



University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

COM 199: Social Media and Society ((ID#xxxx))
UB Seminar – 3 Credits

Instructor: **Yini Zhang, Ph.D.**
 Class Day/Time: **XXX**
 Classroom: **XXX**
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Course Description and Objectives (aka What we’re on about)

We live in a mediated world. Our personal, interpersonal and social experiences are directly shaped by the media we use. In the past two decades, the media landscape has shifted dramatically, with social media becoming one predominant type of media that we access on a daily basis. Social media have changed how we access information and interact with each other. Some aspects of this are reflected in catchphrases like echo chamber and filter bubbles. Relatedly, social media also influence how our society operates, ushering in a network society. The Arab Spring protests, the Occupy movements, and the more recent #BlackLivesMatter and #Metoo movements are all manifestations of new collective action dynamics in the network society. This course explores the various ways that social media shape individual and social behaviors and phenomena, ranging from self-presentation to political polarization, social movement and disinformation. The goal is to provide students with a deeper understanding of social media in relation to society.

Having completed a UB Seminar, students will be able to:

Learning Outcomes	Delivered through the Following Instructional Method(s):	Student Achievement of This Learning Outcome will be Assessed by:
1. Think critically using multiple modes of inquiry.	Course Readings Lecture Class Discussion	Attendance & Participation In-class presentation Response paper Social media usage essay
2. Analyze disciplinary content to identify contexts, learn fresh perspectives, and debate and discuss problems in the field.	Course Readings Lecture Class Discussion	Attendance & Participation In-class presentation Response paper
3. Understand and apply the methods of close reading, note taking, analysis, and synthesis.	Course Readings Lecture Class Discussion Class Note Taking Demonstrations	In-class presentation Response paper Sample notes Sample reading summary

Learning Outcomes	Delivered through the Following Instructional Method(s):	Student Achievement of This Learning Outcome will be Assessed by:
4. Recognize and debate ethical issues and academic integrity in a variety of settings.	Course Readings Lecture Class Discussion	Attendance & Participation In-class presentation
5. Demonstrate proficiency in oral discourse and written communication.		Attendance & Participation In-class presentation Response paper
6. Develop essential research and study skills such as time management.	Course Readings Classroom Discussion Demonstrations	In-class presentation Response paper Time management journal
7. Use an ePortfolio for at least one assignment.	N/A	In-class presentation
8. Understand the academic expectations pertaining to student at the University at Buffalo and to higher learning at a research university.	Course Readings Lecture Class Activities	All Course Activities

Academic Content and Readings

Each class will have a reading that will be posted on UB Learns. Currently listed as TBA.

Week	Topics	Assignments	Associated Learning Outcome Number
1	Media and society		1, 3, 4, 8
2	Social media	Social media usage essay	1-3, 5-6, 8
3	Self-presentation	Time-management journal	1-3, 5-6
4	Social status	Sharing notes	1-3, 5-6, 8
5	Social networks & social capital	Sharing reading summary	1-3, 5-6
6	Social networks & media	Quiz #1	1-8
7	Hybrid media	Response paper #1	1-3, 5-6
8	Attention economy		1-3, 5-6, 8
9	Political participation	Quiz #2	1-3, 5-6
10	Social movement		1-3, 5-6, 8



11	Filter bubble and polarization	Response paper #2	1-3, 5-6
12	Disinformation and misinformation		1-3, 5-6, 8
13	Trolling & harassment		1-3, 5-6
14	Privacy and surveillance	Response paper #3	1-3, 5-6, 8
15	Social Media and society	Final Exam	1-3, 5-6

Course Requirements (aka What you'll have to do)

There are a number of readings and assignments in this course designed to encourage a greater understanding of the relationship between social media and society.

First, it is expected that you do the readings assigned for each class. The assigned readings should be read before the class, that is before the day they are scheduled (see final page of this syllabus for the schedule). The class does not focus on reviewing the readings, but instead on generating meaningful conversations based on your understanding of the readings.

