gap; digital divide.</li> <li>▪ Diffusion of innovation.</li> <li>▪ Two-step flow of information; opinion leader and influencer.</li> <li>▪ Personal influence vs. Impersonal influence.</li> <li>▪ Normative communication theories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Baran &amp; Davis, chaps 3, 11</li> <li>☞ Mutz, 1998, chap 4</li> <li>☞ #13 Prior, 2005</li> <li>☞ #14 Papa et al., 2000</li> </ul>	
10/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social learning theory, socialization, social control.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ Baran &amp; Davis, chap 7</li> <li>☞ Noelle-Neumann,</li> </ul>	Final paper outline (1-page hard copy) due

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Media violence.</li> <li>▪ Spiral of silence</li> <li>○ Opinion climate</li> <li>○ Public opinion expression</li> <li>▪ Third-person effect.</li> </ul>	<p>1974</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🔗 #15 DeMartino, Rice, &amp; Saltz 2015</li> <li>🔗 #16 Davison, 1983</li> </ul>	<i>in class (which will not be graded)</i>
11/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interpersonal communication.</li> <li>▪ Group communication.</li> <li>▪ Social network, use, and issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🔗 #17 Littlejohn &amp; Foss, 2008, chap 7</li> <li>🔗 #18 Oetzel &amp; Ting-Toomey, 2003</li> <li>🔗 #19 Griffin, 2019, pp 231-244</li> <li>🔗 Baran &amp; Davis, chap 8</li> <li>🔗 Zhong, chap 8</li> </ul>	<b>Assessment #3</b>
11/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Network and social media.</li> <li>▪ Content production and media industry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🔗 Baran &amp; Davis, chap 14</li> <li>🔗 #20 Lazer et al., 2018</li> <li>🔗 #21 Zhong, chap 10</li> </ul>	
11/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information processing and reception.</li> <li>▪ Uses and gratifications.</li> <li>▪ Active and passive audiences.</li> <li>▪ Media use and personal well-being.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🔗 Baran &amp; Davis, chaps 9, 10</li> <li>🔗 Zhong, chaps 4-5</li> <li>🔗 #22 Zillmann, 1988.</li> <li>🔗 #23 Jelenchick, Eickhoff, &amp; Moreno, 2013</li> </ul>	<b>Assessment #4</b>
12/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Media system dependency (MSD).</li> <li>▪ Critical theories: Race, gender, and class</li> <li>▪ Final paper presentations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🔗 Baran &amp; Davis, chap 6</li> <li>🔗 #24 Walter &amp; Brüggemann, 2018</li> <li>🔗 #25 Anderson &amp; Hitlin, 2016</li> </ul>	<b>Final paper due: 12/6 noon in Blackboard "Student Works" folder</b>