

COMM 3440
Mass Communication & Society

Spring 2023, 3 credits
Online Course

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Course Overview

News headlines about media effects tend toward the extreme. Are smartphones [destroying a generation](#)? Does screen time [ravage children's brains](#)? Are video games [digital heroin](#)? Does the devil [live in our phones](#)? To the untrained eye, it might seem difficult to separate fact from clickbait.

This class begins with an introduction to the basics of media psychology, including the scientific methods used to test claims about the effects of mass media on individuals. We then consider the psychological mechanisms through which media effects are thought to occur before examining the contexts in which these effects are stronger, weaker, or non-existent. Ongoing class assignments will push students to consider how the realities of media effects can be communicated to mass audiences in ways that are practical, accurate, and devoid of fearmongering.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to...

1. **...classify "media psychology" as a branch of social science.**
 - 1.1. Identify key theories and research methods used by media psychologists.
 - 1.2. Identify appropriate methods for investigating various research scenarios.
 - 1.3. Explain how key theories can be used to understand media effects in everyday life.
 - 1.4. Use communication theories to predict the outcomes of research studies.
2. **...evaluate the quality of published research on media effects.**
 - 2.1. Recognize the limitations of survey and experimental research methods.
 - 2.2. Analyze the limitations of published research on media effects.
 - 2.3. Compare the relative strength of evidence produced across studies.
3. **...evaluate how media effects research is communicated to the public.**
 - 3.1. Explain how "moral panics" influence news coverage of media effects research.
 - 3.2. Illustrate the disconnect between research results and news coverage of those results.
 - 3.3. Distinguish between high- and low-quality news coverage of media effects research.
4. **...develop evidence-based recommendations for media use in everyday life.**
 - 4.1. Identify and gather published research on a specific media effects topic.
 - 4.2. Summarize key findings of published research on a specific media effects topic.
 - 4.3. Translate research findings for a mass audience.

Textbook/Readings

There is no textbook for this course. All readings are posted on Carmen (<https://carmen.osu.edu>).

Grade Distribution

This class has 100 possible points. Points are distributed as follows:

“5M” Activities (x6)	6 points
Checkpoints (x7)	14 points
Research Synthesis Assignments (x3)	30 points
Online Quizzes (x4)	10 points
Online Exams (x2)	40 points

Letter Grade Distribution

You must attempt each assignment in order to receive a grade. Your final grade will be determined based on the combined score of all assignments. The grading distribution is as follows:

≥ 92.5	A	72.5 – 76.4	C
89.5 – 92.4	A-	69.5 – 72.4	C-
86.5 – 89.4	B+	66.5 – 69.4	D+
82.5 – 86.4	B	59.5 – 66.4	D
79.5 – 82.4	B-	≤ 59.4	F
76.5 – 79.4	C+		

Technology

Each weekly module features video lectures on Carmen. Lectures are posted in two formats: (1) PowerPoint files with audio recordings, and (2) online YouTube playlists. The content included in each version is identical, so you only need to access one version (whichever you prefer). The YouTube playlists allow for closed captioning. Please make certain you have a strong internet connection and relevant audio equipment (e.g., headphones). It is not feasible for me or your TAs to help you with technical problems. University Tech support can help you (614-688-HELP) with technical problems.

Overview of Assignments

Each weekly module contains readings, lectures, and assignments. All work is due by 11:59 pm on Sunday (i.e., the **END** of each week).

“5M” Activities: The main concepts introduced this semester are summarized as the **5M’s**: Moral panics, Research Methods, Mediation, Moderation, and Meta-analysis. When these concepts are introduced, you will complete a worksheet that asks you to examine how that concept manifests in published research papers and/or news articles. There are six activities in total, and they are graded out of one point for thoroughness and completion (1 = satisfactory, .5 = needs improvement, 0 = incomplete).

Checkpoints: Periodic “checkpoints” serve to assess your understanding of key course concepts. Each checkpoint consists of open-ended questions on Carmen. You will receive instructor feedback, which will help as you prepare your research synthesis (see below). There are seven checkpoints in total, and they are graded out of two points for thoroughness and completion.

