

SM5351: INTRODUCTION TO INFLUENCER STUDIES

Effective Term

Semester A 2026/27

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Introduction to Influencer Studies

Subject Code

SM - School of Creative Media

Course Number

5351

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

As a stream core course, it lays the foundational knowledge and theoretical contours of influencer studies. This course aims to trace the inception of influencer studies to established academic (sub)fields such as audience studies, reality TV studies, fandom studies, gender studies, and in particular sociology of taste (Bourdieu and Gronow), celebrity studies (Grindstaff and Turner) and the recent history of internet celebrity. The course also critically examines the emergent phenomenon of influencers and creators as well as their impact on real world events, cities, and policies locally, regionally and globally. The course will tackle the pressing issues of the contemporary influencer and/or creator sector globally and regionally in the Sinosphere. These issues addressed by this course broadly range from the socioeconomic, political, aesthetic, to the ethical. The course will be delivered in the form of lectures and workshops. The assessment will be: (1) a creative and research group project to take a deep dive into one "rabbit hole" of influencer lores in relation to one prominent issue or controversy outlined in the course; (2) an individual project that explores the students' own social media journeys and personal branding. The two projects will motivate the students to question the ongoing narratives and debates on social media influencers with both theoretical vigour and intimate knowledge of contemporary digital culture.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Critically define what influencer is and nature of fame on the internet, and evaluate its impact in terms of economics, aesthetics, and politics		x	x	
2	Situate influencer studies in intellectual framework of the contemporary media and cultural studies		x	x	
3	Understand the history of celebrity studies and the impact of social media on celebrity culture, and gain greater awareness of how contemporary influencers function as the new cultural intermediaries of taste and status through guest talks of local influencers in Hong Kong		x	x	
4	Deploy research skills, theories and various methods of presentation to critically analyse cases of influencer practices in its various manifestations in both regional and global contexts		x	x	x
5	Gain the ability to critically reflect upon students' own social media practices, self-promotional strategies and ethical positions		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 foundational media studies and cultural studies - Lectures on the shaping of influencer studies in relation to celebrity studies and fandom studies - Guest lectures delivered by invited local influencers	1, 2, 3	
2	Workshops	- Discuss weekly required readings - Discuss cases of influencer culture and debates on their impacts on very aspects of society. - Discuss ideas and plans for group projects on a pool of influencer-related topics in both global and regional contexts.	1, 2, 3	
3	Creative project	- A creative and research-intensive group project on one regional or global influencer-related issue and its major impacts on contemporary notions of aesthetic taste, fame, parasocial relationships, fandom, social media-driven economics, and so forth, in reference to provided core readings.	2, 3, 4	
4	Individual essay	- a critical reflection on one's own social media profiles, habits, and ethical position as an influencer and how these impacts or be impacted by their self-branding online and offline.	1, 3, 5	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Participation in lectures and workshops	1, 2, 3	20	-	No

2	Group project on one regional or global influencer-related issue and its major impacts; the outcome of this creative project can be a research poster, a website or other forms of visualised exhibition	2, 3, 4	30	-Students are allowed to use Gen-AI to brainstorm and generate potential ideas for the creative project. In such case, the complete conversation logs should be provided. Students who wish to use AI to generate textual, audio or visual elements of the creative project <i>*must*</i> discuss with the course leader in advance. In such cases, the use of AI must be for critical purpose, rather than replacing human efforts. A separate document should be prepared demonstrate the rationale and necessity of using Gen-AI tools. Failing to notify, disclose, or get the approval from the course leader is considered as the unauthorised use of AI & academic misconduct.	Yes
3	The group projects' presentations during workshops	2, 3, 4	15	-	No

4	Individual essay critically reflecting on one's own social media profiles, habits, and journeys. It must go beyond description by engaging with relevant literature and theories.	1, 3, 5	35	-	No
---	---	---------	----	---	----

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Minimum Continuous Assessment Passing Requirement (%)

0

Minimum Examination Passing Requirement (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

