SOC.300.M003 Internet & Society:
Social, Cultural, and Political Transformations in the Digital Age
Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30 – 10:50, School of Management 306

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Course Description:
This course is designed to introduce students to the profound social transformations brought about by digital technologies. Zooming across scales and domains of analysis, from private everyday life to national politics, we will explore media- and technology-driven processes and their implications on culture, politics, healthcare, economy, and national security.

Additional Course Description:
We live in a platform society – digital technologies have fundamentally reconfigured how we present ourselves, maintain relationships, work, purchase goods and services, and participate in civic and political life. Large scale internet platforms such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, and Uber are becoming venues where large segments of contemporary life are played out, and thus play an increasingly important role in contemporary society. The decisions, assumptions and interests reflected in these platforms will have significant consequences for society at large, yet our understanding of these processes is still very limited. What is at stake as we make this swift platform-mediated transition? How are existing social inequalities challenged or reinforced as the adoption of digital technologies turns from ubiquitous to pervasive? Finally, what are some of the ethical, moral, and legal implications that should be considered with regard to digital technologies? This course assembles some of the most recent and exciting literature from the field of media sociology to answer these questions.

Prerequisite/Co-requisite:
None

Audience:
Undergraduate students

Credits:
3

Learning Objectives:
After taking this course, students should be able to:
● Understand what a platform is and the multiple ways in which platforms contribute to the construction of social reality;

- Develop a critical awareness and sensibility of digital communication technologies and their outcomes;
- Identify the ethical, moral, and legal implications of digital technologies in everyday life;
- Understand the ways in which platforms record, monitor, predict, and manipulate human behavior online through the use of data;
- Critique decisions, assumptions, and processes that lie at the core of digital technologies across various domains of social life.

Required Books:

Halavais, A. (2018). *Search Engine Society, 2nd Edition*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Lupton, D. (2015). *Digital Sociology*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Vaidhyanathan, S. (2018). *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Required Readings:

Abidin, C. (2014). In$tagLam: Instagram as a repository of taste, a brimming marketplace, a war of eyeballs. In M. Berry & M. Schleser (Eds.), *Mobile Media Making in an Age of Smartphones* (pp. 119–128). New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Pivot.

Bakardjieva, M. (2015). Rationalizing Sociality: An Unfinished Script for Socialbots. *The Information Society*, *31*(3), 244–256.

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of 'platforms.' *New Media & Society*, *12*(3), 347–364.

Kobayashi et. al. (2016). The ethical impact of the Internet of Things in Social Relationships: Technological Mediation on Mutual Trust. IEEE Consumer Electronics Magazine. 2162-2248/16, p. 85-89

Murthy, D. (2012). Towards a Sociological Understanding of Social Media: Theorizing Twitter. *Sociology*, *46*(6), 1059–1073.

Nieborg, D. B., & Poell, T. (2018). The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity. *New Media & Society*.

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. NYU Press. Chapter 1: A Society, Searching.

van Doorn, N. (2017). Platform labor: on the gendered and racialized exploitation of low-income service work in the 'on-demand' economy. *Information, Communication & Society*, *20*(6), 898–914.

Course Requirements and Expectations:

Reading. This course meets the learning objectives through reading the writings of several experts in media sociology and media and communication studies. I expect you to fully engage with the required books and readings, focus on considering the current events that highlight or contradict what you see in the readings, and then engage in discussion and activities based on these readings. You will be expected to read approximately *50 pages a week*. Please plan accordingly, as it's essential for your in-class participation, writing, and essays.

Attendance. If you miss four or more classes without a legitimate reason (such as sports travel, a death in the family, etc.), your participation grade will inevitably drop a full letter grade (e.g. if you had been earning a B+ on participation, your participation grade will drop to a C+).

Assignments and Grading:
- Participation (20% of overall grade)
- In-class writing (30% of overall grade)
- 2 critical essays (20% and 30% respectively - 50% of overall grade)

At the end of each month, I will post your average participation grade on Blackboard so you know where you stand. Your in-class writing grades will be posted on Blackboard after each class. The grades for critical essays will be posted within 2 weeks following their due date.

Class participation (20%):
It is my expectation that you will come to class each time fully prepared. That means you will have not only read the required reading but thought about it and sought out examples that you can share with the class that illustrate the ideas from the required reading. Participation grading will be based on the quality of the contributions related to the readings and connecting them to current events.

Twitter:
I created a Twitter account **@maxwell_soc300** to supplement classroom materials and facilitate discussion outside of class. We are quite a large group, which might make it harder for some of us to actively participate and earn points. Therefore, I will post a question and/or an article at the end of each class, and will award extra participation points for substantive responses. You do need to create an identifiable Twitter account for this purpose. Please note Twitter is part of an online public sphere, and unless you choose to protect your Tweets (there is a privacy setting that allows you to do that), they are searchable and visible to the public. Please remember to be civil and respectful in expressing your opinion online, especially if you critique the author of one of our readings – they might well be the ones reading it. If you have concerns about registering with the platform, please see or email me so we could discuss alternative means of participation.

