

MEDIA PROJECT GUIDE

Politics, Society, and the Mass Media (POLS-3000)

OVERVIEW

This project asks you to apply course concepts to analyze a contemporary media phenomenon. You will research a topic related to media and politics/society, develop an argument, and present your findings in a creative format of your choice.

Requirements: 2000+ words, 10-12 sources, critical analysis using course frameworks.

FORMAT OPTIONS

- 1. Traditional Essay** – Academic argument with thesis, evidence, and analysis
- 2. Video Essay/Documentary** – 15-20 min with narration + script (include script in submission)
- 3. Interactive Website/Blog** – Multi-page analysis with multimedia (provide URL + written summary)
- 4. Podcast Series** – 3-4 episodes (~15 min each) with transcript
- 5. Narrated Slideshow/Presentation** – PowerPoint/Google Slides with voice-over + speaker notes
- 6. Other Creative Formats** – Propose your own (infographic series, graphic novel, etc.) – get approval first

EXAMPLE TOPICS

- How does TikTok's algorithm shape political engagement among Gen Z?
- Surveillance capitalism in fitness apps: Analyzing Strava, Peloton, and data extraction
- Manufactured consent in coverage of [specific conflict/event]: Comparing CNN, Fox, Al Jazeera, CBC
- AI-generated influencers and the collapse of authentic celebrity
- Platform moderation as governance: Meta's Oversight Board and free speech
- The attention economy and mental health: Instagram's impact on teenage users (see Haidt)

GRADING RUBRIC (30% of final grade)

CRITERION	WEIGHT	EXPECTATIONS
Argument & Thesis	25%	Clear, original argument that applies course concepts; goes beyond description to analysis
Research & Sources	25%	10-12 quality sources (mix of academic, contemporary, course readings); proper citations
Application of Theory	20%	Sophisticated use of 2-3 course frameworks (e.g., Chomsky, Zuboff, McLuhan, Postman)
Evidence & Examples	15%	Specific, concrete examples that support argument; effective use of data/case studies
Format & Presentation	15%	Professional execution; creative use of medium; clear organization; accessibility

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Start with your outline (due Mar 11)** – This is your roadmap and prevents scope creep
- **Choose a focused topic** – Better to go deep on one case study than shallow on many
- **Connect theory to practice** – Don't just describe; analyze using course frameworks
- **Match format to content** – Visual topics suit video/web; theoretical topics suit essays/podcasts
- **Include all required components** – Videos need scripts, websites need content summaries, podcasts need transcripts

Questions? Come to office hours or email jmagnus-johnston@cmu.ca