1. Participation in lectures and workshops (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 workshop 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 discussion and comment on other points
- In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with readings and other materials for the studio classes
- Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and debate others' views with an open mind

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class discussion and comment on other points
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with readings and other materials for the studio classes
- Interpret opinions effectively during debates

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Attentive in in-class participation, listening with comprehension, but only infrequently contributing
- Adequate pre-class preparation but little familiarity with readings and other materials for the studio classes
- Fair ability in interpreting opinions

Marginal

(D)

- Unmotivated to participate in class discussion or comment on other people's views

- Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with readings and other materials for the studio classes
- Poor ability in interpreting opinions

Failure

- (F)
- Unwilling to participate in class discussion and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher
 - No pre-class preparation and familiarity with readings and other materials for the studio classes
-

Assessment Task

2. Group work exhibition (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This group work exhibition should be centred around an influencer-related issue at the regional or global scale. The exhibition should demonstrate the student's understanding of influencer studies. This exhibition should also demonstrate students' ability to create multimedia output.

Excellent

- (A+, A, A-)
- Excellent ability to interpret and integrate various academic resources from influencer studies
 - Precision in argument, well researched and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of an influencer issue

Good

- (B+, B, B-)
- Good ability to interpret and integrate various academic resources from influencer studies
 - Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly articulated research, ability to interpret opinions on influencer issue

Fair

- (C+, C, C-)
- Fair ability to integrate various academic resources from influencer studies
 - Relevant points made to an issue in influencer studies

Marginal

- (D)
- limited use of academic resources from influencer studies
 - Some relevant points to an influencer issue, marginal ability to interpret online opinions

Failure

- (F)
- no or irrelevant use of academic resources from influencer studies
 - Irrelevant points to an influencer issue, no ability to interpret online opinions
-

Assessment Task

3. Group presentation (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This group presentation is the concluding presentation of the group exhibition. This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation on the aforementioned of project. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation on the result of their research and their creative output.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Superior presentation skills: distinct pronunciation, fluent expression and appropriate diction, exact time-management
- Strong organization of content and procedural clarity at the same time demonstrating the importance of the creative process

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Good verbal communication: comprehensible pronunciation, fluent expression and diction, fair time-management
- Reasonable organization of content and procedural clarity at the same time demonstrating the importance of the creative process

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Fair presentation skills: acceptable pronunciation, expression and diction, fair time- management
- Adequate organization of content and procedural clarity at the same time demonstrating the importance of the creative process.

Marginal

(D)

- Marginal presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, poor time-management
- Inadequate organization of content and procedural clarity and not demonstrating the importance of the creative process.

Failure

(F)

- Poor or no presentation skills

Assessment Task

4. Individual essay (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Individual essay should assess the students' ability to reflect on their own social media profiles, habits, and journeys and how it impacts or be impacted by self-branding online and offline through the lens of influencer studies.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources
- Precision in argument, well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing literature
- Rich, informative content, excellent grasp of one's own social media identity with in-depth introspection into personal social media history

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Good ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly differentiated issues, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Considerable content, excellent grasp of one's own social media identity that dissects the personal social media history

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Fair ability to integrate various resources
- Relevant points made to the subject matter in question
- Adequate content, good grasp of one's own social media identity that acknowledges the personal social media history

Marginal

(D)

- limited use of resources
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions
- Weak content, loose grasp of the one's own social media identity, with some disclosure of personal social media history

Failure

(F)

- no or irrelevant use of resources
 - Irrelevant points to the subject matter, no ability to interpret opinions
 - Inadequate content, fail to grasp of the one's own social media identity.
-

Assessment Task

1. Participation in lectures and workshops (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the workshop 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-)

Engaging participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the workshop sessions.

Good

(B+, B)

Active participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the workshop sessions.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

Passive participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the workshop sessions.

Failure

(F)

Lack of participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the workshop sessions.