Research Synthesis Assignments: The main course project asks you to research a specific media effects topic of your choice. This project culminates in a 1-page paper (single-spaced) that summarizes existing research on your topic and provides evidence-based recommendations about how people should approach media use in everyday life. Prior to writing this short paper, there are two preliminary assignments that ask you to gather, evaluate, and synthesize research on your chosen topic. These assignments are each graded out of 10 points using a combination of completion, accuracy, and effort. Detailed rubrics are provided for each assignment.

Online Quizzes: Quizzes occur every 2-3 weeks. Each quiz is worth 2.5 points and consists of 10 multiple-choice questions. You have two opportunities to complete each quiz, and these attempts have no time limit. You should complete the first attempt without referencing your notes. After submitting the quiz, you can see which questions you answered incorrectly. You should then use your notes to figure out why you got those questions wrong. You can then correct your answers and resubmit. Only your highest score will be counted. Research shows that this process of testing yourself, re-learning the material, and correcting your responses is a more effective study technique than simply reviewing your notes because it forces you to recognize and address gaps in your knowledge. As such, these quizzes serve as periodic checks of your knowledge, as well as reviews for exams.

Online Exams: There are two online exams that consist of 20 multiple-choice questions and 10 true/false questions. Each exam is worth 20 points. A study guide is provided, and you can use your notes to complete the exams. However, you only have ONE attempt to complete each exam. This attempt is timed (60 minutes).

If you score less than 70% on an exam, you have the opportunity to complete an *Exam Reflection Assignment*. This assignment requires you to reflect on errors that you made and demonstrate mastery of the material that you misunderstood. Satisfactory completion of this reflection will increase your exam grade to 70%.

Late Work Policy: Freebies!

All late assignments receive a zero for that assignment. However, you are allowed two “freebies” over the course of the semester, such that you can turn in an assignment late with **NO PENALTY**. In order to use your freebie, you need to email your TA within one day of the assignment due date (i.e., some time on Monday). Your TA will keep track of how many freebies you have used. Once you use up your two freebies, you will receive a zero on any late assignment—no exceptions.

Extra Credit

Participate in a research study! Conducting scientific research is crucial to the mission and purpose of the School of Communication at The Ohio State University. You can earn 1 point of extra credit for each 1 hour of research participation (up to 3 hours, or 3 points total) that you complete in School of Communication research studies. Be sure to read the detailed instructions on the SONA site. Importantly, missing your research appointment or quickly clicking through surveys and giving researchers fake data will not earn participation credit. You must sign up for studies at: <https://osucomm.sona-systems.com>

Mental Health: Please Take Care of Yourself!

As a student, you might experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to your learning (e.g., strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation). These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you are or someone you know is suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614-292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766. If you are thinking of harming yourself or need a safe, non-judgmental place to talk, or if you are worried about someone else and need advice about what to do, 24 hour emergency help is also available through the Suicide Prevention Hotline (Columbus: 614-221-5445 / National: 800-273-8255); or text (4hope to 741741); or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Title IX

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at titleix@osu.edu

Diversity

The School of Communication at The Ohio State University embraces and maintains an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, experiences, and people. Our commitment to diversity moves beyond mere tolerance to recognizing, understanding, and welcoming the contributions of diverse groups and the value group members possess as individuals. In our School, the faculty, students, and staff are dedicated to building a tradition of diversity with principles of equal opportunity, personal respect, and the intellectual interests of those who comprise diverse cultures.

Requesting Accommodations

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know via email immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You can also register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, you should make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

Academic Integrity

All work must be the original work of the student and not turned in to any other course prior to this one. Cheating is unacceptable and will result in a formal report to the School of Communication and the Committee on Academic Misconduct. It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct: <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>

Student Academic Services

Arts and Sciences Advising and Academic Services’ website provides support for student academic success. Information on advising issues such as tutoring, transfer credits, academic standing, and contact information for Arts and Sciences advisors can be obtained through this website. The site is: <http://advising.osu.edu/welcome.shtml>

Student Services

The Student Service Center assists with financial aid matters, tuition and fee payments. Please see their site at: <http://ssc.osu.edu>

Copyright Disclaimer

The materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection and are only for the use of students officially enrolled in the course for the educational purposes associated with the course. Copyright law must be considered before copying, retaining, or disseminating materials outside of the course.

