

The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

M.P.S. in Political Management

Fall
2017

Digital Strategy

6452.10
3 Credits

Wednesday, 7:10-9:40pm

1957 E Street Room 314

September 6 – December 7, 2017

PLEASE NOTE: No class on August 30

BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Instructor: Sue Zoldak, Founder and Owner, The Zoldak Agency

Sue Zoldak creates ground-breaking digital and social media campaigns, builds grassroots and advocacy campaigns, and provides leading-edge advertising and media strategy. She succeeds by bringing a Madison Avenue mentality to public affairs, unafraid to bring uncommon ideas to the table. Determined to get inside the mind of audiences and find out what gets them to act, she tirelessly seeks to deploy the right tools, but only as part of a sound strategy. Sue is often sought for her insights by those developing new digital platforms and advocacy services. As an industry connector, Sue convenes a 1000-person networking group called DC Media Peeps, the largest and fastest growing happy hour for public affairs, communications, digital and advertising professionals.

2017 AAPC Gold Pollie Award – **Best Digital and Internet Campaign** in Public Affairs Division

2017 Reed Award – **Best Use of Social Media** for Public Affairs Campaign

Contact Information

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Email Address: sue@zoldakagency.com

Communication

Please contact me by e-mail, unless it is an emergency, in which case you may reach me on my mobile phone. Mobile text is okay (and preferred over voicemail) for brief, urgent messages as long as you include your full name in the body of the text each time. I will respond within 24 hours to all student e-mails. If you would like to arrange an appointment to see me one-on-one, please e-mail me at least 48 hours in advance and we will arrange a meeting or call.

Blackboard Site

A Blackboard website has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to use the site to access readings, submit papers, engage in discussion board conversations, and obtain their grades. In short, Blackboard will be the **primary venue** for outside classroom communications.

Students can access the site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu>. Tech support is available at 202-994-4948 or <http://helpdesk.gwu.edu>.

Academic Integrity

All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at <http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity>.

Support for Students with Disabilities

George Washington University’s Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS. Please also be sure to notify me of your disability, should you require accommodations. Additional information is available at www.gwu.edu/~dss.

In the Event of an Emergency or Crisis During Class

If we experience some an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we must leave here, we will meet at the lobby level of the Media & Public Affairs Building (805 21st Street, NW) to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University’s operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu>.

Attendance Policy

Attending class is required. Should you find yourself with a scheduling conflict, please contact me as soon as you are aware of the issue to let me know that you will absent, otherwise, it will be considered an unexcused absence and it will negatively count against your participation grade. Simply put, you must attend class to participate. In addition, examples of class assignments will be shown in class. **Three or more class unexcused absences during the fall semester (1/5 of the classes) will result in a failing class participation grade.**

Out-of-Class/Independent Learning Expectation

Over the course of the semester, students will spend at least 2 hours (100 minutes) per week in class. Required reading for the class meetings and written response papers or projects are expected to take up, on average, 7 hours (350 minutes) per week. Over the course of the semester, students will spend 25 hours in instructional time and 87.5 hours preparing for class.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the semester, students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the course through GW's online course evaluation system. **It is very important that you take the time to complete an evaluation.** Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting any of the following:

Dr. Michael Cohen
Interim Director, Political Management Program
michaeldcohen@gwu.edu | 202-994-5512

Suzanne Farrand
Director of Academic Administration, GSPM
sfarrand@gwu.edu | 202-994-9309

Dr. Jack Prostko
Associate Dean for Learning and Faculty Development
College of Professional Studies
jackp@gwu.edu | 202-994-3592

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND GSPM EXPECTATIONS

Political Management Program Objectives

A Political Management degree prepares students to win campaigns for elective office and policy positions, and to do so in a manner that benefits democracy and society as well as their organization and clients.

In completing the degree, students will be able to:

1. Assess a political environment, develop a strategy to achieve specified goals, and execute that strategy;
2. Draw upon a repertoire of effective campaign communication skills;
3. Collect, evaluate, and incorporate empirical evidence to shape and optimize the strategy;
4. Find, engage, and motivate the right leaders, professionals, and citizens;
5. Recognize and work through recurring political dilemmas in a manner that upholds ethical standards and professional conduct.

Graduate School Expectations

Students enrolled in a graduate program should take their academic responsibilities seriously and be prepared to meet the following expectations:

1. Utilize effective time management skills to complete and submit their assignments on their required due dates and times.
2. Have attained a mastery of written communication skills including proper sentence

- structure, grammar, spelling, and word usage.
3. Understand how to properly format in-text citations and references for resources and information integrated into their written assignments.