Second, lecture slides will be available, but they are only meant to facilitate your learning. Lecture slides mainly include lecture outlines and a lot of visuals for illustration and engagement purposes. So you cannot rely on lecture slides alone and you are expected to take notes.

Third, in each class one student will do a 10-minute presentation, which connects the course reading to personal experiences, observations or external readings. You will sign up for a topic after I introduce all the topics during our first meeting. This mini presentation is useful because you learn best if you are able to relate learning to your own experiences, observations and readings and to articulate what you think. Also this is a perfect opportunity for you to explore a topic in-depth and practice your public speaking skills.

Fourth, there will be various writing assignments as well as quizzes throughout the semester. These are meant to help you stay on track with the reading assignments, consider how content from multiple lectures and readings are linked, and form arguments about course concepts that are supported by readings and current events. Note that the writing assignments will be mostly graded on the quality of thought rather than the writing because I want you to engage with the actual content of readings and lectures. But you need to get to the minimum of clear writing.

Fifth, participation is key. You are expected to join discussion and ask questions to both me and the presenting student. Lastly, you need to attend lectures, otherwise you will not obtain the maximum benefit from this class. Research shows a very strong correlation between attendance and grades.

Course Activities.

These goals will be accomplished through lectures and the following assessment opportunities. Learning assessments will be graded based on rubric criteria and weighted according to the following break-down.

1. **Attendance & participation (10 points).**
 - a. *Must attend, must make meaningful contributions. Can have 2 excused absence.*
2. **Social media usage essay (10 points).**

- a. *Take a day to track your social media usage. Write down what social media you used during the day, how frequently you accessed them, and for what purposes. Reflect on how using social media is related to your interpersonal relationship, your information diet, your opinions on various issues, and your life in general. This essay should be 2-3 pages long, double-spaced with standard margins, type face and font size (12 point).*

3. **Time management journal (10 points).**
 - a. *How do you allocate your time? How might you do that better to be more productive? You will log a week in your life--keep track of everything you do. And you comment on it and turn it in for evaluation. This journal should be about 2 pages long, double-spaced with standard margins, type face and font size (12 point).*

4. **Quizzes (10 points each = 30 points).**
 - a. *There will be 3 quizzes throughout the semester, each worth 10 points, and will be based on readings, lecture materials and in-class discussions.*

5. **In-class presentation (20 points).**
 - a. *You will sign up for a lecture and based on the readings assigned to that lecture you will reflect on this topic and conduct additional research on it. You can link it to your own experiences and observations. You can also rely on news articles, videos, TV shows, films etc. to help you and your fellow students better understand the topic. You will create a cohesive E-portfolio based on your research.*

6. **Response paper (10 points each = 20 points).**
 - a. *You will select two weeks' topics and try to write a coherent response by connecting the topics. Each paper should represent a thoughtful discussion of the ideas in, and the connections between, two or more readings from the related weeks. These assignments serve several purposes. First, they are benchmarks to ensure you stay on track with the readings assignments. Second, they help you consider how content from multiple lectures and readings are linked. Third, they prompt you to form arguments about course concepts that are supported by readings and current events. Responses should be 2-3 pages long, double-spaced with standard margins, type face and font size (12 point).*

Note: These assignments total to 100 points.

Late assignments minus 1 point per day late.

Students who are **absent from a Quiz** must request a makeup quiz from me; it will be given only if there is an appropriate, documented reason for absence from the quiz. Any

disputes regarding the validity of the reason or the documentation will be referred to the Communication Department Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Grading: Below is the point totals that you will need to achieve the particular grades. **I adhere to the UB *Incomplete Policy*:**

<https://catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/explanation.html>

UB Letter Grade Point Value (% Equivalent) Quality points

A	92-100	4.00
A-	90-91	3.67
B+	88-89	3.33
B	82-87	3.0
B-	80-81	2.67
C+	78-79	2.33
C	72-77	2.00
C-	70-71	1.67
D+	66-69	1.33
D	60-65	1.00
F	<i>Less than 60</i>	0

