

SM5334: NAVIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA: CULTURE, AESTHETICS, AND TECHNOLOGY

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Navigating Social Media: Culture, Aesthetics, and Technology

Subject Code

SM - School of Creative Media

Course Number

5334

Academic Unit

School of Creative Media (SM)

College/School

School of Creative Media (SM)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course provides an in-depth exploration of social media, focusing on its historical evolution, digital identity nuances, visual communication power, and the transformation of the public sphere. Through an integrated approach, students are equipped to navigate and master the interconnected technological, aesthetic, and cultural landscape of social media.

Structured into three modules, the course offers a holistic view of the social media ecosystem. The Content Observer module offers a macro-level analysis of social media's evolution. The Content Creator module focuses on individual content creation, balancing theory and practice. The final module, Integrative Social Media, synthesizes insights through a semester-long project, encouraging critical engagement with social media subcultures. This structure ensures students are well-equipped to analyze and contribute meaningfully to the digital public sphere and their personal development.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Analyze the medium-specific characteristics of audio-visual social media platforms within the broader context of digital media history.		x	x	
2	Evaluate the impact of social media on contemporary views of technology, aesthetics, and culture.		x	x	
3	Interpret various media theories related to social media to understand emerging socioeconomic, aesthetic, and cultural trends.			x	x
4	Develop critical perspectives on social media through both theoretical understanding and practical application in audio-visual formats.			x	x
5	Acquire new skills in audio-visual production techniques within the social media ecosystem.		x	x	x
6	Transform research findings into comprehensive audio-visual creative or artistic projects.		x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures	- Lectures on relevant media theories and media criticism as well as broader academic debates on social media	1, 2, 3, 4	

2	In-class discussions	- Reading relevant theories and critical analysis to find theoretical Gaps and identify connections with societal issues/debates	1, 2, 3, 4	
3	Seminars/Workshops	- Seminars on a wide range of research methods and theory-driven approaches to understanding the technology, aesthetics, and culture of social media - Students present their step-by-step progress of formulating an individual media criticism project: from the inception of an idea around a specific topic, to a plan or a script of executing the audio-visual work, to concrete issues encountered in the making of the work	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
4	Individual/Group project	- Semester-long media criticism project with an audio-visual creative or artistic work	4, 5, 6	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Participation in in-class Exercises	1, 2, 3, 4	30	-	Yes
2	Content observer report	1, 2, 3, 4	25	-	Yes
3	Content creator report	4, 5, 6	5	-	Yes
4	Semester-long group media criticism project with an audio-visual creative or artistic work (video essay)	4, 5, 6	40	-	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Minimum Continuous Assessment Passing Requirement (%)

0

Minimum Examination Passing Requirement (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

1. Participation in In-Class Exercises (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre- class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to his/her peer members.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate class exercise and comment on other points
- In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret others' views with an open mind and ready to negotiate
- Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and synthesis with informed views
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class exercise and comment on other points
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret opinions effectively

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Attentive in in-class participation, listening with comprehension, but only infrequently contributing
- Adequate pre-class preparation but little familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Fair ability in interpreting opinions

Marginal

(D)

- Unmotivated to participate in class exercise or comment on other people's views
- Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Poor ability in interpreting opinions

Failure

(F)

- Unwilling to participate in class exercise and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher
- No pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Minimal ability in interpreting opinions

Assessment Task

2. Content observer report (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This assessment assesses the Historical Analysis, the understanding of Platform Affordances,

Application of Theoretical Concepts. The assessment will be graded on rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment. The threshold of 'discovery' lies in a student's ability to negotiate a position that is informed, defensible, and standing on personal insight.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the historical evolution of social media, effectively linking ancient communication practices to contemporary platforms.
- Demonstrates a thorough understanding of how platform affordances shape public discourse, identity formation, and user behavior.
- Effectively applies theoretical concepts such as prolificity and visual culture theory to analyze social media phenomena.

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Offers a clear and detailed analysis with some insightful connections between historical and modern communication practices.
- Shows a good understanding with some detailed examples of platform affordances and their impacts.
- Applies theoretical concepts with some effectiveness and relevant examples.

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Provides a basic analysis with limited connections between historical and modern practices.
- Provides a basic understanding with limited examples.
- Applies basic theoretical concepts with limited effectiveness.

