BMS316H Social Media & Digital Platforms

Instructor: Xianwei Wu   **Email:** xianwei.wu@utoronto.ca
Classroom: AH 107   **Time:** Tues & Thursdays: 1:00 — 3:00pm
Office: Odette Hall (OH 019)   **Office hours:** Wednesdays 10:00-12:00pm
(on zoom or by appointment)

Course Description:

     We live in an age surrounded by digital platforms, that serves almost all of our basic whims from being social to being fed. A lot has been said and debated about the potential impact these newly developed platforms can have on our lives and our society, and this class will explore some of the most rigorously discussed topics, including the effect of digital platforms on our thoughts, our identity, our decision making, our privacy, our interests, and our relationships; and of course, the larger social and cultural implications of all these phenomena. Students will have opportunities to share their own opinions and experiences regarding these topics and more.

Course Objectives:

Throughout the class, students will:
 ➢ Critically discuss the latest trends in social media and digital platforms
 ➢ Identify the issues and problems facing social media and digital platforms today
 ➢ Develop skills to analyze their own social media usage and how it impacts their personal behaviors
 ➢ Learn academic theories and researches related to social media
 ➢ Conduct their own research about social media phenomenon

Required Texts:

Class readings will be available through Quercus portal or through the University's library. Readings are subject to change without notice, the final list of readings will be uploaded onto Quercus before the start of next week's class. Unless stated otherwise, students are responsible for completing the readings before class, and discuss them during class.

Academic Resources:

University of Toronto provides a wide range of resources to help students conduct in-depth academic research. Students are encouraged to utilize the U of T's various libraries, especially the Kelly Library for their research and other related inquiries, you can always contact our librarian Stacy Reardon: s.reardon@utoronto.ca. Or visit the library in person.

While Wikipedia is a good place to gain some background information about any particular event or subject, it is not considered a proper academic resource. You may use it to start your research journey but you cannot cite Wikipedia as a source.

Classroom conduct:
No inappropriate classroom behavior will be tolerated. In this class, "inappropriate behavior" includes talking on cell phones, texting, playing games, checking social media, surfing the internet, and talking to other students during class. Put any device that makes noise on SILENT before the class starts. Your participation grade will be deducted once such conduct is discovered. Having said that, since this is a social media class, you will be asked to use social media for some class activities. You may use your laptop or tablet to take notes, though pen and paper could work just as well.

Attendance is required for each class, as it is a part of your final grade, please inform the professor of any possible absence at least 48 hours in advance. Emergency situations should be accompanied with a doctor's note or a note from formal sources such as a pastor or officials.

Academic Integrity:
University of Toronto takes academic integrity incredibly seriously, and violation of the university's code of behavior on academic conduct is could result in suspension of degree.
According to the code of behavior, offenses include:
(a) falsify or forge any document to forge or in any document, whether they be in print or electronic form;
(b) to use or acquire the service of another person to help complete an assignment or examination
(c) to personate another person, or to have another person personate, at any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work;
(d) to represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e. to commit plagiarism;
(e) to submit, or resubmit the same work that was used for another course without the knowledge of the instructor.
(f) to submit any academic work containing a purported statement of fact or reference to a source which has been concocted, aka fake citations. Note: AI generated answers tend to create fake citations.
(g) to represent AI generated passages as your own idea, or copy or paraphrase from any generative artificial intelligence applications,

All accusations of academic dishonesty will be thoroughly investigated. Students' works will be submitted to the university's Turnitin system for plagiarism detection, it will also be double checked for any errors. Once plagiarism is detected, the student will automatically receive an F for the entire class, no exceptions.

Grading:

Grades will be based on the following:
- ➢ 25% – Digital activities journal + Digital Media Diet Analysis
- ➢ 30% – Group project: design a social media platform
- ➢ 30% – Final Paper: Literature review
- ➢ 15% – Class discussion and participation
- ➢ *1% – Extra credit: writing center visit

Do not assume grades will be rounded up or curved. Your scores on each assignment will be posted on the Quercus portal. You can keep track of the points you earn toward the desired grade. You are welcome to come discuss your grade with me during my office hours.

Assignments:

All assignments must be uploaded onto Quercus on or before the due date. All papers, including discussion section responses, must be **double-spaced** and include your name and the date on the first page. You should use Times New Roman, 12pt font, with 1-inch (2.54cm) margin on all four sides. You are **expected to engage with class readings on all assignments** unless otherwise stated.