Academic Integrity:

Students must be familiar with and abide by the University's policies and procedures on Academic Integrity, available at the following link: *Academic Integrity*:

<https://catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/integrity.html>

Accessibility Resources:

Accessibility Resources coordinates reasonable accommodations for equitable access to UB for students with disabilities. Visit 60 Capen Hall, North Campus, call (716) 645-2608, or email at stu-accessibility@buffalo.edu. Additional information is located at the Office's website: <https://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/who-we-are/departments/accessibility.html>

Available Resources on Sexual Assault:

UB is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and stalking. You may call UB's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at (716) 645-2266 for more information. <https://www.buffalo.edu/equity.html>

Counseling Services:

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. These might include strained relationships, anxiety, high levels of stress, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, health concerns, or unwanted sexual experiences. Counseling, Health Services, and Health Promotion are here to help with these or other concerns. You learn can more about these programs and services by contacting:



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Counseling Services: 120 Richmond Quad (North Campus), phone 716-645-2720
202 Michael Hall (South Campus), phone: 716-829-5800
Health Services: Michael Hall (South Campus), phone: 716- 829-3316
Health Promotion: 114 Student Union (North Campus), phone: 716- 645-2837

Controlled Enrollment Courses:

The UB Seminar is a Controlled Enrollment Course [CEC]. Enrollment in a CEC is restricted by the available student positions, and self-registration for a CEC in any fall or spring semesters is available only to students taking that course for the first time. Repeat enrollment may be difficult or impossible in a fall or spring semester; a student seeking to repeat a CEC should plan to register for and do this in a UB summer session. Repeat enrollment is enrollment by a student who previously enrolled in the course at UB or transferred an equivalent course to UB and for which course the student has a grade of 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'F' or qualified value thereof [e.g., 'A-', 'D+'], or a grade of 'P', 'S', 'U', 'I', 'J', 'N', or 'R'. A student may self-register to repeat a CEC in a fall or spring term only if the student's grade of record for the previous enrollment is 'W', i.e., administrative withdrawal. Students may petition for enrollment in such a designated spring course by the third week of the preceding fall semester, and in a fall course by the third week of the preceding spring semester.

UB Curriculum Capstone:

You are completing this course as part of your UB Curriculum requirements, therefore please select an 'artifact' from this course that is representative of your learning and upload it to your UBPortfolio account. Templates have been created for this purpose. Artifacts include homework assignments, exams, research papers, projects, lab reports, presentations, and other course materials. Your final UB Curriculum requirement, UBC 399: UB Curriculum Capstone, will require you to submit these 'artifacts' as you process and reflect on your achievement and growth through the UB Curriculum. For more information, see the UB Curriculum Capstone website: <https://www.buffalo.edu/ubcurriculum/capstone.html>.

Course Fees: None.

Classroom Policies

As mentioned earlier, I very much encourage – and even require - discussion. I appreciate questions about anything at any time. I believe you are adults and I will treat you as such. If you happen to miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the notes from a classmate, as I cannot provide notes. I will request cell phones turned off, and no extraneous conversation. However, if you have to address something urgent, I am very happy to have you quietly step out of the classroom to manage your phone call or urgent conversation. This is a courtesy to your classmates. Likewise, if you are late to class, please do so with as little disruption as possible.

Guidelines for classroom interactions

We will discuss a wide range of topics in class and some of which can be controversial. I'd like to establish the guidelines for our in-class interactions. First, share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you tend to have a lot to say, make sure you leave sufficient space to hear from others. If you tend to stay quiet in discussions, challenge yourself to contribute so others can learn from you. Second, be an ethical listener. Don't interrupt, turn to technology, or engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language. Your comments should reflect that you have paid attention. Third, be open to changing your perspectives based on what you learn from others. Try to explore new ideas and possibilities. Think critically about the factors that have shaped your perspectives. Seriously consider points-of-view that differ from your current thinking. Fourth, understand that your words have effects on others. Speak with civility, care and empathy. If you learn that something you've said was experienced as disrespectful or marginalizing, listen carefully and try to understand that perspective. Learn how you can do better in the future. Be careful about assumptions and generalizations you make based only on your own experience. Be open to hearing and learning from other perspectives.

