New Jersey Institute of Technology

Digital Commons @ NJIT

Fall 2023

HSS-404 (053-055): STS Seminar: The Social Dilemma

Theresa Hunt

The Social Media Dilemma

HSS 404:055

Fall 2023

T/TH 10-11:20 – FMH 405

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Office & Hours:

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T & Th 9:30-10; W by appt

Course Description

How do we experience the digital world? How are those experiences different from the *analog* world? The physical or empirical world? Which is the "real" world? How does our experience with the digital change based on who we are and where we live? This course introduces concepts and methods drawn from sociology to analyze humans and/in digital environments, with a particular focus on social media. By learning about theory and case studies of current events, we will investigate privacy, identity, work, law, and justice as they become intertwined with digital technology. In addition, as part of the university-wide VITAL Active Learning Initiative, this class will feature immersive and collaborative assignments as follows:

Our semester is divided into 3 five-week modules organized by theme. In each module, students collaborate in groups to develop either 3 podcast episodes or 3 audio/visual learning guides. This media will be made available to the entire class at the end of each module. Students will listen to and review each other's work, and the content creators will be required to reflect on their collaborative and individual process, as well as their own final product. In Module 1, students investigate core concepts of digital sociology. In Module 2, students explore data, algorithms, and information. In Module 3, students consider relationships vis-à-vis the digital world. Research, writing, and presentation work in this course ranges from analysis of current headlines and ethical concerns to the tasks and issues facing the developers and administrators of social media.

Prerequisites for this class include completion of the GUR in English (3 credits), Cultural History (6 credits), Basic -Social Sciences (6 credits) and either the Lit/Hist/Phil/STS (3 credits) or the Open Elective in Humanities and Social Science (3 credits).

Required Texts and Course Materials to Purchase

1. **Reading:**

Lupton, Deborah (2014). *Digital Sociology*. New York: Routledge. **ISBN 9781138022775**

2. **Video:**

Black Mirror, Season 3, Episode 1, "Nosedive" on Netflix (Links to an external site.) and Amazon Prime (Links to an external site.) ($2.99)

All other texts have been made available on Canvas, and are organized by date. Should you need to access an article from *The New York Times*, you can create an account through Van Houten Library.

Recording audio and/or video will be a required part of this course. Your group can determine the best tools and/or programs for recording, editing, and producing content. Two options we will discuss during the first weeks of the semester include Audacity and VoiceThread. Familiarize yourself with these options by reviewing them here: https://www.audacityteam.org/ and here: https://voicethread.com/ .

Ongoing Course Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of disciplinary theories that emerge through course notes/ instruction and course readings
- Demonstrate eventual proficiency with core concepts in the sociology of technology, and their application to the building of technology infrastructure and the development of law and policy.
- Demonstrate improvement with this analysis over the course of the semester by responding effectively to instructor feedback and directives.
- Demonstrate proficiency with information literacy by producing multi-layered, bibliographic research components in Module Presentations ("episodes" or "guides"),
- Demonstrate consistent engagement with classmates and the professor through team collaboration on episodes/guides
- Demonstrate leadership and initiative capabilities by facilitating conversations within collaborative groups, responding effectively to classmates and delegating or dividing tasks effectively and efficiently
- Demonstrate meaningful and impactful reflection of finished products by providing effective peer and self-review

Class Meetings: This class meets face-to-face from 10-11:20 in FMH 405. In weeks 2-4 of a module, students will collaborate to determine topics, divide research tasks, write and edit scripts, and record content. Meetings are flexible and can include alternate locations. Options and procedures for determining meeting locations and checking in with Dr. Hunt will be discussed during week 1 of our course.

Module Schedule Guidelines

Week 1: Content Introduced
Formal, structured class meetings include traditional lecture and discussion. Core content (theory, readings, etc) that will be central to the groups' episode/guide will be introduced.

Week 2: Initial Team Collaboration
Groups meet using classroom or alternate space to determine a topic and plan preliminary bibliographic research. **Task list and outline due at the end of week 2/class 2.**

Week 3: Share Findings and Script
Groups meet to share findings and develop script and order of presenters. **Rough draft and script outline due at the end of week 3/class 2.**

Week 4: Rehearse, Finalize, and Record
Groups meet to rehearse and review script changes as-needed/depending on instructor feedback. Segments will be recorded and edited collaboratively or separately, as-needed.

