ANTH 2540/UGEC 2665

Fall 2020

Thursday: 3:30 – 5:15 PM (Lecture)

Tutorial: 5:30 – 6:15 PM

Venue: Online until further notice

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Office Hours: TBA

Social Media and Culture

Human life without and outside of social media and digital technology has become almost unthinkable. Today, we literally hold the world in the palm of our hands: Mobile devices enable us to access the knowledge of generations through one click; chat simultaneously with friends all over the globe; organize protests or dance performances in a flash; instantaneously transfer money or gamble it away; lose ourselves in virtual worlds of adventure, sex, and magic; share our apartments, ideas, music, or meals; collaborate, innovate, and imitate. Yet, despite these seemingly endless possibilities, social media also generates exclusions of access; hierarchies of attention and perception; technologies of surveillance, tracking and tracing; and new modes of economic exploitation, or of racist and gendered violence!

This course encourages the students to research, question, and critically analyze this social mediation of human life, the new technologies of society, and the (post-)human forms of the body and self! We therefore will engage social media through the anthropological perspective that aims to understand what makes us human but also how we make the diverse cultural meanings and practices that constitute our differences. **All majors are welcome: from anthropology to humanities and social sciences students and from computer science and engineering students to those from other sciences backgrounds.**

The course links cutting edge ethnographic materials and anthropological concepts together to provide an opportunity for students to reflect personally on their own experiences and engage the world and communities around them. How has technology and how will technology continue to shape your lives? How does social media create interfaces and linkages around you? What are the technological, political and economic institutions that condition socially mediated lives and communities? What are the possibilities of daily practices to change the technologies of social media? How does social media structure and enable collective engagement? As an anthropology course, this course also will provide: **1)** Theoretical foundations and practical research tools that will be invaluable both for students to understand the changing worlds we all live in; and **2)** for students interested in careers in

software, hardware, or other online-related businesses to understand the "social" side of social media and digital technology.

The course is divided into four modules. The first module provides the basics of thinking about social media and digital technology from an anthropological perspective. Each of the following modules is loosely structured around specific themes. We will read a diverse array of qualitative and ethnographic research on attention, artificial intelligence and algorithms, sex, gaming, hackers, politics, hate, war, open source sharing, digital labour, and surveillance that explore the diverse, multiple and conflicting "culture(s)" of social media and digital technology. The ethnographic readings serve as models of online social research that provide examples of methodology and research design to learn and practice techniques of online fieldwork and referencing.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- describe and explain key anthropological theories and concepts for understanding the complex relationships between technology and society or culture.
- describe key examples of the wide variety of different social media platforms, of the different ways that different groups around the world use social media platforms, and of the ways that social media impacts larger cultural and societal developments.
- describe the history of social media and explain the various ways social media is rooted in other techno-social developments around rise of the Internet.
- identify the ways that social media has changed with the introduction of mobile and other devices.
- analyse the ways that social media-related technologies affect and shape issues well beyond its bounds including notions of gender, identity, surveillance, activism, copyright, and social relationships.
- show, paradoxically, how technologies of communication are shaped by culture, both through its production and its ongoing use by people from a variety of cultures, even as culture is shaped by technologies.
- design a research plan on a selected issue or case in cyberspace that incorporates anthropological methods, questions, and concepts.
- write about the ways that people are making use of cyberspace and incorporating it into their new or already existing different cultural practices.
- write about their experiences with and in cyberspace in ways that enable those experiences to better illuminate critical theoretical concepts we encounter in class.

Course Format:

This course is conducted in lecture and tutorial format. The lecture will discuss and introduce the required readings, but it will not give a detailed summary of the readings. It is therefore essential that you do the required readings before class and come prepared with questions and

comments. All required readings will be made available as PDFs on Blackboard. The lecture will be interactive with room for your questions and discussion. The tutorial is an extension of the lecture based on the student's needs and interest. The tutorial will also facilitate interactive explorations of our social media habits, relations, and entanglements.

In case you have to miss class, please also e-mail me beforehand. It is your responsibility to obtain notes from your fellow students about the missed sessions. There will be no transcript of the lecture or tutorial provided afterwards, so please take notes.

Requirements and Assessment:

The following are the required assignments that will be graded.

