

Advanced Master in European Integration

Platform and algorithmic governance in Europe course outline

Course aims

Digital platforms and their algorithms are under scrutiny for their role in addictive and manipulative behaviour, hate speech, data breaches, and more. Their presence in our everyday lives is no longer (naively) evaluated in mere positive terms. In recent years, the European Union has sought to better understand the (societal and political) impact of digital platforms and increase their responsibility, through a varied set of policies.

This module enables critical reflection on platform and algorithmic governance in Europe by unpacking how governance of and through technology has changed over the years, what we know and don't know about platforms' role in propagating *or* preventing illegal and harmful content and behaviour, where scientific debates stand on how to govern digital (public) spaces. We also consider the consequences of patchwork policies in this field and whether there are sufficient safeguards to prevent abuse of well-intended policies.

In this module, we explore these topic and questions through *two theory-based lectures*, to provide concepts and theories that dig deeper than the latest tech policy fad; *two policy-based lectures* to sketch the history of EU policy approach towards digital platforms; *two case study lectures* on how socio-technical problems are currently tackled through a mix of societal, private and policy responses; and a *simulation exercise* to gain practical understanding of how EU digital policy-making works in practice.

Additional information

The readings will be provided in electronic format to the students via the e-learning platform. Students who wish to deepen their knowledge or need more background materials will receive a recommended reading list.

Learning outcomes

The student has interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding of

- select state of the art theory, concept, research and scientific debates on the governance of platforms and algorithms.
- the competence and policies of the EU in this field, specifically how recent legislative efforts interrelate and (likely) impact digital platforms.

The student will become familiar with technological developments in EU policymaking.

Course assignments

Students will have two assignments for the module: a simulation exercise on a recent (EU) digital policy and a final exam. The exercise simulates interinstitutional negotiations (European Parliament, Council, Commission) on a digital policy-making file and will take place during two sessions of the module. It includes a preparatory input paper (graded) and a feedback session (ungraded). The final exam assesses students' knowledge and understanding of both the research and policy of platform

and algorithmic governance. The exam is written and includes questions that require a medium length response, and a brief essay.

Course structure

The following list provides a proposal for the structure of classes and themes (to be confirmed upon delivery of course manual).

1. Introduction: a short history of governance of and through technology
2. Theory: the rise and fall of digital platforms and their algorithms
3. EU platform policy approach: from the e-commerce directive to the digital services act and beyond
4. Access to platform data: how to assess (societal) risks and impact of platforms
5. Case study: tackling online disinformation in the EU
6. A view from elsewhere: digital censorship in authoritarian contexts
7. Simulation exercise: digital policy in practice (1)
8. Simulation exercise: digital policy in practice (2)