

# General Exam Questions for Yibin Fan

## Exam 1: Core (COM 500/501) Question

For the purposes of this question, imagine the following scenario:

You've successfully published your paper on incidental political communication across Reddit, and it has been very well received. A private foundation that seeks to promote more political discussion in society has approached you and asked for advice on a small grants program it is considering establishing, which will support communication research aimed at understanding (and eventually promoting) political discussion in non-political internet contexts. While the foundation staff is specifically interested in funding a range of epistemological traditions and perspectives in communication research, they have very little background in communication research themselves. They want your help understanding what a program like this might look like.

Drawing on the material you covered in COM 500 and 501, and any other material you find relevant, write a report that summarizes the advice you will give to the foundation. To do so, first identify a set of epistemological perspectives or approaches you would want to ensure are supported. For each epistemological perspective or approach:

- a. Provide a general introduction to that perspective or approach while highlighting important thinkers, historical context, pieces of work, etc.
- b. In conceptual terms, describe how a grantee working from this perspective might approach the project of understanding and supporting political speech in non-political Internet contexts.
- c. Briefly outline an example of a study that a researcher working from this perspective might conduct. This can be a "real" existing study, or you can imagine a hypothetical study that reflects how a researcher working from the perspective you've identified might approach the question.

Once you have introduced each perspective, reflect on any connections, tensions, conflicts, and/or complementarities you see between them.

## Exam 2: How media-related theories of effects shape and interact with individuals' political talk

Communication scholarship traditionally has juxtaposed mass media and interpersonal communication as two forces exerting influence on a host of attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. With the development of today's media ecosystem and more nuanced theorizing, scholars have increasingly turned to examining the influences of one type of communication on the other. This general-exam question requires you to focus on how media-related theories of effects shape and interact with individuals' political talk.

In this essay, please address the following questions related to political talk. Try to divide your answer between the two questions in a way that is roughly proportional to the percentages in parentheses.

1. What is your conceptualization of political talk, and how does it differ from other similar—but distinctly different—concepts? (And very briefly in this section, why is political talk normatively important today?) (25%)
2. As two of the most-examined theories that shape how individuals understand the world around them, agenda setting and framing have evolved significantly over the past half century. For each area of scholarship: (a) How does each influence political talk?; (b) What would you consider the key theoretical and empirical turns?; and (c) What points of contention remain unresolved and what needs additional research? (75%)

## Exam 3: Organizing in offline and online spaces

For this question, discuss organizing in offline and online spaces by answering a series of subquestions. Make sure you answer all the questions:

- a. What are some common ways scholars have defined *organizing*? Based on your preferences and understanding of the literature, offer a definition that you will rely on for the remainder of this question.
- b. Why is organizing relevant to collective action? Describe your conceptualization of the relationship between mobilization, participation, and organizing, both generally and in the context of collective action.
- c. Identify a series of important factors that contribute to organizing collective action.
- d. How are social networks related to organizing in general? How are they related to organizing collective action?

- e. How has organizing changed as organizing moves from the offline space to the online space?
- f. Why should we care about an ecological perspective in understanding organizing? Why is it relevant to understanding organizing collective action?
- g. From an ecological perspective, to what extent does the online space overlap with the offline space? How can we use an ecological perspective to understand the shift of organizing from offline to online?