Additional Disclaimer

This syllabus represents a contract “in the works.” Events that transpire over the semester may require modifications to the course. In the event of a change, I will announce the change and update the syllabus on Carmen. Ultimately it is your responsibility to keep up with any such modifications and to be aware of current policies, deadlines, etc. I reserve the right to modify course policies throughout the semester.

University COVID-19 Policies

All students, faculty and staff are required to comply with and stay up to date on all university safety and health guidance (<https://safeandhealthy.osu.edu>), which includes wearing a face mask in any indoor space and maintaining a safe physical distance at all times. Non-compliance will result in a warning first, and disciplinary actions will be taken for repeated offenses. Students seeking to request COVID-related accommodations may do so through the university’s [request process](#), managed by Student Life Disability Services. If at any point you are too ill to participate in this course due to COVID-19, please contact the instructor as soon as you are able. If at any point the instructor is too ill to teach the course for a period of time, the designated backup for this course will step in. You will be notified via email from the School of Communication.

DEFINING “MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY” (Week 1 & Week 2)

WEEK 1 (Jan 9 – Jan 15) Media Psychology as a Social Science	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introductory Lecture: Course Overview 2. Introductory Lecture: Assignments Overview 3. Introductory Lecture: Tips for Success 4. A Brief History of Media Psychology 5. Personalized Media Effects 6. How to Read a Journal Article
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Jan 15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Checkpoint #1: Introduction
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jordan, C. H. & Zanna, M. P. (1999). How to read a journal article in social psychology. <i>The Self in Social Psychology</i>. Philadelphia: Psychology Press. 2. Valkenburg, P. M. & Piotrowski, J. T. (2017). Themes and theoretical perspectives. <i>Plugged In: How Media Attract and Affect Youth</i>. New Haven: Yale University Press.

WEEK 2 (Jan 16 – Jan 22) Moral Panic Theory and Fears about Media Effects	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Tenets of Moral Panic Theory 2. Identifying a Moral Panic
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Jan 22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5M Activity #1: Understanding Moral Panic Theory 2. Checkpoint #2: Identifying a Media Effect
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cassidy, M. (2015). “Concerning printed poison”: 19th century American adults’ ambivalence about children’s interactions with cheap fiction. <i>The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth</i>, 8(2), 211-228. 2. Markey, P. M., & Ferguson, C. J. (2017). Teaching us to fear: The violent video game moral panic and the politics of game research. <i>American Journal of Play</i>, 10(1), 99-115. 3. Twenge, J. M. (2017). Have smartphones destroyed a generation? <i>The Atlantic</i>. Retrieved from: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/

UNDERSTANDING MEDIA EFFECTS (Week 3 – Week 8)

WEEK 3 (Jan 23 – Jan 29) Survey Methods: Cultivation Theory and Social Perceptions of Reality	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Tenets of Cultivation Theory 2. The Basics of Surveys 3. Interpreting Survey Results 4. Understanding Statistical Significance
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Jan 29	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5M Activity #2: Understanding Survey Methods 2. Checkpoint #3: Clarifying Confusions
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Scientific Methods in Media Effects Research</i>, p. 25-35 only 2. Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Signorielli (2014). Cultivation theory in the twenty-first century. <i>The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory</i>. London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 3. Segrin, C. & Nabi, R. L. (2002). Does television viewing cultivate unrealistic expectations about marriage? <i>Journal of Communication</i>, 52(2), 247-263.