GSPM prepares students for careers in the professional political world. In politics, words and deadlines matter. Excellent written communication skills are essential for success. Every word used, whether it is in a television or radio ad, direct mail piece, social media, or a press release, will be scrutinized. Similarly, deadlines are important. Election Day does not get postponed because a candidate and their campaign are not prepared. There are no “do-overs” because a direct mail piece did not arrive to its intended recipients until after the election was concluded. Students will be best positioned for success in the practical political world if they have developed and exercise excellent written communication and time management skills.

THE COURSE

Course Description and Overview

This class is an introduction to digital strategy as part of a modern communications effort, with an emphasis on political, public affairs, and advocacy communications. We will begin by covering the origins of social media and the rise of digital platforms. It is important to understand why certain platforms were invented, what void these platforms fill for the user, and what users expect to get out of their digital universe before one can take advantage of these platforms for communicating effectively as a professional strategist. In other words, you cannot influence someone unless you know where, how, and why they consume information. We will quickly move on to how to create content, how to target audiences, how to place and program advertising, and how to measure results. Along the way, we will hear from experts in the field about real world applications and case studies.

Students can expect to come away with the knowledge of how to create a digital communications plan, how to pitch that plan, how to budget for that plan, how to execute both an organic and a paid digital plan, and how to quantify results. You will also come away with an expert-level understanding of the history of social media.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will;

1. Understand the history of digital mediums and social networks. It is impossible to prepare for the future without understanding the past. While this may seem like a very philosophical approach to a digital strategy class, it is imperative that you understand the digital environment we live in and the history of how we got here not just as a user but as a digital expert and historian. Over time, you will begin to see why the “origin story” of digital mediums is so important to our survival in an ever-changing world. The three (or four) assigned books serve to support this objective.

2. Understand the current public policy issues and trends that impact the job of a digital strategist. The world we operate in as digital strategists changes every day. Whether it is a Facebook privacy change or an FTC ruling, knowing how to keep up with trends and public policy is what makes you a good digital counselor. The weekly trending topic submissions and discussions will serve to support this objective.
3. Understand the basics of running a digital and social media advertising campaign. Without a doubt one of the most requested skills for new entrants into the field of digital is knowledge of how to run a paid advertising campaign. We will walk through the steps of launching ads on Facebook, Twitter, and Google AdWords. Bring your laptop to class for a hands-on experience – the best way to remember how to do this is to try it.
4. Be able to write a complete digital media communications plan. Week by week, you will build the skills to develop a full digital media communications plan. We will discuss how to explore both strategy and tactics, messaging and creative, calendars and budgets. Assignments will culminate in a semester project and presentation.

Course Requirements

Bolded items are those related to your semester-long individual project.

- (1) Trending Topic Weekly Submission - Due Weeks 3 through 12 (1 point x10) = 10% of grade
- (2) **Audience Matrix and Persona Assignments** – Due Week 4: 9/20 (5 pts. each) = 10% of grade
- (3) **Editorial Calendars** – Due Week 5: 9/27 (5 pts. each) = 10% of grade
- (4) **Social Media Ads** – Due Week 6: 10/4 (10 pts.) = 10% of grade
- (4) **Project Proposal** – Due Week 7: 10/11 (5 pts.) = 5% of grade*
- (5) Squarespace Website – Due Week 11: 11/8 (10 pts.) = 10% of grade
- (6) **UTM Tagging Protocol** – Due Week 12: 11/15 (5 pts.) = 5% of grade*
- (7) **Google AdWords proposal** – Due Week 13: 12/6 (5 pts.) = 5% of grade*
- (7) **Final Semester Project** – Due Week 13: 12/6 (25 points) = 25% of grade
- (8) Class participation - Includes attendance, participation in discussion, demonstration of having read assigned reading material, asking questions, showing developing insight and expertise for the material, and seeking help when needed = 15% of grade

*One low-scoring 5-point assignment will be dropped. However, all of those pieces must appear in your Final Semester Project. Therefore if you want any feedback on those elements, please complete all assignments when due.