Marginal

(D)

- Lacks depth and fails to adequately connect historical practices to contemporary social media.
- Shows minimal understanding and few examples.
- Shows minimal application of theoretical concepts.

Failure

(F)

- Provides little to no relevant analysis or connections.
- Lacks understanding and relevant examples.
- Fails to apply theoretical concepts.

Assessment Task

3. Content creator report (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This assessment will assess Content Creation and Aesthetics, Ethical Considerations, and Persona Construction. This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation as well as the feasibility of the proposed project. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation identifying a specific topic that they are interested in. Students should also show a feasible plan for an audio-visual creative or artistic work.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Creates engaging content with good use of visual grammar.
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of the ethics of content creation and applies ethical principles effectively.
- Effectively constructs online personas using self-presentation theory, creating authentic and engaging identities.

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Creates engaging content with good use of visual grammar.
- Shows a good understanding and application of ethical principles.
- Constructs engaging personas with good use of self-presentation theory.

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Creates basic content with limited use of visual grammar.
- Demonstrates basic understanding with limited application of ethical principles.
- Constructs basic personas with limited use of self-presentation theory.

Marginal

(D)

- Content lacks visual appeal and effective use of visual grammar.
- Shows minimal understanding and application of ethical principles.
- Personas lack authenticity and effective use of self-presentation theory.

Failure

(F)

- Content is visually unappealing and lacks engagement.
- Lacks understanding and application of ethical principles.
- Fails to construct engaging or authentic personas.

Assessment Task

4. Semester-long group media criticism project with an audio-visual creative or artistic work (video essay) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Students should demonstrate ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up argument and analysis in the form of an individual or group audio-visual creative or artistic work.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Produces a highly engaging and insightful video essay that critically engages with social media subcultures or practices, reflecting platform-specific aesthetics.
- Seamlessly integrates theoretical insights with practical content creation, demonstrating a deep understanding of social media dynamics.
- Provides a thorough and insightful critical reflection on the ethical challenges and implications of social media practices.

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Produces an engaging video essay with good critical engagement and reflection of platform aesthetics.
- Integrates theoretical insights with practical content creation effectively.
- Offers a good critical reflection with relevant insights.

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Produces an engaging video essay with good critical engagement and reflection of platform aesthetics.
- Integrates theoretical insights with practical content creation effectively.
- Offers a good critical reflection with relevant insights.

Marginal

(D)

- Video essay lacks engagement, critical analysis, and reflection of platform aesthetics.
- Shows minimal integration of theoretical insights with practical content creation.

- Shows minimal critical reflection and insights.

Failure

(F)

- Video essay is unengaging and lacks critical analysis and reflection.
 - Fails to integrate theoretical insights with practical content creation.
 - Lacks critical reflection and insights.
-

Assessment Task

1. Participation in In-Class Exercise (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in exercises, debates and peer critique during the seminar sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre-class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to their peer members.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate class exercise and comment on other points
- In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret others' views with an open mind and ready to negotiate
- Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and synthesis with informed views
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues

Good

(B+, B)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class exercise and comment on other points
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret opinions effectively

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Unmotivated to participate in class exercise or comment on other people's views
- Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Poor ability in interpreting opinions

Failure

(F)

- Unwilling to participate in class exercise and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher
 - No pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
 - Minimal ability in interpreting opinions
-

Assessment Task

2. Content observer report (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment assesses the Historical Analysis, the understanding of Platform Affordances, Application of Theoretical Concepts. The assessment will be graded on rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment. The threshold of 'discovery' lies in a student's ability to negotiate a position that is informed, defensible, and standing on personal insight.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the historical evolution of social media, effectively linking ancient communication practices to contemporary platforms.
- Demonstrates a thorough understanding of how platform affordances shape public discourse, identity formation, and user behavior.
- Effectively applies theoretical concepts such as prolificity and visual culture theory to analyze social media phenomena.

Good

(B+, B)

- Offers a clear and detailed analysis with some insightful connections between historical and modern communication practices.
- Shows a good understanding with some detailed examples of platform affordances and their impacts.
- Applies theoretical concepts with some effectiveness and relevant examples.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Lacks depth and fails to adequately connect historical practices to contemporary social media.
- Shows minimal understanding and few examples.
- Shows minimal application of theoretical concepts.

