SI710/COMM840: Social Media Studies: Theory & Research
Fall, 2018

Schedule: Class meets Wednesdays, 4:00 – 7:00pm
Location: 1265 NQ
Instructor: Dr. Nicole Ellis
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   Office Hours: Wednesday and Thurs 1-2, and by appointment

Course Description
This course will introduce doctoral students to relevant theories and scholarship examining the social, psychological, and interpersonal aspects of social media use, using relevant theories in fields such as communication, social psychology, and sociology. We will be reading both classic and new research in this area. Topics include: computer-mediated communication theory; self-presentation and online identity; motivations for social media use, interpersonal relationship initiation and maintenance; cultural aspects of social media platform production and management, and the psychological implications of social media use. The course will be structured as a discussion-focused learning experience.

Course goals
The purpose of this course is to provide students with an overview of critical concepts for understanding the ways in which social technologies – especially but not limited to social media – reshape social interactions, and the implications of this for relationship development, self-presentation, identity work, and other important processes. The reading list covers both foundational work and state of the art scholarship in this vibrant and emerging arena of scholarship.

Reading
There is a fair amount of reading included in this course, which you will need to engage with in order to contribute to class discussions. That said, it’s acceptable to skim sometimes when you are certain a particular article is not going to be particularly useful for your research focus. But I hope will not often be the case. And it will be apparent when it is.

Unless otherwise noted, all readings are in Canvas. If you can’t find or are having trouble with a file, please let me know immediately so I can fix it. The books you should purchase, check out, or borrow are:

Weekly Responses (30%)
Each week’s readings share a focus, which will vary week to week. Throughout the semester you should upload six (6) two-page (double-spaced) reaction papers to canvas. In your paper, you will respond to the readings, addressing questions such as: What did you find particularly interesting, counter-intuitive, or troubling about this work? What research question(s), methods, or future research was suggested by the readings in your opinion? What alternative explanations should the author(s) have considered? How does this work speak to (or ignore) other work we’ve discussed this semester? What concepts are particularly useful for your own work? There is not a standard structure for these papers. You should use them as a platform for working through and synthesizing your thoughts about the readings and topic area, and we may organize class discussions around the ideas you raise. I am NOT looking for a summary of the readings or for you to “prove” that you have done the reading – that is my assumption. I am looking for reactions, responses, and ideas sparked by the readings. This is an exercise designed to encourage intellectual engagement, not a strategy to determine who has done the readings.

In addition to your two-page paper, please pose 2-3 discussion questions (1 – 3 sentences each) informed by the readings and your own engagement with them. These questions can focus on any aspect such as the findings, the method, the theory, and should provide interpretation, critique, or an extension of the work.

These response papers should be posted to Canvas no later than Tuesday at 5pm. If possible, I encourage you to read your peers’ contributions before class on Wednesday, especially if it is a topic that is closely related to your own work.

Some questions for our discussions that may inform your paper:
• What is the topic/area/research question(s)?
• What are the mechanisms or theoretical frameworks guiding the project’s focus, conclusions, or design?
• What are the study’s methods (and how do they relate to the research questions and theoretical framework)?
• What is the disciplinary framework the author(s) are working within or in conversation with?
• What are the publishing norms shaping this paper? How does it differ from other papers we have read?
• What studies, academic communities, or other authors is this piece in conversation with?

Deadline: Tuesday (day before class), 5pm.

Participation: 10%
You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and the ideas they represent in thoughtful ways. Note that, as with most communication, quality counts more than quantity. Dominating class discussions or saying something just to hit a participation metric is not the goal.
here; providing insights, building on others’ ideas, respectfully disagreeing, and contributing to
the discussion in meaningful ways is.

**Discussion presentation/topic leader (20%)**
You will pick one week on which you would like to lead a portion of the session’s presentation
and discussion. For your selected topic you will:

Prepare a brief (~15 minute) overview presentation that introduces the topic and expands on
the assigned readings, such as by providing more background or context for the papers,
describing additional research not covered in class, considering the theoretical, ethical, or
design implications of the work, societal issues and concerns on the topic, or even
demonstrating new related platforms or tools inspired by or related to the papers or topic.
Your goal is to highlight important aspects of the readings or topic and to go a bit deeper,
connecting them back to other concepts from class or your own reading and expanding the
concepts covered.

During a portion of the class, I will ask you to help lead the discussion by addressing key points
of interest from the questions submitted that week and pulling them into the day’s discussion.
Synthesize or select from the discussion questions submitted and propose a set of 3-4 questions
that can be used to guide conversation. **Please email these with a short note to me by
Wednesday at 12 for quick feedback (if needed).**

**Research paper: 40%**
More information about the research paper and presentation will be provided at a later date. I
am happy to work with you to find a topic and approach that supports your long-term research
goals. The final paper should be approximately 15 pages.

**On Oct. 17, you will turn in a short description of your paper and present the idea to the class
in order to receive feedback.** This should include your idea/thesis and a rationale for why this
topic is important to study. Group work (max group size: 3) is allowed, though group projects
must reflect the substantive work of all parties and the length of the paper should reflect the
larger set of authors. I do not recommend group work for first or second year students.

**On the Dec. 12, we will meet to discuss papers, so please prepare a short presentation that
includes and overview of your topic, research question, literature review, and findings or
arguments (if applicable).** Please note this meeting replaces a final exam and it takes place after
classes have concluded. Let me know as soon as possible if you can’t attend on Dec. 12, 4pm.