WEEK 4 (Jan 30 – Feb 5) Experimental Methods: Media Exposure and Social Behavior	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Basics of Causation 2. The Basics of Experimental Research 3. IV Manipulation 4. Randomization 5. Experimental Research Example 6. Internal and External Validity
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Feb 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quiz 1
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Scientific Methods in Media Effects Research</i>, p. 35-41 2. Saleem, M., Anderson, C. A., & Gentile, D. A. (2012). Effects of prosocial, neutral, and violent video games on children's helpful and hurtful behaviors. <i>Aggressive Behavior</i>, 38, 281-287.

WEEK 5 (Feb 6 – Feb 12) Emotional Mediators: Inspirational Television and Altruistic Behavior	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Tenets of Emotional Contagion Theory 2. The Basics of Mediator Variables 3. Responses to Inspirational Television
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Feb 12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research Synthesis #1: Gathering Evidence of Media Effects
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1993). Emotional contagion. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i>, 2(3), 96-99. 2. Tsay- Vogel, M. & Krakowiak, K. M. (2016). Inspirational reality TV: The prosocial effects of lifestyle transforming reality programs on elevation and altruism. <i>Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media</i>, 60(4), 567-586.

WEEK 6 (Feb 13 – Feb 19) Cognitive Mediators: Stereotypical Depictions & Prejudice	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Tenets of Priming Theory 2. Review of Research Methods
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Feb 19	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5M Activity #3: Understanding Multiple Methods and Mediators
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Roskos-Ewoldson, D. R., Roskos-Ewoldson, B., & Carpentier, F. D. (2009). Media priming: An updated synthesis. <i>Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research</i>. London: Routledge. [Read only the posted pages under the header “Models of Priming” p. 79-81] 2. Saleem, M., Prot, S., Anderson, C. A., & Lemieux, A. F. (2015). Exposure to Muslims in media and support for policies harming Muslims. <i>Communication Research</i>, 44(6), 841-869.

WEEK 7 (Feb 20 – Feb 26) The Dual Influence of Cognition and Emotion: Intergroup Contact in Online Video Games	
LECTURES	1. The Tenets of Intergroup Contact Theory 2. Intergroup Contact in Online Video Games
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday Feb 26	1. Quiz 2 2. Checkpoint #4: Identifying a Mediator Variable
READINGS	1. Intergroup Contact Theory. <i>Encyclopedia of group processes and intergroup relations</i> . p. 1-11. 2. Adachi, P. J. C., Hodson, G., Willoughby, T., Black, C., & Ha, A. (2016). From outgroups to allied forces: Effects of intergroup cooperation in violent and nonviolent video games on boosting favorable outgroup attitudes. <i>Journal of Experimental Psychology: General</i> , 145(3), 259-265.

WEEK 8 (Feb 27 – March 5) Exam 1	
LECTURES	1. None!
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday March 5	1. Exam 1 2. Checkpoint #5: Mid-semester Evaluation
READINGS	1. Study Guide

CONTEXTUALIZING MEDIA EFFECTS (Week 9 – Week 12)

WEEK 9 (March 6 – March 12) Meaning is in the Eye of the Beholder: The Importance of Moderator Variables	
LECTURES	1. The Basics of Moderator Variables 2. Interpreting the Results of Moderation Analyses
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday March 12	1. 5M Activity #4: Understanding Moderators 2. Checkpoint #6: Identifying a Moderator Variable
READINGS	1. Piotrowski, J. T. & Valkenburg, P. M. (2015). Finding orchids in a field of dandelions: Understanding children's differential susceptibility to media effects. <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i> , 59(14), 1776-1789. 2. Kleemans, M., Daalmans, S., Carbaat, I., & Anschutz, A. (2018). Picture perfect: The direct effect of manipulated Instagram photos on body image in adolescent girls. <i>Media Psychology</i> , 21(1), 93-110.

<p style="text-align: center;">SPRING BREAK (March 13 – March 19)</p>	
LECTURES	1. None! Have a safe and relaxing break!
ASSIGNMENTS	1. None! Have a safe and relaxing break!
READINGS	1. None! Have a safe and relaxing break!

