Instructor: S. Shyam Sundar, PhD  
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College of Communications  
Penn State University  
865-2173 (leave message)  
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Office Hours: Tues and Thur– 5:00 to 6:00 pm; Fri – 2:00 to 3:30 pm  
(Advance sign-up at 122, Carnegie)  
E-Mail for Appointments outside of office hours

Teaching Assistants:  
Yan Huang (PhD candidate)  
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Office: 205 James Building  
Office Hours: By appointment only

T. Franklin Waddell (PhD candidate)  
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Office: 203 James Building  
Office Hours: By appointment only

Meeting Times: Tuesdays & Thursdays - 2:30 pm to 4:25 pm

Meeting Location: Rm. 113, Keller Bldg. (unless otherwise indicated)

Description: This course will investigate the vast body of empirical work on the effects of both media content and media technology upon audiences, with particular emphasis on the theoretical mechanisms governing these effects. In keeping with the media-effects research tradition in the field of communication, the course will primarily focus on social and/or behavioral approaches to inferring effects of media. It will emphasize the classic empirical approach to advancement of knowledge by way of theory-testing and theory development.

Themes: The following are the overarching themes of this course:  
• the social-psychological effects of media on their audiences,  
• critical exploration of theory and research in media effects, and  
• contribution to advancement of knowledge in media effects.
Goals: To help you learn
• about the psychological factors underlying media-effects theories and research findings,
• how to apply empirically derived knowledge to everyday media situations,
• how to derive communication strategies from media-effects theories and research,
• about integrating media-effects research to inform policy issues, and
• to conduct original research to investigate effects of newer media.

Textbook and Readings: There is no textbook for this course. However, students are required to download readings from ANGEL in preparation for each class meeting and the examinations.

Requirements:

Class Participation (30 percent of the grade),

Your class participation score will be based on your
• attendance (5%)
• involvement in class meetings (5%)
• group discussions (5%)
• motivated discussion questions (15%)

Paper Critique & Discussion Facilitation (5 percent),
Exams (40 percent), and
Group Project (25 percent)

Attendance is mandatory, and prior permission should be obtained from the instructor in case of emergency absences. Your active involvement in class meetings, as indicated by your participation during lectures and responses to discussion facilitation, will be rewarded. Your ability to integrate theoretical material from class meetings and readings in your group response to discussion topics will be another grading event. Starting 01/21, you will take turns facilitating a class discussion about one of the readings assigned for that day. How well you come prepared to conduct the class discussion will account for 5% of your total grade. Motivated discussion questions will begin the next week (01/21) and end at the beginning of April (04/03). During this period, all students will be required to submit at least one motivated discussion question (MDQ) for each class meeting, that is, two MDQs per week. The question should be mailed to sss12@psu.edu and CC’ed to yxh185@psu.edu and tfw119@psu.edu by 8 am on the day of the class. Some of these questions will be used for in-class discussion as well as bulletin-board discussions on ANGEL. Your question should be (a) relevant to the readings and lectures of that week, and will be graded for its (b) level of profound curiosity. It should ideally (c) integrate the readings for the class meeting with
your own media experiences, and (d) make references to classroom discussions and material learned in other classes, especially those outside Communication. The question should focus on (e) theoretical issues of media effects, i.e., why and how an effect appears to occur, instead of merely wondering whether a given effect is true or not. A question that is thoughtful as well as thought-provoking will be awarded full points whereas one that perfunctorily seeks factual answers will be awarded minimal points, if at all. More details on grading criteria will be provided as the semester progresses.

**Structure:**
After the first week of introduction to media effects, the class is divided into four parts: The first part of the semester will be devoted to readings and discussions pertaining to theoretical processes by which media and their messages have an effect on individuals. In the second part, students will use the Media Effects approach to study media technologies, with an emphasis on newer digital media. The third part of the semester will focus on effects of specific genres of media content (e.g., news, entertainment, advertisement) as well as particular elements of media messages (e.g., sex, violence, health, politics). The fourth and final part of the class is devoted to conducting an original piece of media-effects research by way of the Group Project.