Photographing/recording lecture materials

Please be advised that the reason the lecture outlines will be provided is to get you to write your own notes, thus photographing the power point slides defeats that purpose. Research shows if you hand write your notes you will remember it better!! Moreover, in class there may be videos shown that feature individuals who have NOT consented to having their images shown outside of a classroom. Thus by attending this class, you have CONSENTED to NOT recording or disseminating any images of individuals shown in class to anyone. This also means you cannot post any recording, be it audio or video, of any of the materials or lectures from this class on any publicly accessible medium in any form.

Readings

Week 1:

Media and society

- ScienceDaily. (2012, October 29). We live our lives within our media, rather than simply with it, expert says. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/10/121029131825.htm>
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Week 2:

Social media

- Yurieff, K. (2019, December 19). From Instagram to TikTok: How social media evolved this decade. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/19/tech/social-media-end-of-decade/index.html>
- Fisher, M. & Taub, A (2018, April 25). How Everyday Social Media Users Become Real-World Extremists. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/25/world/asia/facebook-extremism.html>



- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 13(1), 210-230.
- Ellison, N. B., & Boyd, D. (2013). Sociality through social network sites. *The Oxford handbook of internet studies*, 151-172.

Week 3:

Self-presentation

- Fumo, N. (2017, June 14). Instagram Profiles are the new homepage. *The Verge*. Retrieved from <https://www.theverge.com/2017/6/14/15796124/instagram-curation-archive-profiles-homepage>
- Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New media & society*, 13(1), 114-133.

Week 4:

Social status

- Herrman, J. (2019, May 31). What if Instagram Got Rid of Likes? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/31/style/are-likes-and-followers-the-problem-with-social-media.html>
- Marwick, A. E. (2013). *Status update: Celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age*. Yale University Press. (Chapter 2)

Week 5:

Social networks & social capital

- Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. In *Culture and politics* (pp. 223-234). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Turkle, C. (2012, April 21). The Flight From Conversation. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/opinion/sunday/the-flight-from-conversation.html>
- Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., Steinfeld, C., & Vitak, J. (2011). With a Little Help From My Friends: How Social Network Sites Affect Social Capital Processes. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 124- 145). New York, NY: Routledge

Week 6:

Social networks & media

- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. Yale University Press. (Chapter 1 & 6)

Week 7:

Hybrid media

- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press. (Chapter 2 & 3)

Week 8:

Attention economy

- Zeynep Tufekci. (2018, January). It's the Democracy Poisoning Golden Age of Free Speech. *Wired*. Retrieved from https://www.wired.com/story/free-speech-issue-tech-turmoil-new-censorship/?CNDID=14997515&mbid=nl_011618_daily_list1_p1
- Haidt, J. & Rose-Stockwell, T. (2019, December). The Dark Psychology of Social Networks. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/social-media-democracy/600763/>
- Wu, T. (2017). *The attention merchants: The epic scramble to get inside our heads*. Vintage. (Chapter 20-25).

Week 9:

Political participation

- Ho, S. (2020, June 13). A social media 'blackout' enthralled Instagram. But did it do anything? *NBCNews*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/social-media-blackout-enthralled-instagram-did-it-do-anything-n1230181>
- Bennett, W. L. (2012). The personalization of politics: Political identity, social media, and changing patterns of participation. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science*, 644(1), 20-39.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Molyneux, L., & Zheng, P. (2014). Social media, political expression, and political participation: Panel analysis of lagged and concurrent relationships. *Journal of communication*, 64(4), 612-634.