**Classroom Civility**
In this course, it is important that people and ideas are treated with respect, and that class time
is used productively. The classroom should be a safe space for open discussion of ideas. Debates
and disagreements may arise, but please be respectful of the diverse opinions and experiences
presented in the classroom.

Harassment will not be tolerated. Harassment consists of abusive behavior directed toward an
individual or group because of race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, religion, gender, sexual
orientation, age, or physical or mental disability. Please contact me if anything in the course has
made you uncomfortable.
Please avoid behaviors that make it difficult to accomplish our mutual objectives (e.g., side conversations, showing disrespect to classmates, coming to class late or leaving early, etc.). We will use technology sometimes for various class-related activities, and you may use a laptop or tablet to take notes. Please do not use them for other purposes such as email. Be respectful to yourself, to your instructor, and to your classmates in your use of your technology in a learning environment.

Please read the following Guidelines for Dialogue, developed by the Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan, 2012. We will adhere to these principles whenever possible.

We will do our best to:

1. Maintain confidentiality. We want to create an atmosphere for open, honest exchange.
2. Commit to learning from each other. We will listen to other and not talk at each other. We acknowledge differences among us in backgrounds, skills, interests, identities and values. We realize that it is these very differences that will increase our awareness and understanding through this process.
3. Not demean, devalue, or "put down" people for their experiences, lack of experiences, or difference in interpretation of those experiences.
4. Trust that people are always doing the best they can. We will give each other the benefit of the doubt. We will assume we are all trying our hardest and that our intentions are good even when the impact is not.
5. Challenge the idea and not the person. If we wish to challenge something that has been said, we will challenge the idea or the practice referred to, not the individual sharing this idea or practice.
6. Speak our discomfort. If something is bothering us, we will share this with the group. Often our emotional reactions to this process offer the most valuable learning opportunities.
7. Step Up, Step Back. We will be mindful of taking up much more space than others. On the same note, empower ourselves to speak up when others are dominating the conversation.
8. Not to freeze people in time. We are all works in progress. We will be willing to change and make space for others to do so. Therefore we will not assume that one comment or one opinion made at one time captures the whole of a person's character.

**Academic Integrity**

Unless otherwise specified in an assignment all submitted work must be your own, original work. Any excerpts, statements, or phrases from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation, and a proper citation provided. Any violation of the School’s policy on Academic and Professional Integrity (stated in the Doctoral Student Handbooks) will result in serious penalties, which might range from failing an assignment, to failing a course, to being expelled from the program. Violations of academic and professional integrity will be reported to UMSI Student Affairs. Consequences impacting assignment or course grades are determined by the faculty instructor; additional sanctions may be imposed by the assistant dean for academic and student affairs.
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way we teach may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate accommodations. SSD (734-763 3000; ssd.umich.edu/) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. I will treat any information that you provide in as confidential a manner as possible.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students, while acknowledging that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impacts students’ academic performance.

If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (734) 764-8312 and https://caps.umich.edu/ during and after hours, on weekends and holidays or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult University Health Service (UHS) at (732) 764-8320 and https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources.

For a more comprehensive listing of the broad range of mental health services available on campus, please visit: http://umich.edu/~mhealth/

Reading Schedule
The readings may be adjusted. Any adjustments will be announced via canvas.

Week 1 (Sept 5): Overview and Definitional Work
Prep work for day one: BEFORE YOU DO THE READINGS, write a 1-page short paper that describes (1) your working definition of “social media” and (2) your response to the following question: “What are the most interesting and important research questions related to social media at this time (to you)?” [Note this does not count as one of the 6 reaction papers and will not be graded.] Upload to canvas by 2pm.


Note: if you haven’t read boyd & Ellison (2007), please do so before reading Ellison & boyd, 2014.

**Week 2 (Sept 12): Affordances**


**Week 3 (Sept 19): Interpersonal Relationships**


**Week 4 (Sept 26): Self Presentation**


Recommended:


**Week 5 (Oct 3) What/why we share (2): Media accounting and Identity work**


**Week 6 (Oct 10) : Privacy and Audience**


**Week 7 (Oct. 17):** Well-Being and other outcomes

**One-pager on paper idea due.**


**Week 8 (Oct. 24): Why we click: Likes and other one-click feedback**


**Week 9 (Oct 31): Algorithms [Note: We may want to meet earlier for those who want to trick or treat with their families]**

[Video] “The Trouble with Bias” NIPS 2017 Keynote by Kate Crawford, online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMym_BKWozk


**Week 10 (Nov 7) Mobile Communication. Guest Instructor: Scott Campbell (NE at CSCW)**


Saker, M, & Frith, J. (in press). From hybrid space to dislocated space: Mobile virtual reality (MVR) and a third stage of mobile media theory. Communication Theory.


Week 11 (Nov. 14)  Methodological Challenges


*For more details on the controversy about the Kramer et al. (2014) study, see: http://laboratorium.net/archive/2014/06/30/the_facebook_emotional_manipulation_study_source*

Recommended:

Week 12 (Nov 21): Class cancelled due to Thanksgiving recess. Enjoy the holiday!

Week 13 (Nov 28): “Custodians of the Internet”: Moderation and Other Challenges
Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media*. Yale University Press. [Try to read the whole book, but skim or skip parts that are less relevant to your particular project. Do attend carefully to the opening and closing chapters.]

**Week 14 (Dec. 5): Social media and emotional labor**

Baym, N. K. (2018). *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection*. NYU Press. [Try to read the whole book, but skim or skip parts that are less relevant to your particular project.]

Be prepared to discuss your paper and receive feedback.

**Wednesday, Dec 12: Presentations and Final Paper due**