**Paper critique:** Starting January 21st, students will take turns presenting critiques of media effects research articles (downloaded from ANGEL) during each class meeting. The student responsible for a given article is expected to distribute a handout and make a 8-minute presentation of the article in the class, followed by about 7 minutes of questions from the instructor and fellow students. This exercise will count for 5 percent of the final grade in the course. Each critique will be graded on a ten-point scale as follows: One point each for correct identification of concepts and statement of research question, three points for description of methods used, two for interpretation of results, and three points for a detailed theoretical and methodological critique of the study (which includes coming up with creative alternative explanations and discussion points for the class to think about as a way to expand/redesign). Students going early in the semester may have an opportunity to do more than one paper critique, depending upon availability. The average score across two or more critiques will be used to compute the overall “critique score” for the semester.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU SHOULD UPLOAD BOTH YOUR POWERPOINT PRESENTATION AND YOUR HANDOUT (WORD DOCUMENT) ON ANGEL AT LEAST 24 HOURS BEFORE YOUR PRESENTATION.**

**Group project:** The group project is devoted to applying the media-effects research tradition for studying the impact of various new personal and social media, from computers to mobile devices to microblogs. For this project, each team will come up with one or two variables related to either (a) personalization/customization or (b) interface cues that
appear on digital media interfaces. Then, each team will systematically
design a quantitative study (for example, a survey or an experiment)
that will investigate how these technological elements shape
psychological effects of newer media. If particular student groups
would like to study media effects outside the realm of newer media
technologies, we will allow that upon prior consultation with the
instructor. Details regarding the conduct of group project will be
spelled out as the semester progresses.

Schedule: The schedule includes the main topics for each class meeting and the
reading required for that meeting. The lectures will not repeat material
in the readings; rather, they will add more depth and attempt to
synthesize existing material. Therefore, it is very important to keep up
with the readings. This will not only aid you in your class participation
but also help you do well on the exams and group project work.

INTRODUCTION

01/14 INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS

01/16 INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDIA EFFECTS PARADIGM

PART 1: MEDIA-EFFECTS PROCESSES

01/21 DUAL PROCESS MODELS OF PERSUASION
Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann (1983)
Chaiken (1980)

01/23 SOCIAL LEARNING
Nabi & Clark (2008)
Harrison & Cantor (1997)

01/28 PRIMING
Bushman (1998)
Harris, Bargh, & Brownell (2009)

01/30 CULTIVATION
Romer, Jamieson, & Aday (2003)
Shrum (2001)

02/04 THIRD PERSON EFFECT & AUDIENCE ACTIVITY
Chen (2011)
Tal-Or, Cohen, Tsfati, & Gunther (2010)

02/06 EXAM 1
PART 2: EFFECTS OF MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

02/11 MEDIA-EFFECTS APPROACH FOR STUDYING TECHNOLOGY
Sundar (2009)
Lee & Sundar (2009)

02/13 EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES AND CUES
Sundar (2008)
Lee & Sundar (2012)

02/18 EFFECTS OF Adaptive AND TAILORED MEDIA
Sundar & Marathe (2010)
Sundar, Oh, Bellur, Jia, & Kim (2012)

02/20 EFFECTS OF MODALITY
Sundar (2000)

02/25 EFFECTS OF AGENCY
Stavrositi & Sundar (2012)

02/27 EFFECTS OF INTERACTIVITY
Guillory & Sundar (2013)
Sundar, Xu, & Bellur (2010)

03/04 EFFECTS OF NAVIGABILITY
Balakrishnan & Sundar (2011)

03/06 EXAM 2

PART 3: EFFECTS OF MEDIA CONTENT AND CONTEXT

03/18 EFFECTS OF VIOLENT MEDIA, PART 1
Bushman & Anderson (2009)
Hasan, Bègue, & Bushman (2013)

03/20 EFFECTS OF VIOLENT MEDIA, PART 2
Ramos, Ferguson, Failing, & Romero-Ramirez (2013)
Ferguson & Rueda (2010)

03/25 EFFECTS OF NEWS AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION
Lefevere, De Swert, & Walgrave (2011)
Meraz (2009)

03/27 EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING & MARKETING COMMUNICATION
Torres & Briggs (2007)
Peters & Leshner (2013)
The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus during the semester.

**Attendance Policy:** Attendance is mandatory for every class meeting. If a student needs to miss a class, prior permission must be obtained from the instructor.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the university. Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else’s work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the university or in the grade of “XF” (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.
As students studying communications, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own.) A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at http://tlt.psu.edu/plagiarism/student-tutorial/.

The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20, and in the College of Communications document, “Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures.” Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.

Note to Students with disabilities: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services, ODS located in room 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their web site at www.equity.psu.edu/ods/ Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

List of Electronic Course Reserves Readings
(Readings accessible via ANGEL)