<p style="text-align: center;">WEEK 10 (March 20 – March 26) Communication So White, So Weird: Racial Identity as a Moderator Variable</p>	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Brief Primer on U.S. Racism 2. #CommSoWhite, #CommSoWeird 3. Racial Identity as a Moderator Variable
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday March 26	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research Synthesis #2: Gathering Evidence of Mediators and Moderators
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Stamps, D. (2020). Race and media: A critical essay acknowledging the current state of race-related media effects research and directions for future exploration. <i>Howard Journal of Communications</i>, 31(2), 121-136. 3. Banjo, O. O., Appiah, O., Wang, Z., Brown, C., & Walther, W. O. (2015). Co-viewing effects of ethnic-oriented programming: An examination of in-group bias and racial comedy exposure. <i>Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly</i>, 92(3), 662-680.

<p style="text-align: center;">WEEK 11 (March 27 – April 2) When Scholars Disagree I: Meta-Analyses of Social Media Effects</p>	
LECTURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Basics of Meta-Analysis 2. Meta-Analyzing the Effects of Social Media Use
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday April 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quiz 3
READINGS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooper, H. M. (2011). Meta-analysis. <i>The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods</i> 2. Huang, C. (2017). Time spent on social network sites and psychological well-being: A meta-analysis. <i>Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking</i>, 20(6), 346-354.

WEEK 12 (April 3 – April 9) When Scholars Disagree II: Meta-Analyses of Violent Media Effects	
LECTURES	1. Conclusions of Meta-Analyses in Media Psychology 2. Tips and Tricks for Checkpoint #7
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday April 9	1. 5M Activity #5: Understanding Meta-Analyses 2. Checkpoint #7: Identifying a Meta-Analysis
READINGS	1. Greitemeyer, T. & Mügge, D. O. (2014). Video games do affect social outcomes: A meta-analytic review of the effects of violent and prosocial video game play. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i> , 40(5), 578-589. 2. Rains, S. A., Levine, T. R., & Weber, R. (2018). Sixty years of quantitative communication research summarized: Lessons from 149 meta-analyses. <i>Annals of the International Communication Association</i> , 42(2), 105-124.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT MEDIA EFFECTS (Week 13 & Week 14)

WEEK 13 (April 10 – April 16) Constructively Communicating Media Effects Research: Part I	
LECTURES	1. How to Avoid a Moral Panic
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday April 16	1. Quiz 4 2. 5M Activity #6: Constructively Communicating Media Effects
READINGS	1. Guernsey, L. G. (2017). Don't take away your teen's phone: Smartphones are linked to problems, but they haven't "destroyed a generation." <i>Slate</i> . Retrieved from: http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2017/08/smartphones_haven_t_destroyed_a_generation.html 2. Lillard, A. S., & Peterson, J. (2011). The immediate impact of different types of television on young children's executive function. <i>Pediatrics</i> , 128(4), 644-649. 3. French, N. (2011). Will SpongeBob make you gay? No, but he might make you stupid. <i>National Review</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.nationalreview.com/the-home-front/will-spongebob-make-you-gay-no-he-might-make-you-stupid-nancy-french/ 4. Jabr, F. (2011). SpongeBob drains attention, but doesn't harm brains. <i>New Scientist</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn20914-spongebob-drains-attention-but-doesnt-harm-brains/ 5. Reilly, G. (2011). It's official: SpongeBob SquarePants is making our children stupid. <i>Business Insider</i> . Retrieved from: https://www.businessinsider.com/its-official-spongebob-squarepants-is-making-our-children-stupid-2011-9

WEEK 14 (April 17 – Sunday April 23) Exam 2	
LECTURES	1. None!
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Sunday April 23	1. Exam 2
READINGS	3. Study Guide

WEEK 15 (Monday April 24) Constructively Communicating Media Effects Research: Part II	
LECTURES	1. None!
ASSIGNMENTS Due 11:59 pm Monday April 24	1. Research Synthesis #3: Advice for the General Public
READINGS	1. None!