Evaluation and Grading**Please note: All assignments are due at 1pm ET on Due Date.**

Assignment	Description and Learning Objective(s)	Due Date	Weight
Trending Topics	Choose a news item or trending topic in digital or social media, internet policy, advertising, or politics. Research your topic and supply three supporting links. Topics will be chosen at random to start class discussion. Be prepared to give an overview of your chosen topic when called upon.	Due Weeks 3 through 12	10%
Audience Matrix and Persona	This assignment is about demonstrating an understanding of your target audience, knowing what action you need them to take on your behalf, and defining the “voice” that you will use to speak to them online.	Due Week 4: 9/20	10%
Editorial Calendars	This assignment is about how to plan out content for a month (detailed calendar) as well as a year (broad calendar). Editorial calendars help digital teams stay on message and coordinate tactics with strategy. Examples will be provided in class.	Due Week 5: 9/27	10%
Social Media Ads	This assignment will combine best practices in copy writing and basic graphic design skills. You must also demonstrate an understanding of how content must be tailored to different social platforms. Examples will be provided in class.	Due Week 6: 10/4	10%
Project Proposal	Choose an organization or issue advocacy campaign around which your semester project, a full digital media communications plan, will be based. Explain the mission of the organization or campaign and an overview what your plan will accomplish for them.	Due Week 7: 10/11	5%
Squarespace Website	Sometimes your client needs a basic website in one week or even one day. This exercise will be started in class and is meant to demonstrate your ability to create a functional website under a very tight deadline. You must demonstrate understanding of basic web usability	Due Week 11: 11/8	10%

	principles.		
UTM Tagging Protocol	This assignment is to demonstrate understanding of how to create UTM tracking links and a protocol for defining campaign-wide usage for the Campaign, Content, Medium, and Source fields. UTM tagging is the underlying method behind tracking results of various digital efforts in a Google Analytics dashboard. Examples will be provided in class.	Due Week 12: 11/15	10%
Google AdWords Proposal	Create a list of key search words or phrases that would support your issue advocacy campaign. Write 5 AdWords ad copy using the provided Excel template.	Due Week 13: 12/6	5%
Final Semester Project	The final semester project, a written memo and a slide presentation, will include elements assigned throughout the course (refined as necessary based on feedback). The final memo should include a.) background on the organization or issue advocacy campaign chosen; b.) a campaign proposal and overview of what the digital plan will accomplish c.) challenges and opposition analysis; d.) campaign messaging; e.) target audiences and an audience matrix; f.) campaign creative rational and persona; g.) editorial calendar; h.) advertising plans; i.) goals; j.) and budget. The final presentation must be a 5-page slide deck to present to class that provides a 30,000-foot view of your campaign plan. The November 15 th class will include dedicated time to ask questions about this project.	Due Week 13: 12/6	25%
Class Participation	Includes attendance, participation in discussion, demonstration of having read assigned reading material, asking questions, showing developing insight and expertise for the material, and seeking help when needed.	Weekly	15%

Following is the grade scale for all GSPM classes:

Grade	Grading Standard
A 94-100	Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work.
A- 90-93	Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work.
B+ 87-89	Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work.
B 83-86	Satisfactory work, but needs reworking and more effort. Note that although not a failing grade, at the graduate level, anything below a “B” is viewed as unacceptable.
B- 80-82	You’ve completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all the requirements.
C+ 77-79	Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows some motivation and concern.
C 73-76	Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern.
C- 70-72 (lowest grade to pass)	Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc.
F Below 70	Unacceptable performance, or inability to submit the assignment.

Weekly Assignment Due Date

Weekly assignments must be turned in digitally **by 1pm ET on the date due**, usually the Wednesday of class unless otherwise instructed. Turning in an assignment any time after 1 pm ET on the due date up until 1pm of the following day is considered *one day late* (see Late Assignments below). This is because I like the chance to review submissions prior to class so that I can address any overall shared lessons or observations. By turning in your assignment late, you are jeopardizing how much your classmates may gain from the class by restricting my ability to give quality, timely feedback. Thank you!

Late Assignments

For each day that an assignment is late (one day is counted as after 1pm ET on the due date until 1pm ET on the following day), it will be marked down 10 percentage points (e.g., from a 93% to an 83%). If you believe you have a legitimate "emergency" that makes it so that you will be unable to complete an assignment on time, please notify me as soon as possible to make alternate arrangements. A one-time extension may be made to the due date for emergency situations. No deadline will be extended more than once. Late assignments should still be turned in as multiple late or missing assignments will begin to also impact your class participation grade despite class attendance record.

Classroom Technology Policy

Students are welcome to bring a laptop or tablet computer to class for the purpose of taking

notes, but are cautioned against letting it become a distraction or otherwise causing disengagement from the class discussion. Some classes will require you to work on your laptop, such as classes where we practice programming Facebook ads. It is expected that you do not have extraneous browser windows or chat dialogues, etc., open during class.

