



Faculty of Social Sciences

SIMS58, Social Media and Democracy, 7.5 credits

Sociala medier och demokrati, 7,5 högskolepoäng

Second Cycle / Avancerad nivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by Graduate School Board on 2021-11-29 to be valid from 2022-08-29, autumn semester 2022.

General Information

The course is offered as an interdisciplinary, freestanding second cycle course in social sciences, as an elective course in the Master's programmes in Social Scientific Data Analysis, Global Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Gender Studies and Development Studies.

Language of instruction: English

<i>Main field of studies</i>	<i>Depth of study relative to the degree requirements</i>
Gender Studies	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Sociology of Law	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Social Work	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Political Science	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Sociology	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Social Anthropology	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Development Studies	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements
Human Geography	A1N, Second cycle, has only first-cycle course/s as entry requirements

Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, the students shall be able to

Knowledge and understanding

- With academic precision, give an account of a number of stated social sciences theories connected to democracy and social media
- Describe and critically discuss a number of central psychological, social and societal mechanisms that are relevant to the interplay between social media and democracy/democratic development
- Critically discuss possibilities and limitations in combining theories and concepts from different stated research traditions in the field of democracy and social media
- Describe ethical principles and regulatory frameworks that are relevant to research on social media and how it shall/should be applied in research studies, taking into account the legislation and regulation of different countries.

Competence and skills

- In one or more concrete cases, illustrate how theoretical concepts can be used and, where appropriate, be combined to strengthen the analysis in both research-related and practical respects
- Demonstrate proficiency, based on stated theories, to operationalise and design a research study connected with social media and democracy
- Evaluate different strategies for using social media in a political context from instrumental, scientific and ethical perspectives
- Demonstrate basic proficiency in how to develop/design studies in order for these to be compatible with existing ethical rules and guidelines
- Describe and communicate applications of research-based knowledge in the area to different interest groups/recipients.

Judgement and approach

- Critically discuss and evaluate current research on social media and democracy
- Evaluate from an ethical perspective different strategies for using social media in a political context
- Demonstrate the ability to orientate themselves in the area of tension between the scientific discussion of social media and democracy and the general debate and popular notions about the problem area.

Course content

Social media has changed the preconditions for obtaining and assessing information and talking about politics. These changes entail extensive challenges for representative democracy and, more generally, democratic dialogue. Over the past few decades, there has been a discussion that connects social media to a number of different perceived problems such as political polarisation, political populism, hate speech, manipulation, disinformation, mental illness, and, in general, the difficulties of maintaining a sustainable, democratic communication society.

On the other hand, it has long been hoped that social media could lead to deepened political participation, a more equal political debate and better possibilities for political organisation and mobilisation. This course takes a unified approach to the current

knowledge situation and provides advanced insight into social media as a phenomenon and into the mechanisms that influence interaction between social media, users, different actors and political outcomes.

The research concerning these issues is based partly on established theoretical perspectives and methods, and partly on attempts to develop new paradigms in which both theoretical and methodological approaches are emerging. An important theme in the course is therefore orientation in the research situation (state of the art) and a critical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of different research approaches with special emphasis on theoretical and methodological assumptions that shape knowledge development.

The starting points for the course are democratic theory, theories of social media and current research and debate about democratic development in the hybrid media society including intersectional approaches. During the course, the students therefore specialise in a number of specific theories of social media and democracy, including deliberative democracy, (social) media logic, media effects, selective exposure, the spiral of silence, normalisation and reinforcement hypotheses about political participation, and relevant ethical principles and issues.

The students are encouraged to try to combine the discussed theoretical traditions and research fields in a systematic way in order to develop an independent line in both academic and practically applicable contexts.

Course design

The teaching consists of lectures, seminars/field trips and supervision. Group discussions and exercises make up a substantial part of the course design. Seminars and workshops are compulsory. Students who have been unable to participate in compulsory components through no fault of their own due to circumstances such as an accident or sudden illness will be offered the opportunity to compensate for or re-take compulsory components. This also applies to students who have been absent because of duties as an elected student representative.

Assessment

The assessment for the course consists of:

- Written take-home exam in the form of a research study design (40%)
- Recorded audio-visual presentation intended for practitioners (30%)
- Written take-home exam in the form of a peer review of a fellow student's texts (20%)
- Written take-home exam in the form of a peer review of a fellow student's presentation (10%)

All written tests must have a reference system and a list of quoted sources.

Submissions are made via the indicated course platform in accordance with the stated deadline.

The course includes opportunities for assessment at a first examination, a re-examination close to the first examination and a second re-sit for courses completed in the past year (catch-up exam). Within a year of a major change or discontinuation

of the course, at least two further opportunities for assessment are offered on the same course content. After this, further re-examination opportunities are offered but in accordance with the current course syllabus.

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

Subcourses that are part of this course can be found in an appendix at the end of this document.

Grades

Marking scale: Fail, E, D, C, B, A.

The grade for a non-passing result is Fail. The student's performance is assessed with reference to the learning outcomes of the course. For the grade of E, the student must show acceptable results. For the grade of D, the student must show satisfactory results. For the grade of C, the student must show good results. For the grade of B, the student must show very good results. For the grade of A, the student must show excellent results. For the grade of Fail, the student will have shown unacceptable results. At the start of the course, students are informed about the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus and about the grading scale and how it is applied on the course.

The grade assessment is weighted, based on the following allocation:

- Written take-home exam in the form of a research study design (40%)
- Recorded audio-visual presentation intended for practitioners (30%)
- Written take-home exam in the form of a peer review of a fellow student's texts (20%)
- Written take-home exam in the form of a peer review of a fellow student's presentation (10%)

The grade for the whole course consists of a mean of graded components (in which A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2 and E = 1) divided according to the percentage allocated for each component. To pass the course, the student must have received at least the grade of E on all components assessed using the grading scale E-A, Fail, and participated in all compulsory components.

Entry requirements

Admission to the course requires 150 credits including a degree project for a Degree of Bachelor, or in the first cycle in the main field of study, in social sciences or an equivalent subject.

Oral and written proficiency in English equivalent to English 6/B from Swedish upper secondary school is a requirement. International qualifications will be assessed in accordance with national guidelines.

Subcourses in SIMS58, Social Media and Democracy

Applies from H22

2201 Social Media and Democracy, 7,5 hp
Grading scale: Fail, E, D, C, B, A