

INFO215: Social Aspects of Information Systems

Assignment 2

UPDATED (Oct 18, 2022)

The year is 2025. Big Tech companies and numerous startups have created apps that use facial recognition and analysis to track users' "well-being." Such apps are now standardly included on smartphones (e.g., Apple Health), and evidence shows that roughly 50% of all smartphone users use these apps. The most popular is an app called "Thalia"

Either on your own or with a partner, write a fictional newspaper op-ed (600-800 words) about Thalia. The op-ed should begin with the line: "It's on your phone, it's in the news. Thalia, an app that uses facial recognition and analysis to monitor users' mental health, has taken the world by storm. But what does it mean for us and our society when AI tells us how happy we are?"

Writing for a general audience of readers, discuss the fictional app "Thalia," arguing its sociotechnical benefits and detriments. Discuss at least five scholarly articles from the syllabus while making your arguments. Your opinion piece must take a clear stance: if you and your partner agree that Thalia is beneficial in some ways and detrimental in others, you can (of course) say this, but you should make a choice about which benefits/detriments outweigh the others. Such a choice should reflect whether Thalia is more utopian or dystopian.

NOTE: At this point, there is an odd number of students in the class. The 25th student will have the option of writing alone or joining another group.

Format:

- Standard formatting requirements apply (See syllabus)
- Submissions should include a headline, a by-line (i.e., both authors names), and use language that is accessible to general readers (i.e., non-specialists)
- References to at least five scholarly articles from the syllabus should be included.
 - Please use APA referencing format for in-text citations and bibliography.
- Submissions should be between 600 and 800 words (not including references)

Grading Rubric:

- Formatting: **6pts** (1pt per formatting requirement: headline, byline, accessible language, at least five references, ACM reference format, wordcount)
- Clear position about Thalia: **4pts** (e.g., sociotechnically beneficial / utopian; sociotechnically detrimental / dystopian; both, but one outweighs the other)
- Clarity and organization of thoughtful arguments that use five references from class: **15pts**
 - (3pts per discussion of each article)

Pro Tips:

- If you are struggling to think of benefits and detriments, start by asking yourself or your teammate these questions: What kind of human futures are implied by Thalia? Who has the agency to determine well-being re: Thalia? How could Thalia use or misuse data? How could other companies or industries use the data that Thalia collects? Are there non-digital, historical precedents for Thalia? What might it mean if different demographics use this app and others don't (e.g., older people vs. younger people)? What are the benefits or detriments of reducing "well-being" to facial expressions?
- People working in teams will receive the same grade. I expect that you will, in good faith, work together if you choose to do so. Be the kind of colleague you'd want to work with.