In-class writing (30%):

To help support you doing the readings and to contribute to rich class discussion, there will be a short writing prompt at the start of each class on the assigned readings. These in-class writing prompts are not a quiz – rather, they are meant to make sure you understand the main points of the readings. Answering the question in your own words is strongly encouraged! If you prefer, you could use bullet-points where relevant. At the end of your in-class writing you could ask me a question about the reading. Your response will be graded on a scale from 1 to 10, with 6 being "satisfactory", 8 – "good", and 10 – "excellent". There will be no make-ups for missed in-class writing, so please come on time!

Essays (50%):

You will write and submit two critical essays in this course (midterm – 20% and final – 30%). Essays are a way for you to demonstrate profound understanding of the concepts learned in class and apply them to analyzing real-life scenarios. Each essay assignment presents an opportunity to deep-dive into a topic of your interest, writing an analytical critique on a selected platform in a context of your choice. The instructions and the grade rubric will outline the expectations for each of your papers. The essays have to be submitted through Blackboard (Turnitin) by their respective deadlines. For late submissions, the paper will drop a full letter grade for each day it is late.

Grade Scale:

A 100 - 94	C+ 79 - 76
A- 93 - 90	C 75 - 73
B+ 86 - 89	C- 72 - 70
B 85 - 83	D 69 - 60
B- 82 - 80	F <60

Work ethic. In this class, we will work towards building mutual trust and helping each other cultivate a strong work ethic. This includes professionalism, integrity, discipline, responsibility and collegiality. My basic expectation is that you are consistently on time, ready for class, and respectful towards your fellow classmates. Any written materials that you turn in should be carefully proofread, formatted, and free of grammar and stylistic errors. If you encounter any issues or difficulties during class, please be sure to communicate them to me promptly so I can help resolve them.

Communication. I will do my best to communicate with you in a timely manner – please do not hesitate to reach out via email in case of any questions or concerns. I usually respond to emails over a 24-hour span. Please note that the response might be slower after 6 pm and on weekends. Office hours are another good place to communicate – I encourage you to stop by on Thursdays from 11 till noon @Maxwell 415. I will not accept friend requests from students on Facebook while class is in session. I will, however, be happy to connect on professional platforms such as Twitter or LinkedIn after the semester is over.

Course Policies

No digital devices in class: I know, bummer – this is a class on digital media with no smartphones allowed. Yet, this is not an easy class, and multitasking has been proven to hinder your attention and learning. This is a strict requirement – I might not call you out if I see you on your phone or laptop, but it might have a negative impact on your participation grade. I will do my best to make the lectures interesting and engaging, and I expect you to be fully present. If you use a Kindle or a tablet for class readings, please make sure to take notes on paper. The exception to this policy is when the class is allowed to look at online examples or do activities for the purposes of class illustration or discussions. Students who wish to use digital technologies beyond approved times should see me to request an exception.

Use of Blackboard: This course involves the use of Syracuse University's Blackboard system as an online tool. The environment is composed of a number of elements that will help you be successful in both your current coursework and your lifelong learning opportunities. To access Blackboard, go to the following URL: http://blackboard.syr.edu. Use your Syracuse University NetID & Password to log into Blackboard. This specific course will appear in your course list.

To search for answers to your Blackboard questions, visit the Answers self-help knowledge base at https://answers.syr.edu/display/blackboard01/Blackboard. If you have problems logging in or need assistance with Blackboard, contact the ITS Service Center at: help@syr.edu or (315) 443-2677. The Syracuse University Blackboard support team will assist you.

Academic Integrity: Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. SU students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information about the policy, see http://class.syr.edu/academic-integrity/policy/.

I take academic integrity very seriously. Misconduct is judged based on the severity and perceived intent. Punishment may range from a reduced score on an assignment to failing the class, depending on the severity of the incident. In all cases, I am obligated to report the incident to the Academic Integrity Office.

University Attendance Policy: Attendance in classes is expected in all courses at Syracuse University. Students are expected to arrive on campus in time to attend the first meeting of all classes for which they are registered. Students who do not attend classes starting with the first scheduled meeting may be academically withdrawn as not making progress toward degree by failure to attend. Instructors set course-specific policies for absences from scheduled class meetings in their syllabi. It is a federal requirement that students who do not attend or cease to attend a class to be reported at the time of determination by the faculty. Students should also review the university's religious observance policy and make the required arrangements at the beginning of each semester.

Disability-Related Accommodations: We value diversity and seek to promote meaningful access to educational opportunities for all of my students. My goal is to create learning environments that are accessible, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite you to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success. To request accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), http://disabilityservices.syr.edu, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498, TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Religious Observances: SU religious observances notification and policy, found at http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/index.html, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes and by the submission deadline for flexibly formatted classes. An online notification process is available for students in *My Slice / StudentServices / Enrollment / MyReligiousObservances / Add a Notificatio*n**.**

Policy on Student Academic Work: Educational use of student work: I intend to use academic work that you complete this semester in subsequent semesters for educational purposes. Before using your work for that purpose, I will render the work anonymous by removing all your personal identification.

