

# Media Freedom in the Age of Social Media and Citizen Journalism

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## OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

In 2011 1.2 billion users accessed a social media site, a 6% increase from 2007.<sup>1</sup> Four years later, in 2015, over 2 billion people used social media globally. By 2019, this figure is projected to grow to 2.72 billion users, or 39% of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> These figures illustrate the exponential growth of social media. In a little over a decade, it has developed from crude and relatively small and exclusive online communities to the platforms that we associate with it today. As a result, the likes of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, among many others, have become intertwined within our cultural and social fabric, to the extent that these platforms, permeate every aspect of our lives:<sup>3</sup> in the words of Marshall McLuhan, they have become an 'extension of man.'<sup>4</sup>

The growth of social media, and the way in which it has emerged as a new infrastructure for speech, has stimulated two phenomena that are the focus of this course. Firstly, by facilitating the convergence of audience and producer, it has encouraged the growth of citizen journalism, and other online news communities. Secondly, a symbiosis with the traditional media (which, for the purpose of this course, is defined as the printed press and broadcast media), in which citizen journalists, often operating online, increasingly act as a 'source' of news. A 'side-effect' of this symbiotic relationship is that false information by citizen journalists can have an even greater impact, as it is often 'recycled' by the traditional media. In turn, the fact that the traditional media has published it serves to justify and support the false information. Ultimately, the cycle becomes self-fulfilling. Thus, arguably, citizen journalism, and its symbiotic relationship with the traditional media, has not only permanently altered the media ecology, but has shifted the media paradigm.

Thus, during the course students will deal with the following topics: (i) The development of social media and how it has evolved into one of the main mechanisms through which digital speech occurs and, therefore, how it facilitates citizen journalism. We will consider the extent to which social media, and the Internet more broadly, has enabled access to the public sphere; (ii) The development of citizen journalism, the impact it has had on the traditional media and the extent to which it currently contributes, or could contribute, to democratic governance. In relation to the traditional media we will consider the notion of the 'free press', the extent to which the concept is, or is not, an 'illusion' and, if it is, whether

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<sup>1</sup> Comscore Report 2011, [http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Presentations-and-Whitepapers/2011/it\\_is\\_a\\_social\\_world\\_top\\_10\\_need-to-knows\\_about\\_social\\_networking](http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Presentations-and-Whitepapers/2011/it_is_a_social_world_top_10_need-to-knows_about_social_networking).

<sup>2</sup> L. Kawasaki, Strategy Analytics Global Social Network Forecast, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015 <https://www.strategyanalytics.com/access-services/media-and-services/in-the-home/digital-media/digital-media/reports/report-detail/global-social-network-market-forecast#.VuFWXYs7aII>.

<sup>3</sup> P. Coe, 'The social media paradox: an intersection with freedom of expression and the criminal law', *Information & Communications Technology Law*, (2015), Vol. 24, Issue 1, 16-40, 25; J. Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity A Critical History of Social Media*, (Oxford University Press, 2013), 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> See generally: M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (MIT Press, 1964).

citizen journalism is able to remedy this; (iii) The difference between individual freedom of expression and media freedom and what this means in practice; (iv) The interpretation and application of the philosophical foundations of free speech and communication theories, in the context of the modern media and citizen journalism and how these apply to the notion of responsible journalism. Students will also consider the impact that the emergence of citizen journalism has had on defamation, privacy and media regulation.

### GRADE EVALUATION

- Participation in lectures: 40% of the overall grade.
- A final examination lasting no longer than 45 minutes that will consist of essay-style question(s).

### CLASS FORMAT

During class meetings, in addition to lecturing, I will ask questions and invite discussion.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
22 <sup>nd</sup> June	<i>The development of social media and the development of citizen journalism</i>
23 <sup>rd</sup> June	<i>Unpacking free speech and media freedom</i>
24 <sup>th</sup> June	<i>The interpretation and application of the philosophical foundations of free speech and communication theories in the context of the modern media and how these apply to the notion of responsible journalism</i>
24 <sup>th</sup> June	<b>Consultation (student debate):</b> <i>Is the concept of the 'free press' an illusion?</i>
25 <sup>th</sup> June	<i>The impact that the emergence of citizen journalism has had on defamation, privacy and media regulation</i>
26 <sup>th</sup> June	Examination

### REQUIRED READING

Coe, P. (2018) '(Re)embracing social responsibility theory as a basis for free speech: shifting the normative paradigm for a modern media'. *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, 69 (4). pp. 403-431

Coe, P. (2017) 'Redefining 'media' using a 'media-as-a-constitutional-component' concept: An evaluation of the need for the European Court of Human Rights to alter its understanding of 'media' within a new media landscape'. *Legal Studies*, 37 (1). pp. 25-53

Coe, P. (2015) 'The social media paradox: an intersection with freedom of expression and the criminal law'. *Information and Communications Technology Law*, 24 (1). pp. 16-40

Charney, J (2018) *The Illusion of the Free Press* (Hart Publishing), chps. 2, 3 and 4

#### **OTHER SOURCES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL**

Koltay, A (2019) *New Media and Freedom of Expression: Rethinking the Constitutional Foundations of the Public Sphere* (Hart Publishing)

Oster, J (2015) *Media Freedom as a Fundamental Right* (Cambridge University Press)

Wragg, P (2020) *A Free and Regulated Press: Defending Coercive Independent Press Regulation* (Hart Publishing)