

Sensurveiledning

General comments

The students are not expected to give exact references from the syllabus for their answers, neither are they expected to include a list of references in their answer.

If students write in Norwegian (bokmål or nynorsk) but do not know technical terms in Norwegian, they are allowed to use the technical terms in English (since the lecture and syllabus were completely in English).

Task: «Below, you see four questions/tasks. Please choose and answer three of them. Each answer should not exceed 1,200 words (approximately 3 pages), but your answer does not need to approach this maximum. Shorter answers can be very good answers, too. Clarity, conciseness and structure of the answers will be a part of the total evaluation of your answers.

Each question you choose will count 33% of the final grade. You need to pass all three questions/tasks individually in order to pass the exam.»

1) *Since a few years, there is an economic crisis of newspapers that is said to have been caused by the rise of the internet. Why is the internet seen as a main reason of this development?*

The answer should base on a description of the business model of newspapers most of which (except free dailies) are financed by a mix of advertising revenues and sales revenues. Both are connected: The more readers/sales revenues a newspaper has, the more advertising revenues it gets which can be used for increasing quality, which ideal-typically leads to more readers/higher sales revenues and so on. Since the rise of the internet, an increasing amount of advertising revenues has been given to online content suppliers. At the same time, many users are not willing to pay for online content provided by the newspapers. As a result, the costs for producing news content stay the same, while the newspapers' revenues are shrinking. This leads to economic problems for the newspapers – the so-called newspaper crisis. Very good answers will in addition discuss the consequences of this development for our society.

2) *The freedom of the press has been called «the backbone of democracy», and authoritarian regimes have regularly tried to suppress it. Discuss this relationship between democracy and freedom of the press against the background of the history of press freedom and current developments.*

The media have many different function, amongst them informing the public, criticising and controlling the powerful, mobilizing the citizens, and ensuring social integration. By fulfilling these functions, the media provide the preconditions for a well-informed citizenry that democracies rely on. But they can only do so if freedom of the press is ensured. Authoritarian regimes have regularly tried to suppress press freedom because they are afraid of losing their power when being criticized and when the people are getting information that enables them to build their own, independent opinions. This can be seen repeatedly in the long history of press freedom: It took several centuries from the beginnings of press freedom in England in the 17th century until it was guaranteed in most Western countries, and until today, there are large parts of the world in which it still does not exist. The current developments that can be discussed here are manifold (to mention just three examples:

journalists are attacked in arrested in many authoritarian states, e.g. in China; populist political actors in many democracies are continuously attacking the free press; Hungary has introduced very restrictive laws in the context of the corona crisis that also affect the freedom of the press and is thus in line with former attempts of this government to restrict the freedom of the press).

3) Quantitative content analysis is a central empirical method in media sociology. Discuss why it is important to investigate media content and give examples for chances and challenges when applying this method.

The answer should start with defining quantitative content analysis, for example: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." (Berelson 1952: 18) Media content has effects on media users undoubtedly. If we want to learn more about how exactly media content influences the users, we need to know which content media users are confronted with. Content analyses are a way of doing that. Even though not telling us anything about effects, they can give evidence of the impact potential of certain content. Chances of this method include, e.g., that it is possible to investigate communication in retrospect and its unobtrusiveness, that is, applying the method does not have an effect on the materials/people we investigate (different from surveys and experiments, for example). Quantitative content analysis, in particular, enables us to identify patterns in (media) content in a representative way (different from qualitative content analysis) and describe it systematically. That allows for statistical calculations with the data. Challenges of quantitative content analysis include, e.g., the necessity of focusing on certain, pre-defined aspects of content while neglecting many others, not allowing for in-depth analysis of individual texts, not being able to adjust the measuring instruments during the process of data collection, and the focus on manifest content/explicit messages because it is in most cases not possible to code implicit content (e.g., irony, "reading between the lines") in a reliable way. Very good answers will illustrate these chances and challenges by giving concrete examples of topics/questions that can be analyzed by means of quantitative content analysis.

4) The Internet has enabled average people to address and reach broad audiences. It seems everyone can now be a journalist. What does this mean for the social importance of professional journalists and news media in democratic societies?

It is important to notice that the internet provides the opportunity to address and reach broad audiences, but that this does by far not mean that every user in fact can and will reach broad audiences. Most users still rely on the traditional news providers when looking for news, and most average users will not reach broad audiences. That is, professional journalists still play an important role in democratic societies, but in some respects, this role has changed: In the past, journalists were gatekeepers responsible for selecting which topics, actors, and opinions appeared in news coverage. Nowadays, they still have this role, but in addition they have become gatewatchers who help the users with orienting in the information flood online and provide information about which sources and information are important and reliable and how to interpret information found online. This is a function urgently needed in today's democratic societies: We need reliable sources which provide us with reliable information. At the same time, journalism has become more interactive since the internet provides more ways of direct communication between journalists and users, and the influence of the users on journalism has increased, both due to direct communication and audience metrics (e.g., click rates). Very good answers will in addition discuss the challenges this brings along for journalists (e.g., an increasing number of tasks, an increased pace due to "24-hours journalism", decreasing resources due to an increasing competition for audiences and advertising revenues, decreasing trust in journalism, "fake news"/disinformation online).