Week 5: Publish and Present!
Formal, structured class meetings will include presentation of projects and class-wide reflection/assessment.

Midterm Exam: Course content and **reading** will differ in each unit. It is imperative that students keep pace with the course reading / lesson schedule, as the units build upon each other. A mid-semester exam will be administered to assess learning. It will include multiple choice questions on the assigned readings, as well as short-answer questions demonstrating student's engagement with the assigned work. Critical feedback on these questions will direct students toward what he or she needs to focus on more specifically in preparation for future assignments. There will be NO final exam for this course.

Final Paper: **A final, 6-8 page paper** expanding ONE of your group's episodes or guides will be required by the end of the semester. This paper will include bibliographic research and be presented in MLA or APA format. Options for type and format will be discussed in early October.

* Other Course Policies *

<u>Late assignments:</u>

For **Module Episodes/Guides,** completing tasks on time is essential. Your group is depending on your active and timely contributions to produce successful content by the end of the module. Task lists and outlines will be created during the "prep week" (week 2) of each module, and will include group-determined deadlines. Self- and group-evaluation assessments will be completed by the end of each module, and will include an assessment of whether/how you have completed tasks on time. Rubrics for Module assessment include on-time completion of tasks, and will be worth 15%.

Final Projects submitted late will lose 1 grade point per day (ie from a B to a C). Work submitted 48 hours after the stated deadline **will receive NO credit**. Receipt of <u>final</u> papers is verified through TurnItIn or instructor email. If you do not receive a return receipt within four hours of sending the final paper, **it is your responsibility** to follow up and ensure your paper has been received.

Plagiarism, or presenting someone else's words, thoughts, or ideas - including LLM such as ChatGPT - as your own is cheating, and will not be tolerated. The NJIT Honor Code will be upheld, and any violations will be brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students. NJIT enforces strict academic integrity policies, and any plagiarized material **will** result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly for the course. Academic probation and possible suspension or expulsion from the university may also be pursued by NJIT administration in cases of plagiarism. **Three very important things to remember:**

1) Various plagiarism-detection tools are employed in this course.
2) There have been numerous cases of students attempting to submit papers written by students enrolled in earlier versions of this class. These students have received failing grades and academic probation – and the students supplying the papers have also been punished.
3) If you're struggling with the final project or concerned about these policies, I'm happy to work with you! Plagiarism is <u>not worth the risk to your future.</u>

Final Grade assessment formula:

Modules (see rubric breakdown for weight of individual components)	50%
Collaboration Assessment	10%
Final Paper	20%
Exam	10%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Final Grade assignments:

A =89.6-100; B+=87-89.5; B =80-86.5; C+=77-79.5; C =69.5-76.5; D+ =66.5-69.5; D = 59.5-64.5; F =59.4 or below

Course Schedule

Subject to change as needed.
Assignments and/or deadlines are highlighted in **red**.

Use this schedule with Canvas to understand what is expected of you for each Module. Ask questions early and often: thunt@njit.edu. If you ever feel overwhelmed by the pace, confused by a reading, unsure of an assignment, and so on, I am here to help you succeed. Please reach out to me throughout the term!

Introductory Week: Defining Topics and Active Learning

September 5-7: Introduction and Course Overview

Module 1: Defining & Exploring Digital Sociology

September 12-14: Initial Team Collaboration. See *Module 1 Collaboration Guide, p. 7. **Task List due 11:30 AM on 9/14.**

September 19-21: Share Findings and Script. **Draft script outline due 11:30 AM on 9/21.**

September 26-28: Rehearse, Finalize, and Record. **Dr. Hunt advisement meeting, schedule TBA.**

October 3-5: Publish and Present. Groups selected to present will discuss their work on 10/5. **All content must be published and made available to the class by midnight on 10/4.**

Required Resources – to be completed by the end of Module 1 (10/4)
1. REQUIRED: Lupton, Chapters 1-2
2. REQUIRED: The Daily, "Did AI Just Get Too Smart?"
3. REQUIRED: Roose, "Don't Ban TikTok"
4. REQUIRED: Useem, "Online Shopping"

Suggested resources (helpful for episode/guide content!):
5. "One Effect of the Instagrammed Insurrection: FOMO"(Schiller/Wood, *Marketplace*)
6. "Americans' Perceptions of Privacy and Surveillance in the Covid-19 Pandemic" (Zhang/Kreps et al, *PLOS ONE*)
7. "Sex Workers Made OnlyFans Valuable –Then It Sold Them Out" (Solis)
8. "The Writers' Strike Over AI is Bigger Than Hollywood" (Bragg)
9. "Supreme Court Avoids Ruling on Law Shielding Internet Companies from Being Sued for What Users Post" (Sherman)

Module 2: Social Media: Is it A Dilemma?