1. **Out-Of-Class Assignment and Participation (20 %):** You are expected to do the readings and come to all lectures and tutorials. I strongly encourage you to ask questions and participate in discussion. You are also welcome to e-mail me questions or comments before or after class.
   To help you apply the topics and readings to your social media experience, you will have to finish **one** out-of-class assignment and may be asked to present it during class. For this assignment you have to find a socially mediated source. This can be a viral video, game challenge, discussion threat, open source software, etc. As part of this assignment you will have to write a short accompanying note that links to or provides description of what you found, how this is something of social media and interesting to the course! This note should be less than 500 words. Post this note and the source on blackboard (in the discussion forum threat). Your 'Out-Of-Class' assignment has to be submitted anytime **after week 2 and before week 14** of the course. Please note that you will have to submit your own assignment, no group work!

2. **Midterm Exam (30 %):** The Midterm-Exam is based on the first two modules of the course. The questions will be handed to you in class (7th week: October 22nd). This is a take-home exam. It consists of two questions to be answered in individual essays (each answer between 500 – 600 words). The questions will test the student's understanding of the anthropological perspective on social media and culture, and ask students to be able to think of and formulate examples of based on their own interest. Please send your paper as a word-document from your CUHK e-mail account to the instructor. The deadline for the instructor to receive the e-mail is **Tuesday, October 27th by midnight.** Please label the document: "LastName_FirstName_Midterm."

3. **Final Exam (50 %):** The Final Exam is also a take-home exam and consists of three questions. Two questions will challenge students to further explore a theme/module of the course. The other question will expand on the student's interests to explore and define a specific social media research site and question. Each answer has to be between 500 – 600 words. The questions will be handed to you in the last class. The final exam is due on **Monday, Dec 14 by midnight** via e-mail. Please send your paper as a word-document from your CUHK e-mail account to the instructor. Please label the document: "LastName_FirstName_FinalExam".

VeriGuide requirements: Students are required by university policy to submit all exam papers to VeriGuide (https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jspx). An exam (midterm and final) assignment without a signed declaration from VeriGuide will not be graded.

Grade Descriptors:

A: Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.

A-: Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.

B: Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

C: Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.

D: Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.

F: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Policies and Support:

- **Technology Use:** This course obviously encourages the use of digital technology and devices. While such technology (laptops, tablets, smart phones) is an important tool to aid learning, please be respectful and do not distract yourself and your fellow students. Students are only allowed to use their tablets or laptops in class to take notes and access social media if necessary for the learning objectives of the course. Please do not use your devices for non-class related activities. Mobile phones must be turned on silent (not vibrate).

- **Educational Technology:** This class relies on the use of Blackboard. All required class readings, the out-of-class assignment submissions, as well as announcements will be done through it. Note that it uses the email address assigned to you by the University, so it is your responsibility to have an electronic mail forwarded to your main email address.

- **Respectful Conduct and Discussion Rules:** We will discuss many interesting and important topics. While I encourage thoughtful, engaged, and controversial

discussion, I expect you to be polite and respectful of your classmates' opinions, limit your statements to academic (not emotional) arguments, and not use offensive language or judgmental statements. Please give each other time to talk, do not interrupt, and most importantly listen to each other.

- **Late Submission:** Late submission will suffer a fraction of a grade per day. For example, an A will become an A-.

- **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:** Academic honesty is crucial and plagiarism is a serious offense. The university has recently updated its policies on Academic Integrity and the penalties for plagiarism and cheating: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_%282013-14%29/p06.htm. You are required to cite properly (guidelines: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ant/tstyle.doc and http://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/english/resource/referencing_avoidingplagiarism1.pdf) to avoid plagiarism. Please do not hesitate to talk to me and ask questions about this.

- **Independent Learning Center:** If you need help with communication and learning skills, the University has a great resource for you. You can schedule a consultation or attend workshops on various strategies for improving learning outcomes https://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/EN/mission.aspx

- **Special Accommodation:** If you need special accommodations or classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and the University's Wellness and Counseling Center (https://www2.osa.cuhk.edu.hk/disability/en-GB) no later than the third week of class.

Module I: Basics

Week 1 (Sep 10): Introduction: Why social media? Why culture?
Recommended:
Miller, Daniel and Heather Horst. 2012. "The Digital and the Human: A Prospectus for Digital Anthropology." In Heather Horst and Daniel Miller eds., Digital Anthropology, New York: Berg. → Pp. 3-37.

Week 2 (Sep 17): The Innovation of Social Media
Miller, Daniel. "What is Social Media." In: *How the World Changed Social Media*. London: UCL Press. Pp 1-8.

Benjamin, Walter. 1936. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. New York: Schocken/Random House. Pp. 3 – 11 (on Aura)

Souza e Silva, Adriana de. 2006. "From Cyber to Hybrid: Mobile Technologies as Interfaces of Hybrid Spaces," Space and Culture 9(3): Pp. 261-278.