Proper in-text citation and bibliography are required on all assignments, you are free to choose either MLA, APA or Chicago format, and please be consistent with the style you choose, citation is a part of the grading rubric.

LATENESS: late assignments will be subject to 1 assignment percent deduction/day, unless prior excuse with proper documentation (doctor's note or absence declaration) is obtained, please speak to me if you have trouble completing the assignment BEFORE the due date to arrange for extensions. DO NOT assume that assignments will be reweighed.

AI USAGE: Generative AI tools including but not limited to ChatGPT, GPT4, Bing, etc. can ONLY be used to help with copyediting (specifically grammar and word usage), and nothing else unless otherwise indicated.
*IMPORTANT: If you enlisted the help of an AI during an assignment, please indicate that you did so, and include the prompts you've used to guide the AI at the end of your paper as an appendix.

Digital activities journal + Digital Media Diet Analysis (25%):
For this assignment, you will need to **record your digital activity for one week**, including the platforms you've used, and the amount of time that you've spent on them each time you use them. Platforms include but are not limited to: any and all social media sites and apps (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, Whatsapp, Telegram etc.), any and all video streaming websites, any and all game

related apps and sites (e.g.: Steam and Twitch). Pay close attention to how using these activities influences your attention and behaviors, for example, seeing sponsored contents and buying a product, or watching a sports game and look up discussions and playbacks. A form for recording your activities will be provided, please record your digital activities as detailed as you can.

Analyze your social media usage and media diet (~2,000 words). The aim of this assignment is for you to take a more critical look at how you interact with social media and digital platforms, and how they change/mold your behavior and vice versa. Look at which platform you spend the most time on, what you do on these platform, what kinds of contents do you consume, and how you navigate through various platforms (essentially: contents and activities), and evaluate how balanced (or unbalanced) is your social media diet. Focus on both external (e.g.: platform affordances, work and study requirements etc.) and internal (e.g.: personal preferences and biases) reasons that influences your media diet.

DO NOT simply describe what you did in the week, because these are already recorded in the form. The analysis should have a focused theme that help you provide a more in depth and critical analysis. You need to actively engage with class readings in this section, or use class concepts in your analysis. Incorporate concepts such as platformization, algorithm, big data, surveillance, echo chamber, digital labor etc. to analyze your media usage,

Group Project (30%):
You will get into groups of 3 or 4 people for this assignment, and you and your teammates will design a new digital platform/social media platform (doesn't have to only be social media, you can create an alternative to Steam or the App Store if you wish) that aims to solve one key problem that you identify in the digital environment today.

For this assignment, you will need to
a) identify the problem, explain why this problem hasn't been solved by any current platforms yet (e.g.: profitability, platform design, competition etc.).
b) come up with a workable solution through feature design, applying the concept of **social media affordance**, you need to explain how your new feature design aims to solve the issue(s) that you've identified, and how this feature affords its users a better way to the currently available alternatives.
c) make sure to include how you plan to make profit with this new digital platform, it needs to be a financially and socially sustainable project.

The final project would be in a **presentation format**, you will need to create a PowerPoint presentation (or other kinds of audiovisual presentations) as if you are the founders of a new tech company trying to attract investors. Your presentation could be

in video format or an interactive presentation with voice-overs. The whole presentation should be ~10 minutes (not exceeding 20 mins).

You should also include a transcript for your presentation with in-text citations and a bibliography. You only need to submit one copy of the presentation and transcript per group, and please identify each group member's contribution to the project at the end of the assignment.

You will all receive the same grade unless prior instructor approval is obtained.

Final project: literature review (30%):
This is your final assignment for this class, you will need to conduct a literature review as if you are designing an original research project on a topic related to social media or digital platforms, the topic does not have to be covered by this class. For this project: you will first need to
a) introduce the topic, explain its significance to academia and/or to society (15%)
b) come up with a research question(s) that you will attempt to answer through your hypothetical research (10%)
c) find relevant research and theories on this topic and write up a literature review on this particular topic. The literature review cannot be limited to only class readings, at least 20 citations is required for this assignment. (75%)

You can think of this project as the first part of a research project proposal. You do not have to actually conduct research; the literature review is meant to lay the groundwork for an original research project. It is not simply a recap of previous studies, try to bring current scholarships into conversation with each other so they can help you answer your research question.

You DO NOT need to make an argument or offer any concluding remarks, the purpose of this assignment is for you to synthesize and summarize previous researches in your current topic of interest. **DO NOT use AI for research**. But try to style your literature review as if you are writing a research proposal for a future project.

The project will be a minimum of 2,500 words, excluding bibliography.