Failure

(F)

- Provides little to no relevant analysis or connections.
- Lacks understanding and relevant examples.
- Fails to apply theoretical concepts.

Assessment Task

3. Content creator report (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment will assess Content Creation and Aesthetics, Ethical Considerations, and Persona Construction. This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation as well as the feasibility of the proposed project. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation identifying a specific topic that they are interested in. Students should also show a feasible plan for an audio-visual creative or artistic work.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Creates engaging content with good use of visual grammar.
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of the ethics of content creation and applies ethical principles effectively.
- Effectively constructs online personas using self-presentation theory, creating authentic and engaging identities.

Good

(B+, B)

- Creates engaging content with good use of visual grammar.
- Shows a good understanding and application of ethical principles.
- Constructs engaging personas with good use of self-presentation theory.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Content lacks visual appeal and effective use of visual grammar.
- Shows minimal understanding and application of ethical principles.
- Personas lack authenticity and effective use of self-presentation theory.

Failure

- (F)
- Content is visually unappealing and lacks engagement.
 - Lacks understanding and application of ethical principles.
 - Fails to construct engaging or authentic personas.

Assessment Task

4. Semester-long group media criticism project with an audio-visual creative or artistic work (video essay) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Students should demonstrate ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up argument and analysis in the form of an individual or group audio-visual creative or artistic work.

Excellent

- (A+, A, A-)
- Produces a highly engaging and insightful video essay that critically engages with social media subcultures or practices, reflecting platform-specific aesthetics.
 - Seamlessly integrates theoretical insights with practical content creation, demonstrating a deep understanding of social media dynamics.
 - Provides a thorough and insightful critical reflection on the ethical challenges and implications of social media practices.

Good

- (B+, B)
- Produces an engaging video essay with good critical engagement and reflection of platform aesthetics.
 - Integrates theoretical insights with practical content creation effectively.
 - Offers a good critical reflection with relevant insights.

Marginal

- (B-, C+, C)
- Video essay lacks engagement, critical analysis, and reflection of platform aesthetics.
 - Shows minimal integration of theoretical insights with practical content creation.
 - Shows minimal critical reflection and insights.

Failure

- (F)
- Video essay is unengaging and lacks critical analysis and reflection.
 - Fails to integrate theoretical insights with practical content creation.
 - Lacks critical reflection and insights.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Social media; Media Criticism; Media Studies; Media Affordances; Proficiency; Visual Language; Public Sphere; Aesthetic Theory; Historical analysis; Inclusive Design; Digital Anthropology; Cultural Analytics; Video Essay; Content Curation.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Content Observer Module:
2	Historical Trajectory of Communication Practices:

3	Moeller, H. G. (2021). <i>Profilicity: Identity in the Age of Social Media</i> . Columbia University Press. This book explores how users curate their online identities for personal and commercial gain.
4	Standage, T. (2013). <i>Writing on the Wall: Social Media - The First 2,000 Years</i> . Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. This book traces the development of social communication from ancient networks to contemporary platforms.
5	Platform Affordances and Public Discourse:
6	Boyd, d. (2014). <i>It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens</i> . Yale University Press. This book examines how visibility, anonymity, and real-time interaction shape public discourse and identity formation.
7	Papacharissi, Z. (2015). <i>Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics</i> . Oxford University Press. This book discusses how social media platforms influence public discourse and user behavior.
8	Visual Culture Theory:
9	Mirzoeff, N. (2023). <i>An Introduction to Visual Culture</i> . (3rd Ed). Routledge. This book provides a foundation in visual culture theory, exploring the role of visual content in shaping perception and public discussion.
10	Rose, G. (2016). <i>Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials</i> (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. This book offers insights into analyzing visual content on social media.
11	Decentralization of the Public Sphere:
12	Sunstein, C. R. (2017). <i>#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media</i> . Princeton University Press. This book explores how social media fragments discourse into echo chambers and filter bubbles.
13	Pariser, E. (2011). <i>The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You</i> . Penguin Press.
14	Content Creator Module:
15	Algorithms and Content Creation:
16	Bucher, T. (2018). <i>If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics</i> . Oxford University Press. This book examines the influence of algorithms on content creation and audience capture.
17	Gillespie, T. (2018). <i>Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media</i> . Yale University Press. This book explores the socio-technical pressures exerted by platforms on content creators.
18	Visual Grammar and Aesthetics:
19	Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). <i>Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design</i> (2nd ed.). Routledge. This book provides a framework for understanding visual grammar in content creation.
20	Berger, J. (1972). <i>Ways of Seeing</i> . British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books. This book offers insights into visual composition, color, and symbolism.
21	Self-Presentation and Online Personas:
22	Goffman, E. (1959). <i>The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i> . Doubleday. This classic work informs the construction of online personas by individuals and brands.
23	Marwick, A. E. (2013). <i>Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age</i> . Yale University Press. This book explores how individuals and brands construct their online identities.
24	Inclusive Digital Ecosystems:
25	Costanza-Chock, S. (2020). <i>Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need</i> . MIT Press. This book emphasizes design justice and universal principles for fostering equitable online communities.
26	Noble, S. U. (2018). <i>Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism</i> . NYU Press. This book discusses the ethical considerations in designing inclusive digital ecosystems.
27	Integrative Social Media Module:
28	Video Essay Projects and Platform-Specific Affordances:
29	Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2018). <i>YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture</i> (2nd ed.). Polity Press. This book provides insights into YouTube aesthetics and participatory culture.
30	Abidin, C. (2018). <i>Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online</i> . Emerald Publishing. This book explores the dynamics of internet celebrity and platform-specific affordances.