Classroom Social Media Policy

The contents of presentations and lectures are intended only for the benefit of enrolled students and should be considered “off the record.” With the exception of thanking guest speakers or engaging with brands and campaigns for the purposes of classwork, students are expected to refrain from posting about the contents of this course on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media platforms. Please do not take photos of slides or screen shares. No digital recording of any kind is permitted.

Required Text and Learning Materials

Digital is a fast-moving space. Digital experts are defined by their ability to spot trends, understand changes to platforms, and anticipate public policy issues that impact our profession. Therefore, one of the expectations of this class is that you will be responsible for bringing to class knowledge of key events and developments for class discussion. That means we will rely less on pre-assigned reading and more on you being responsible for staying up to date using such resources as Ad Age, Social Media Today, Mashable, Inc.com, Wired.com, etc. When exploring a topic (i.e. Facebook’s recent change to their mission statement or an article about net neutrality as a public policy issue), it is important to explore multiple sources about the same topic. We will look at every topic from multiple angles and the expectation is that you will be open to discussion. It is important to study developments under two lenses: 1.) what caused this to happen and 2.) how does this effect my job as a digital strategist. **Each week, you are to submit one topic with three supporting links for possible class discussion with a rationale on why you think this topic is important. More details on this assignment will be given out the first day of class.**

Listed below are the **3 books (4th is optional reading but will make for interesting discussion)** you'll need to purchase. **ALL other readings will be assigned weekly or as it happens in the news.**

Books (in order of reading):

1. Kirkpatrick, David. *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World*, 2011. (<https://www.amazon.com/Facebook-Effect-Inside-Company-Connecting/dp/1439102120/>)
2. Bilton, Nick. *Hatching Twitter: A True Story of Money, Power, Friendship, and Betrayal*, 2014. (<https://www.amazon.com/Hatching-Twitter-Story-Friendship-Betrayal/dp/1591847087/>)
3. Levy, Steven. *In The Plex: How Google Thinks, Works, and Shapes Our Lives*, 2011 (<https://www.amazon.com/Plex-Google-Thinks-Works-Shapes/dp/1416596585/>)
4. OPTIONAL: Eggers, Dave. *The Circle*, 2014. (<https://www.amazon.com/Circle-Dave-Eggers/dp/0345807294/>) (Fiction)

Please note: Watching “the movie” does NOT count as reading the book in any of the above cases. If you have read these books in the past (more than a year ago), please re-read them for this class.

Tentative Course Calendar*

*The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar. An updated Course Calendar will always be available in a shared Dropbox folder.

August 31 – Week 1 – NOTE: NO CLASS THIS WEEK

I will be out of town for a conference this week. You will use this week to start and finish the first book assignment. I look forward to meeting you next week!

DUE TODAY:

1. Sign up to receive email updates from candidates for 2017 Virginia gubernatorial election:
 - a. <http://ralphnortham.com/>
 - b. <https://edforvirginia.com/splash/join-ed/>
 - c. <http://cliffhyra.com/>

Assignment for next class:

1. Start and finish reading ***The Facebook Effect*** in lieu of class meeting.

September 6 – Week 2 – Introduction and the birth of social media

Topic to be covered:

1. Introductions and class overview
 - a. Explanation of weekly trending topic assignment
2. Class discussion on ***The Facebook Effect*** and developments since
 - a. How has Facebook evolved since the book was written
 - b. What are the benefits and disadvantages of using Facebook to influence your audience
 - c. Who do you think does a good job of using Facebook?
3. Introduction of semester project
 - a. Overview of project requirements
 - b. Choosing an issue and campaign

Assignment for next class:

1. Begin reading ***Hatching Twitter*** for discussion in Week 4.
2. Submit a trending topic in the digital space for class discussion next week with 3 supporting links (A few topics will be selected at random for discussion in next week’s class) – THIS IS A REPEATING WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

September 13 – Week 3 – Knowing your audience and voice

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Case Study: Ending the Hall Tax
3. Creating an audience matrix
4. Creating an audience persona

Assignment for next class:

1. Submit a trending topic with 3 supporting links
2. Submit your audience matrix
3. Submit your audience persona
4. Finish reading ***Hatching Twitter*** for discussion in Week 4.

September 20 – Week 4 – The birth of Twitter, editorial calendars, storytelling

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Discussion of ***Hatching Twitter*** and developments since
3. Creating an editorial calendar
 - a. Broad vs. detailed calendars
4. 8-point Story Arc class exercise

Assignment for next class:

1. Submit a trending topic with 3 supporting links
2. Create a 12-month (broad) and 1-month (detailed) editorial calendar
3. Begin reading ***In The Plex*** for discussion in Week 6.