Participation and discussion (15%):

Each week, you will take an active role in the class discussions, you are expected to contribute your thoughts about the readings of the week, and your own experience on the topic, or any thoughts you may have about social media platforms, and of course any questions.

There will also be weekly discussion boards set up on Quercus, if you want to post your thoughts there, you are welcome to do so, but due to the existence of tools like AI, discussion board participation will not count as much as in class participation.

Please be thoughtful and critical in your discussions, **do not just summarize readings**, engage actively with things you encounter on a daily basis and relate them to the topic of the week.

You may also participate via email or office hours, in person participation will count more towards the participation grade.

Attendance will still be taken randomly throughout the semester, but **attendance does not guarantee participation grades.**

*Extra credit (1%):
Make an appointment at the SMC Writing & Research Help Centre and earn extra credit! You can sit down one-to-one with a librarian or writing instructor for 30 minutes (in person or on Zoom) to get professional help with your class papers.
-Make a "Library and Citation Help" appointment for help finding good sources at the library or for help creating citations/footnotes for your papers.
-Make a "Writing" for help going over drafts of your paper and to receive feedback on how to improve your paper. (Note: writing instructors don't copyedit work.). You should come to the appointment with at least 1 question about your draft that you are looking for feedback or help on.

After your visit, the writing center will send you a link to a survey that asks about your experiences. You can forward the survey email to me here (or other proves from the writing center here: xianwei.wu@utoronto.ca as prove of visit in order to receive the extra credit.

Getting writing help may also improve your assignment grades, so it is highly encouraged that you go and visit more than once.

Course schedule:

Check Quercus for updates to the schedule below. Read the readings **before** class each week.

Readings are subject to change, what's uploaded onto Quercus will be the required readings.

Date	Lecture	Readings	Due dates (11:59pm on Fridays)
Class 1 July 3, 2025	Introduction	Syllabus boyd, danah, and Nicole B.Ellison. 2008. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13 (1): 210–30. Miller, D., Sinanan, J., Wang, X., McDonald, T., Haynes, N., Costa, E., ... & Nicolescu, R. (2016). How the world changed social media, Chapters 1-2 (pp 1-24). UCL press.	
Class 2 July 8, 2025	Digital Platforms	Gillespie, Tarleton. "The Politics of 'Platforms." New Media & Society 12, no. 3 (2010). Nieborg, D. B., & Poell, T. (2018). The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity. New media & society, 20(11), 4275-4292. Doctorow, C. (2023, January 23). The "enshittification" of TikTok. Wired. https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-platforms-cory-doctorow/	
Class 3 July 10, 2025	Social media affordances	Taina Butcher and Anne Helmond, "The Affordances of Social	

		Media Platforms" in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*

Shaw, Adrienne. "Encoding and decoding affordances: Stuart Hall and interactive media technologies." media, culture & society 39.4 (2017): 592-60

Ronzhyn, A., Cardenal, A. S., & Batlle Rubio, A. (2023). Defining affordances in social media research: A literature review. New Media & Society, 25(11), 3165-3188.

Optional: Ruytenbeek, N., Verschraegen, M., & Decock, S. (2021). Exploring the impact of platforms' affordances on the expression of negativity in online hotel reviews. Journal of Pragmatics, 186, 289-307. | |
| Class 4
July 15, 2025 | Algorithm and culture | Willson, M. (2017). Algorithms (and the) everyday. Information, Communication & Society, 20(1), 137-150.

Gaw, Fatima. "Algorithmic logics and the construction of cultural taste of the Netflix Recommender System." Media, Culture & Society 44.4 (2022): 706-725.

Optional: Gillespie, T. (2016). # | Group selection |

		trendingistrending: When algorithms become culture. In Algorithmic cultures (pp. 64-87). Routledge. Optional: Das, Shanti (2022), How TikTok bombards young men with misogynistic videos, The Guardian https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/06/revealed-how-tiktok-bombards-young-men-with-misogynistic-videos-andrew-tate	
Class 5 July 17, 2025	Surveillance, big data, and AI	Andrejevic, Mark, and Kelly Gates. "Big data surveillance: Introduction." Surveillance & Society 12.2 (2014): 185-196. Lyon, David. "Exploring surveillance culture." On Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture 6.6 (2018). Ferrara, E. (2024). The butterfly effect in artificial intelligence systems: Implications for AI bias and fairness. *Machine Learning with Applications*, *15*, 100525. Fry, Hannah, (2021), What Data Can't Do, *The New Yorker* https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/03/29/what-data-cant-do	