Week 10:

Social movement

- Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change. *Foreign affairs*, 28-41.
- Gladwell, M. (2010, September 27). Small change. *The New Yorker*, 4(2010), 42-49. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>
- Needleman, S. & Herrera S. (2020, June 1) Social Media Becomes Battleground Over Days of Street Protests. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/social-media-becomes-battleground-over-days-of-street-protests-11591018647>
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press. (Chapter 1 & 3)

Week 11:

Filter bubble and polarization

- Eli Pariser. Beware online “filter bubbles.” https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles?referrer=playlist-how_to_pop_our_filter_bubbles
- Smith, E. R. (2019, September 2). My social media feeds look different from yours and it's driving political polarization. *USAToday*. Retrieved from



- <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2019/09/02/social-media-election-bias-algorithms-diversity-column/2121233001/>
- Morgan, C. (2016, November 16). Why ‘Popping’ the Social Media Filter Bubble Misses the Point. *Vice*. Retrieved from https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/pgkxng/why-popping-the-social-media-filter-bubble-misses-the-point

Week 12:

Disinformation and misinformation

- Derakhshan, H., & Wardle, C. (2017). Information disorder: definitions. *AA. VV., Understanding and addressing the disinformation ecosystem*, 5-12.
- Confessore, N. and Daisuke, W. (2017, October 9). How Russia Harvested American Rage to Reshape U.S. Politics. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/09/technology/russia-election-facebook-ads-rage.html>.
- Frenkel, S., Alba, D. & Zhong R. (2020, March 8). Surge of Virus Misinformation Stumps Facebook and Twitter. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/08/technology/coronavirus-misinformation-social-media.html>
- Donovan, J. (2020, April 14). Social-media companies must flatten the curve of misinformation. *Nature*. Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01107-z>
- Lewis, R., & Marwick, A. E. (2017). Taking the red pill: Ideological motivations for spreading online disinformation. *Understanding and addressing the disinformation ecosystem*, 18-22.

Week 13:

Trolling & harassment

- Stein, J. (2016, August 18). “How Trolls are Ruining the Internet.” *Time*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/4457110/internet-trolls/>
- Phillips, W. (2015). *This is why we can't have nice things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture*. Mit Press. (Chapter 1, 2, and 9)

Week 14:

Privacy and surveillance

- Raine, L. (2018, March 27). Americans’ complicated feelings about social media in an era of privacy concerns. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/27/americans-complicated-feelings-about-social-media-in-an-era-of-privacy-concerns/>
- Gupta, H. (2019, September 7). Is Facebook really concerned about privacy? *Columbia Journalism Review*. Retrieved from https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/facebook-merges-encrypted-messages.php
- Biddle, S. (2020, July 9). Police Surveilled George Floyd Protests with Help from Twitter-affiliated Startup Dataminr. *The Intercept*. Retrieved from



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- <https://theintercept.com/2020/07/09/twitter-dataminr-police-spy-surveillance-black-lives-matter-protests/>
- Morrison, S. & Estes, C. A. (2020, June 12). How protesters are turning the tables on police surveillance. *Vox*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/6/12/21284113/police-protests-surveillance-instagram-washington-dc>

Week 15:

Social Media and society

- Hughes, C. (2019, May 9). It's Time to Break Up Facebook. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/09/opinion/sunday/chris-hughes-facebook-zuckerberg.html>
- Philips, W. (2020, July 21). It's Time to Defund Social Media. *Wired*. Retrieved from <https://www.wired.com/story/its-time-to-defund-social-media/>
- Schiffer, Z. (2019, November 12). 'Filter Bubble' author Eli Pariser on why we need publicly owned social networks. *The Verge*. Retrieved from <https://www.theverge.com/interface/2019/11/12/20959479/eli-pariser-civic-signals-filter-bubble-q-a>
- Jackson, S.J. (2019, December 27). Twitter made us better. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/27/opinion/sunday/twitter-social-media.html>