

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE MEDIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

**Mélanie Meunier**, Professeur d'anglais

### Résumé :

The media industry today, like most sectors, is forced to adapt to changing circumstances brought about, and accelerated, by the fourth industrial revolution. Not so long ago, the vast majority of people received the news by watching television or reading the written press. In the space of a few decades, the ways of accessing the news have exploded from broadcast news (CBS, NBC and ABC) to cable news (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News) to online media (including Youtube) and social networks. New technologies have revolutionized *what* is considered news, *who* reports the news, how newscasts are produced, and how people get the news. News outlets have had to adapt their offer to a faster-paced world of shorter attention spans (Twitter is the ultimate example), and reporters have had to compete with ordinary citizens who post videos and publish pieces on personal blogs. It is estimated that more than 60% of Americans obtain the news through Facebook. Posting links to articles and "liking" them allows people to read only the news that reinforces their pre-existing personal opinions.

In addition, the free access to much of this information on the Internet has reduced subscriptions to traditional media, like newspapers, which in turn, have had to change their business plans and find ways to remain profitable. One response has been to offer much of their material on the Internet at reduced cost. Another has been to increase the entertainment component to the detriment of more in-depth analysis of major issues. "Infotainment" has blurred the distinction between what is and is not worthy of being considered news. For example, Donald Trump's constant insults of his competitors and less than factual statements during the 2016 election campaign caused major networks to accord him a great deal of airtime rather than to cover serious issues, such as health policy, foreign policy, and the country's increasingly outdated, sometimes hazardous, infrastructure. All of this has had a major impact on both society and people's trust in government. On a positive note, the explosion of alternative media outlets - less constrained by financial concerns or powerful interests - has given voice to sectors of society that were seldom heard in the mainstream press.

The freedom of the press was enshrined in the First Amendment of the US Constitution and Thomas Jefferson, amongst others, repeatedly defended it as the foundational freedom upon which all other freedoms depend. In a letter to the Marquis de Lafayette in 1823, he wrote: "the only security of all is in a free press. The force of public opinion cannot be resisted, when permitted freely to be

expressed." In the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, Margaret Sullivan, journalist at the *Washington Post*, wrote: "... journalists must write and report aggressively and fearlessly and be willing to fight for access, getting involved with civil and media rights and backing officials that champion free expression." In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has a strict defense of this freedom of expression, untempered by changing circumstances, led to unintended consequences, such as the legitimization of hate speech?

This course (continuous assessment including group presentations) will take the United States as an example, but comparisons with other countries will be encouraged. Numerous issues pertaining to the media will be explored:

- Role and responsibility of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter)
- Ethics: whistleblowing vs leaking (Wikileaks, Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Panama Papers, etc.)
- The line between news and entertainment
- Government censorship and surveillance: pros and cons
- Media as elite organization (Disconnection with large swaths of the population; journalists: highly educated, based mostly in big cities on the coasts)
- Power and freedom on the dark web
- User-generated content and the authenticity of information
- Spinning the news (stretching the facts, cherry-picking the facts, fake news, lying)
- Net neutrality: pros and cons
- Comparison: limits to the freedom of expression in 2 or more countries (definition of hate speech?)
- Harassment: impact of new forms of communication (cyberbullying vs #MeToo-type movements; citizen films of police behavior, etc.)
- Discrimination (racism or sexism) in the American news media industry
- Post-text future? (Rise of audiocasts and videocasts)

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## **Films:**

*Good Night and Good Luck*

*CitizenFour*

*Snowden*

*The Fifth Estate*

*Pentagon Papers*

*Page One: Inside the New York*

*Times Spotlight*

*Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on*

*Journalism All the President's Men*

*Thank You for Smoking*

Websites, audio-visual & article references will be given as we go.