Class 6 July 22, 2025	Platform economy and digital labor	Wilken, Rowan. "Social media app economies." The SAGE handbook of social media (2018): 279-296. Steinberg, Marc. "LINE as super app: Platformization in East Asia." Social Media+ Society 6.2 (2020): 2056305120933285. Schor, J. B., & Vallas, S. P. (2023). Labor and the Platform Economy. Reengineering the Sharing Economy: Design, Policy, and Regulation, 83.	
Class 7 July 24, 2025	Social media, mental health, and body image	Sheldon, P., Rauschnabel, P., & Honeycutt, J. M. (2019). "Chapter 1: Social Media and Mental and Physical Health", *The dark side of social media: psychological, managerial, and societal perspectives*. Academic Press. 3-21 McCashin, D., & Murphy, C. M. (2023). Using TikTok for public and youth mental health–A systematic review and content analysis. Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 28(1), 279-306. Drenten, J., & Gurrieri, L. (2017). Crossing the# bikinibridge: Exploring the role of social media in propagating body image trends. In *The*	**Group project DUE Friday**

		Dark Side of Social Media, Routledge. 49-70	
Class 8 July 29, 2025	Social media, self-representation and authenticity	Bechet, Nathalie, (2021) "Chasing a mirage? The social media authenticity movement" https://atelier.net/insights /authenticity-social-media Quinn, K., & Papacharissi, Z. (2018). Our Networked selves: Personal connection and relational maintenance in social media use. The Sage handbook of social media, 353-371. Maares, P., Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2021). The labour of visual authenticity on social media: Exploring producers' and audiences' perceptions on Instagram. Poetics, 84, 101502. Optional: Bhandari, Aparajita, and Sara Bimo. "Why's Everyone on TikTok Now? The Algorithmized Self and the Future of Self-Making on Social Media." Social Media+ Society 8.1 (2022): 20563051221086241.	
Class 9 July 31, 2025	Social media and Activism	George, Jordana J., and Dorothy E. Leidner. "From clicktivism to hacktivism: Understanding digital activism." Information and Organization 29.3 (2019): 100249.	**Digital Activities Journal DUE on Friday**

| | | Mundt, Marcia, Karen Ross, and Charla M. Burnett. "Scaling social movements through social media: The case of Black Lives Matter." Social Media+ Society 4.4 (2018): 2056305118807911.

Milan, Stefania, and Sérgio Barbosa. "Enter the WhatsApper: Reinventing digital activism at the time of chat apps." *First Monday* (2020). | |
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| Class 10
Aug 5, 2025 | Extremism, Trolling and Content Moderations | Gillespie, T. (2020). Content moderation, AI, and the question of scale. *Big Data & Society*, 7(2), 2053951720943234.

Demsar, Vlad, et al. "The social phenomenon of trolling: understanding the discourse and social practices of online provocation." Journal of Marketing Management 37.11-12 (2021): 1058-1090.

Gaudette, Tiana, et al. "Upvoting extremism: Collective identity formation and the extreme right on Reddit." New Media & Society 23.12 (2021): 3491-3508.

Optional: Marantz, Andrew, (2018), Reddit and the Struggle to Detoxify the Internet, The New Yorker https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/03/19 | *Final Paper workshop* |

Class	Topic	Readings	Assignment
		/reddit-and-the-struggle-to-detoxify-the-internet	
Class 11 Aug 7, 2025	Fake news, misinformation and memes	Milner, Ryan M. (2018) Chapter 1: Media Made Memetic, In The world made meme: Public conversations and participatory media. MIT Press, 2018. Ceylan, G (2022) How Social Media Rewards Misinformation https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/how-social-media-rewards-misinformation Optional: Nissenbaum, Asaf, and Limor Shifman. "Internet memes as contested cultural capital: The case of 4chan's/b/board." New media & society 19.4 (2017): 483-501.	
Class 12 Aug 12, 2025	Digital Media Literacy and Wrap Up	Cho, H., Cannon, J., Lopez, R., & Li, W. (2024). Social media literacy: A conceptual framework. *New media & society*, *26*(2), 941-960. Tripodi, F. B., Garcia, L. C., & Marwick, A. E. (2024). 'Do your own research': affordance activation and disinformation spread. *Information, Communication & Society*, *27*(6), 1212-1228.	**Final Project Due on Friday**

		Cusumano, M. A., Yoffie, D. B., & Gawer, A. (2020). The future of platforms. MIT Sloan Management Review, 61, 26-34. More to be determined	