September 27 – Week 5 – Digital creative, branding, digital vendors

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Using visuals in digital media
 - a. IAB standards
 - b. Best practices, specs and restrictions for social graphics (i.e. Facebook 20% rule)
 - c. Tips for creating simple graphics
 - d. Using video and video trailers
3. Campaign branding
4. Guest speaker and discussion: Landscape of digital vendors and what they do

Assignment for next class:

1. Submit a trending topic with 3 supporting links
2. Create 3 Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram graphics that support your communications plan
4. Finish reading ***In The Plex*** for discussion in Week 6.

October 4 – Week 6 – The rise of Google, sample issue advocacy campaign

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Discussion of *In The Plex* and developments since
3. Running a digital issue advocacy campaign
 - a. General campaign management
 - b. Building a grassroots database
4. Buying digital advertising
 - a. What are impressions, frequency, CPM and other terms
 - b. What is the difference between direct buys and ad network buys

Assignment for next class:

1. Submit a trending topic with 3 supporting links
2. Submit project proposal describing the issue advocacy organization or campaign you will be using your semester project
3. Reading assignments on net neutrality to be distributed

October 11 – Week 7 – Planning and running a 360-degree campaign

Topic to be covered:

1. Putting it all together: How to write a digital communications plan
 - a. Strategy vs. tactics
 - b. Creative, messaging, and production
 - c. Budget examples
2. Case Study: Defeating Soda Taxes
 - a. A look behind the scenes at a decade long effort
3. Policy discussion: net neutrality

Assignment for next class:

1. Submit a trending topic with 3 supporting links
2. Being reading *The Circle*, if reading
3. Readings assignments online privacy and ad targeting to be distributed

October 18 – Week 8 – Privacy and data

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Policy discussion: online privacy and ad targeting
3. Guest speaker and discussion: Using voter data

Assignment for next class:

1. Submit a trending topic with 3 supporting links
2. Begin drafting your final digital communications plan

October 25 – Week 9 – Facebook advertising, net neutrality

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. How to launch a Facebook advertising campaign
3. Guest speaker: TBA

Assignment for next class:

1. Continue drafting your final digital communications plan
2. Finish reading **The Circle**, if reading

November 1 – Week 10 – Email marketing, websites

Topic to be covered:

1. Virginia gubernatorial candidate email campaign comparisons and discussion
2. Email communications and marketing
3. Email and copy writing class exercise: Write email copy, banner ad copy, and landing page copy for your issue campaign
4. How to create a Squarespace website in one hour
5. Optimizing landing pages for email and advertising campaigns

Assignment for next class:

1. Monitor results of November 7th election in Virginia, especially as it pertains to digital strategy
2. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news) – Note: can be related to governor's race
3. Finish your Squarespace website and submit link for review
4. Continue drafting your final digital communications plan

November 8 – Week 11 – Electoral campaigns, analytics

Topic to be covered:

1. Discussion of Virginia gubernatorial election results
2. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
3. Reporting and analytics
4. UTM tagging and campaign tracking
5. Guest speaker: TBA

Assignment for next class:

1. Create a UTM tagging protocol for your campaign plan
2. Continue drafting your final digital communications plan

November 15 – Week 12 – Twitter advertising, Google AdWords campaigns, crisis management

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)

2. Twitter advertising campaigns
3. Google AdWords campaigns
4. Digital crisis management discussion
5. Q&A on semester project

Assignment for next class:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Create a Google AdWords proposal for your issue campaign
3. Continue working on semester project

November 22 – NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

Anyone who does not have a place to go for Thanksgiving meal (even last-minute due to travel issues) is welcome to share the meal out my house. I've always made this offer to teams and colleagues and now I extend the invitation to you. So, if you get stranded or otherwise, please don't be shy. I cook well, I promise. Email me for time and address!

Need a quick plane read? May I recommend, ***Never Eat Alone***, by Keith Ferrazzi. (<https://www.amazon.com/Never-Eat-Alone-Expanded-Updated/dp/0385346654>)

December 6 – Week 13 – Student Presentations

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Student presentations of digital communications plans

December 13 – Week 14 – Student Presentations

Topic to be covered:

1. Trending topic of the week (based on class submissions and/or news)
2. Student presentations of digital communications plans
3. Career questions and wrap up

Copyright Statement

Unless explicitly allowed by the instructor, course materials, class discussions, and examinations are created for and expected to be used by class participants only. The recording and rebroadcasting of such material, by any means, is forbidden.