31	Algorithmic Governance and Ethical Challenges:
32	Zuboff, S. (2019). <i>The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power</i> . PublicAffairs. This book addresses critical issues like algorithmic governance and the ethical challenges of visibility in digital spaces.
33	Gillespie, T. (2018). <i>Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media</i> . Yale University Press. This book also covers the ethical challenges faced by content creators and platforms.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Andrejevic, M. (2013). <i>Infoglut: How too much information is changing the way we think and know</i> . Routledge.
2	Berger, J. (1972). <i>Ways of seeing</i> . British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
3	Bennett, C. L., & Rosner, D. K. (2019). The promise of empathy: Design, disability, and knowing the "Other". <i>ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)</i> , 26(1), 1-32. https://doi.org/10.1145/3310280
4	Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), <i>Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education</i> (pp. 241-258). Greenwood.
5	Boyd, d. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), <i>A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites</i> (pp. 39-58). Routledge.
6	Foucault, M. (1977). <i>Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison</i> . Pantheon Books.
7	Girard, R. (1977). <i>The violence and the sacred</i> . Johns Hopkins University Press.
8	Gramsci, A. (1971). <i>Selections from the prison notebooks</i> . International Publishers.
9	Habermas, J. (1989). <i>The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society</i> . MIT Press.
10	Hall, S. (1997). <i>Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices</i> . SAGE Publications.
11	Hogan, B. (2010). The presentation of self in the age of social media: Distinguishing performances and exhibitions online. <i>Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society</i> , 30(6), 377-386. https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610385893
12	Holmes, K. (2018). <i>Mismatch: How inclusion shapes design</i> . MIT Press.
13	Innis, H. A. (1950). <i>Empire and communications</i> . University of Toronto Press.
14	Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1974). Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. <i>Science</i> , 185(4157), 1124-1131. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.185.4157.1124
15	Li, A., & Lu, H. (2019). The rise of TikTok: A new social media frontier. <i>Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing</i> , 7(3), 231-245.
16	McLuhan, M. (1964). <i>Understanding media: The extensions of man</i> . MIT Press.
17	Mirzoeff, N. (2015). <i>How to see the world</i> . Pelican.
18	Moeller, H. G. (2021). <i>You and your profile: Identity after authenticity</i> . Columbia University Press.
19	Pasquale, F. (2015). <i>The black box society: The secret algorithms that control money and information</i> . Harvard University Press.
20	Peters, J. D. (1999). <i>Speaking into the air: A history of the idea of communication</i> . University of Chicago Press.
21	Postman, N. (1985). <i>Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business</i> . Penguin Books.
22	Turkle, S. (2011). <i>Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other</i> . Basic Books.
23	Turner, V. (1969). <i>The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure</i> . Aldine Transaction.
24	Van Dijck, J. (2013). <i>The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media</i> . Oxford University Press.