Week 3 (Sep 24): Data and Artificial Intelligence:
Umoja Noble, Sofiya. (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression*. New York. New York University Press: Pp. 16 – 44.

Tufekci, Zeynep. "The Real Bias Built in at Facebook." In: *The New York Times* (May 19, 2016): https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/19/opinion/the-real-bias-built-in-at-facebook.html?fbclid=IwAR1gOFb7tftt7rWzyxPhKc2JlAx9WcuIvdLaQjkpWlsKYVmdW3KuLj-Wo4g

+++ Week 4 (Oct 1): No Class because of National Day +++

Module II: Intimacy, the Self, and the Body

Week 5 (Oct 8): The Digital Field of Communities and Bodies
Kozinets, Robert. 2010. "Cultures and Communities Online." In Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online. London: Sage. Pp. 1-20.

Tom Boellstorff, 2011, "Virtuality: Placing the Virtual Body: Avatar, Chora, Cypherg," *in A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment.* Frances Mascia-Lees (ed.). Malden and Oxford: Blackwell. Pp. 504-520

Week 6 (Oct 15): Contested Lives: Boundaries of Public/Private and Intergenerational Conflict
boyd, danah. 2014. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens.* New Haven. Yale University Press. Pp. 54 - 100

Week 7 (Oct 22): Body Cultures and Control
Abidin, Crystal, and Joel Gwynne. 2017. "Entrepreneurial Selves, Feminine Corporeality, and Lifestyle Blogging in Singapore." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 45(4-5): 385-408.

Jacobs, Katrien. 2012. *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet.* Chicago: Intellect. Pp. 131 – 146 (chapter 4).

+++ Handing out questions for midterm exam paper (due on October 27th) +++

Module III: Social Media Economy

Week 8 (Oct 29): Attention Economy:
Crogan, Patrick and Samuel Kinsley. 2012. "Paying Attention: Towards a Critique of the Attention Economy." In: Culture Machine, 13. Pp.: 1-16

Marwick, Alice. 2015. "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy". In: Public Culture 27(1 75). Pp. 137–160.

Week 9 (Nov 5): Digital Labor
Gershon, Livia. 2019. We All Work for Facebook Digital labor is valuable even when we do it for free. Should we get paid? https://longreads.com/2019/04/26/we-all-work-for-facebook/

Schwartz, David. 2018. "Embedded in the Crowd: Creative Freelancers, Crowdsourced Work, and Occupational Community". In: *Work and Occupations* 45 (3). Pp. 255-282 (selections).

+++ Week 10 (Nov 12): No Class because of Congregation of BA Conferment +++

Week 11 (Nov 19): Block-Chain Technology and Crypto-Currencies
Caliskan, Koray. 2019. *Data Money: The Socio-Technical Infrastructure of Cryptocurrency Blockchains*. Published by: The Heilbronner Center for Capitalism Studies.

Interview: Koray Caliskan on Blockchain Technology and Cryptocurrencies. In: *Accounts* (Spring 2020).

Module IV: Politics, Play, and Freedom

Week 12 (Nov 26): Politics
Bjork-James, Sophie. 2020: "Racializing misogyny: Sexuality and gender in the new online white nationalism". In: *Feminist Anthropology*. Pp. 1- 8

Kuntsman, Adi and Rebecca Stein. 2015. *Digital Militarism: Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pp. 1 – 17, 39 – 54 (chapters 1 + 3).

Week 13 (Dec 3): Gaming and Play
Malaby, Thomas. 2012. "Digital Gaming, Game Design and its Precursors." In Heather Horst and Daniel Miller eds., Digital Anthropology. New York: Berg. Pp. 288-306.

Golub, Alex and Kate Lingley. 2008. "Just like the Qing Empire" Internet addiction, MMOGs, and moral crisis in contemporary China." In: *Games and Culture* 3(1). Pp. 59–75

Week 14 (Dec 7, +++ Make-up session): Hacking, Open Source, and Openness?
Coleman, Gabriella and Alex Golub. 2008. "Hacker Practice: Moral Genres and the Cultural Articulation of Liberalism." In: *Anthropological Theory* 8. Pp: 255-277.

Nafus, Dawn. 2012 "'Patches Don't Have Gender': What Is Not Open in Open Source Software". In: *New Media and Society* 14(4). Pp. 669–683.

An interview with McKenzie Wark (The Hacker Manifesto): https://intertheory.org/wark-ruiz.htm

Week 15 (Dec 8, +++ Make-up session): What now?

Final discussion + handing out questions for final exam paper (due Dec 14)