October 10: Module Introduction & screening: *The Social Dilemma* (excerpts)

October 12: Continued discussion & screening; Read Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression* (excerpts)

October 17-19: Initial Team Collaboration. See *Module 2 Collaboration Guide (Canvas)
Task List due 11:30 AM on 10/19

October 24-26: Share Findings and Script. **Draft script outline due 11:30 AM on 10/26.**

October 31-Nov 2: Rehearse, Finalize, and Record. **Dr. Hunt advisement meeting, schedule TBA.**

November 7-9: Publish and Present. Groups selected to present will discuss their work on 11/7. **All content must be published and made available to the class by midnight on 11/9.**

Suggested & Required Resources
1. REQUIRED: Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression* (excerpt)
2. Acemoğlu, "Misinformaton"
3. Girish, "'The Social Dilemma' Review: Unplug and Run" (*NYT*)
4. Newton, "What 'The Social Dilemma' Misunderstands about Social Networks" (*The Verge*)

Exam: November 14

Module 3: The Self

November 16: Module Introduction & discussion of the following reading: Carney, "Leave No Dark Corner"
November 21: Initial Team Collaboration. See Module 3 Collaboration Guide (Canvas)
Task List due 11/25 by midnight.

November 28-30: Share Findings and Script. **Draft script outline due 11:30 AM on 11/30.**

December 5-7: Rehearse, Finalize, and Record. **Dr. Hunt advisement meeting, schedule TBA.**

Week of December 12: Publish and Present. Groups selected to present will discuss their work on 12/12. **All content must be published and made available to the class by midnight on 12/14.**

Suggested & Required Resources
1. REQUIRED: Carney, "Leave No Dark Corner"
2. REQUIRED: Black Mirror, "Nosedive"
3. Dewey, "Everyone You Know Will Be Able to Rate You"
4. Lupton, Chapter 5

All Final Drafts of Research Projects are due *no later than Monday, December 19th by midnight.*

Module ONE Collaboration Guide:

<p style="text-align: center;">**Week 2 (9/12-9/14): Determining Topics and Assigning Tasks**</p>

This Module is all about **exploring the answer to two key questions in this module:**

- **what does the field of digital sociology study?**
- **what are some major, current ethical issues related to digital technology?**

Determining a definition for a complex phenomenon like a social science study of the digital world, **if done well and thoroughly**, is extremely involved and challenging. So is narrowing down *what* to focus on in the vast and complex field of contemporary digital ethics. How will your group produce a podcast episode or study guide that will answer these questions? How will you **break down** these questions? These WEEK 2 activities are designed to give you guided but independent space to make these decisions. Your first goal as a group should be to determine WHAT you would like to construct. Will you make a guide, or an episode? Remember what we talked about in week 1 (rhetorical differences, goals, what is involved in each, etc). Your second goal this week should be to determine roles for each group member. Keep in mind that when assigning roles and tasks this week in your groups,

Someone should DEFINE the terms essential to your episode, drawing heavily from assigned readings.

Someone should EXEMPLIFY the field and the ethical issue(s), highlighting elements of the assigned reading.

Someone should identify DEBATES within the field of digital sociology.

Someone should consider how the case studies included among the suggested resources OR sourced from careful research reflects or exemplifies the findings from the tasks above.

Be sure that as you complete your work this week, someone within your group

1. Sends the **OBJECTIVES list** (study aid? Informational podcast episode? etc.) to Dr. Hunt
2. Takes attendance and communicates the meeting place/time/attendance to Dr. Hunt
3. Takes (very basic) notes on who is assigned which task and communicates this to Dr. Hunt
4. Takes note of **group-determined deadlines** (ie "we will each have one slide/source write-up/script summary draft uploaded to Drive folder by X day"), and communicate this to Dr. Hunt