**Description:** Digital media create a marketplace where an endless number of options compete for a limited supply of public attention – an environment where building audiences is a prerequisite for making money or exercising influence. This course explains how the preferences and habits of media users, the strategies and constraints of media makers, and the growing prevalence of media metrics form a dynamic marketplace that shapes public attention. Topics include theories of media choice, the role of social networks, sharing economies, audience-making strategies, bias in measurement, recommender systems, big data, audience fragmentation, and the marketplace of ideas.

**Readings:** The texts for the course are listed below. The first is available at the Norris bookstore. Everything else is available on the course website (Canvas) at https://northwestern.instructure.com/


**Grades:** Your course grade is based on a final paper and the presentation associated with that paper. The paper should, at a minimum, offer a thoughtful review of some body of audience studies literature that is of particular interest to you. A proposal for your paper is due October 13th. Its final scope and substance will be determined in consultation with the professor.

**Schedule of Classes**

**Sept 29**  
Understanding Media Markets  
Webster Chapter 1 (The Marketplace of Attention)

**Oct 6**  
Users: Preferences  
Webster Chapter 2 (Media Users)


**Discussion Question(s):** With so much to choose from, what factors might promote audience loyalties (i.e., seeking out or avoiding types of media)? Should the existence of audience loyalties matter to anyone outside media industries? How do media users cope with so many choices? What strategies do you use? Do any of these strategies have biases? What are they?

**Oct 13** Users: Structures


**Discussion Question(s):** What are the social and technological structures that bear on media use and its consequences? People studying media effects, have long been aware of the role of opinion leaders or “influentials” in face-to-face networks. Are there opinion leaders in social media? How do they achieve that status? Why do some things go viral?

**Proposal Due**

**Oct 20** Individual Meetings

**Oct 27** The Media

Webster Chapter 3 (The Media)


**Discussion Question(s):** A number of writers have noted the emergence (or reemergence) of sharing economies. What kinds of media do people most often share? Why do they share? Digital media are what economists call “public goods.” They can be consumed without diminishing the supply for others. How does the public good nature of digital media affect the media environment?

**Nov 3 Metrics: Market Information**

Webster Chapter 4 (Media Measures)


**Discussion Question(s):** The digital media environment is filled with metrics. What’s the best “currency” for media? Can you think of examples of how “politics” have affected the kinds of metrics that are used in media industries? Do these metrics have any larger social consequences?

**Nov 10 Metrics: User Information**

View: [http://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles](http://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles)


**Discussion Question(s):** What does Pariser mean by the term “filter bubble?” In your own experience, can you think of an example of encountering a filter bubble? Are Big Data and the algorithms that feed of them a good thing? A bad thing? What are the social consequences of our increasing reliance on algorithms?

**Nov 17 **  
**Audience Formations**

Webster Chapter 5 (Audience Formations)


**Discussion Question(s):** What factors contribute to something’s popularity? What does popularity tell us about a media offering? What factors contribute to audience loyalties?

**Nov 24 **  
**The Marketplace of Attention**

Webster Chapter 6 & 7 (Constructing the Marketplace & The Marketplace of Ideas)

**Discussion Question(s):** Where do our preferences come from? Can you trace the origin of some of your newly-minted preferences (e.g., for bands; TV programs; personalities; causes)? Where do you get your news? How will the 21rst century marketplace of ideas operate? Will there be a common cultural forum? Will we have serendipitous encounters? Will we encounter noxious ideas?

**Dec 1 **  
**Presentations**

Papers Due Dec 8
Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, visit the SSD website at http://www.northwestern.edu/disability.

Academic Integrity at Northwestern

Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak to the instructor before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others’ answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, copying another student’s paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a loss of credit for that assignment—at a minimum. Other penalties may also apply, including academic suspension. The guidelines for determining academic dishonesty and procedures followed in a suspected incident of academic dishonesty are detailed on the website. For more information, visit: http://www.communication.northwestern.edu/programs/undergraduate/policies_procedures/academic_integrity/

Sexual Harassment Policy

It is the policy of Northwestern University that no male or female member of the Northwestern community—students, faculty, administrators, or staff—may sexually harass any other member of the community. Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute harassment when:

• submission to such conduct is made or threatened to be made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment or education; or
• submission to or rejection of such conduct is used or threatened to be used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual; or
• such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating what a reasonable person would sense as an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment, educational, or living environment.

For more information, visit: http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment/policy/index.html