Discrimination or Harassment: The University does not discriminate and prohibits harassment or discrimination related to any protected category including creed, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, gender, pregnancy, disability, marital status, age, race, color,

veteran status, military status, religion, sexual orientation, domestic violence status, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

Any complaint of discrimination or harassment related to any of these protected bases should be reported to Sheila Johnson-Willis, the University's Chief Equal Opportunity & Title IX Officer. She is responsible for coordinating compliance efforts under various laws including Titles VI, VII, IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. She can be contacted at Equal Opportunity, Inclusion, and Resolution Services, 005 Steele Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1120; by email: titleix@syr.edu; or by telephone: 315-443-0211.

Federal and state law, and University policy prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and retaliation). If a student has been harassed or assaulted, they can obtain confidential counseling support, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, from the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team at the Counseling Center (315-443-4715, 200 Walnut Place, Syracuse, New York 13244-5040). Incidents of sexual violence or harassment can be reported non-confidentially to the University's Title IX Officer (Sheila Johnson Willis, 315-443-0211, titleix@syr.edu, 005 Steele Hall). Reports to law enforcement can be made to the University's Department of Public Safety (315-443-2224, 005 Sims Hall), the Syracuse Police Department (511 South State Street, Syracuse, New York, 911 in case of emergency or 315-435-3016 to speak with the Abused Persons Unit), or the State Police (844-845-7269). We will seek to keep information you share with me private to the greatest extent possible, but as a professor we have mandatory reporting responsibilities to share information regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and crimes we learn about to help make our campus a safer place for all.

Late Assignments and Incompletes: If you have a legitimate reason for an incomplete or a late assignment, a contract for completing the assignments will be drafted. Students who fail to meet that contract will receive a 0 for the missed assignments and a grade will be given based on what was completed for the course. Assignments may be turned in late with a penalty. The penalty is a reduction of 10% (one letter grade) for every 24 hours that the assignment is late.

Grade Disputes: Students who wish to dispute a grade may resubmit the assignment for regrading with a one-page statement of explanation of why the paper should be regraded. If the student resubmits, the assignment will be regraded, which means the grade may go up, down, or stay the same. Appeals after this process may be adjudicated by the Program Director.

Course evaluations: There will be a midterm and two end-of-course evaluations for you to complete this term, to help me adjust the pace and difficulty of this course. These evaluations will be conducted online and are entirely anonymous. You will also receive a notification from the Syracuse University Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (OIRA) department in your email account with the evaluation website link and your passcode. Please take the time and fill out this evaluation as your feedback and support of this assessment effort is very much appreciated.

Course Schedule SOC.300 Internet & Society

Week	Content	Readings
Tu Jan 15	Introduction – Internet & Society	
Part 1. Theorizing Digital Society		
Th Jan 17	Theorizing Digital Society	D. Lupton, Chapter 2
Tu Jan 22	A critical sociology of big data	D. Lupton, Chapter 5
Th Jan 24	The diversity of digital technology use	D. Lupton, Chapter 6
Tu Jan 29	Digital politics and digital public engagement	D. Lupton, Chapter 7
Th Jan 31	The digitized body/self	D. Lupton, Chapter 8
Tu Feb 5	*Digital society wrap-up and discussion*	
Part 2. Social Media		
Th Feb 7	Social Media: an Introduction	S. Vaidhyanathan, Intro
Tu Feb 12	The Pleasure Machine	S. Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 1
Th Feb 14	The Surveillance Machine	S. Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 2
Tu Feb 19	The Attention Machine	S. Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 3
Th Feb 21	The Benevolence Machine	S. Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 4
Tu Feb 26	The Protest Machine	S. Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 5
Th Feb 28	The Politics Machine	S. Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 6
Tu Mar 5	The Disinformation Machine	S. Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 7
Th Mar 7	*Social Media wrap-up and discussion –* **midterm essay due**	
	March 10-17 Spring Break	
Part 3. Search Engines		
Tu Mar 19	The Engines – a look inside search algorithms	A. Halavais, Chapter 1
Th Mar 21	Searching – how do search engines shape and represent social reality?	A. Halavais, Chapter 2
Tu Mar 26	Knowledge and Democracy	A. Halavais, Chapter 5
Th Mar 28	Control – how does inequality manifest in search?	A. Halavais, Chapter 6
Tu Apr 2	Privacy – how are our identities embedded in data?	A. Halavais, Chapter 7
Th Apr 4	A Society, Searching – race, gender, and biases in search results	S. Noble, Chapter 1
Tu Apr 9	*Search Engines wrap-up and discussion*	
Part 4. Toward a Platform Society?		
Th Apr 11	The Politics of Platforms	T. Gillespie
Tu Apr 16	The Internet of Things	Kobayashi et. al.
Th Apr 18	Platformization of culture	Nieborg & Poell
Tu Apr 23	Platformization of labor (Uber, Fiverr, MTurk)	N. van Doorn
Th Apr 25	Twitter and social bots	D. Murthy, M. Bakardjieva
Tu Apr 30	Instagram and online influencers	C. Abidin
Th May 2	*Platform Society wrap-up and discussion*	
Wd May 8	*Last day of the semester –* **final essay due**	