Assessment Task

2. Group work exhibition (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This group work exhibition should be centred around an influencer-related issue at the regional or global scale. The exhibition should demonstrate the student's understanding of influencer studies. This exhibition should also demonstrate students' ability to create multimedia output.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

Excellent ability to apply knowledge in influencer studies and skills to undertake collaborative research, build up analysis, and create a multimedia output.

Good

(B+, B)

Good ability to apply knowledge in influencer studies and skills to undertake collaborative research, build up analysis, and create a multimedia output.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

Marginal ability to apply knowledge in influencer studies and skills to undertake collaborative research, build up analysis, and create a multimedia output.

Failure

(F)

Lack of ability to apply knowledge in influencer studies and skills to undertake collaborative research, build up analysis, and create a multimedia output.

Assessment Task

3. Group presentation (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This group presentation is the concluding presentation of the group exhibition. This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation on the aforementioned of project. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation on the result of their research and their creative output.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

Excellent rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment on the creative process.

Good

(B+, B)

Good rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment on the creative process.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

Marginal rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment on the creative process.

Failure

(F)

Lack of rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.

Assessment Task

4. Individual essay (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Individual essay should assess the students' ability to reflect on their own social media profiles, habits, and journeys and how it impacts or be impacted by self-branding online and offline through the lens of influencer studies.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

Excellent level of reflexivity, rationality, clarity of argumentation as well as creativity demonstrated in the writing itself.

Good

(B+, B)

Good level of reflexivity, rationality, clarity of argumentation as well as creativity demonstrated in the writing itself.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

Marginal level of reflexivity, rationality, clarity of argumentation as well as creativity demonstrated in the writing itself.

Failure

(F)

Lack of reflexivity, rationality, clarity of argumentation as well as creativity demonstrated in the writing itself.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Influencer Studies, Celebrity Studies, Sociology of Taste and Aesthetics, Political Economy, Audience studies, Fandom studies, Gender studies, Creator Studies, Internet Celebrity, Media Ecology, Social Media Ethics.

Reading List**Compulsory Readings**

Title	
1	Abidin, C. (2018). Internet celebrity: Understanding Fame Online. Emerald Publishing Limited.
2	Abidin, C. & Brown, M. L. (2018). Microcelebrity Around the Globe: Approaches to Cultures of Internet Fame. Emerald Publishing Limited.
3	Briant, E., & Bakir, V. (2024). Routledge Handbook of the influence industry. Routledge.
4	Cunningham, S. & Craig, D. (2021). Creator Culture: An Introduction to Global Social Media Entertainment. NYU Press.
5	Turner, G. (2004). Understanding Celebrity. Sage.
6	Rojek, C. (2001). Celebrity. Reaktion Books.
7	Brooks, G., Drenten, J., & Piskorski, M. J. (2021). Influencer Celebification: How Social Media Influencers Acquire Celebrity Capital. Journal of Advertising, 50(5), 528–547.
8	Grindstaff, L. (2014). DI(t)Y, Reality-Style: The Cultural Work of Ordinary Celebrity. In L. Ouellette (Ed.), A Companion to Reality Television. Wiley-Blackwell.
9	Grindstaff, L., & Murray, S. (2015). Reality Celebrity: Branded Affect and the Emotion Economy. Public Culture, 27(2008), 109–135.
10	Senft, T. (2008). Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks. Peter Lang.
11	Dijk, José van, Poell, T., & Waal, M. de. (2018). The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World. Oxford University Press.
12	Fuchs, C. (2013). Social Media: A critical introduction. SAGE Publications Ltd.
13	Duffy, B. E., Pinch, A., Sannon, S., & Sawey, M. (2021). The Nested Precarities of Creative Labor on Social Media. Social Media and Society, 7(2).
14	Gronow, J. (1997). The Sociology Of Taste. Routledge.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Marwick, A., & Boyd, D. (2011). To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on twitter. Convergence, 17(2), 139–158.
2	Zhang, G., & De Seta, G. (2018). Being 'red' on the internet: The craft of popularity on Chinese social media platforms. In C. Abidin & Megan Lindsay Brown (Eds.), Microcelebrity Around the Globe (pp. 57–67). Emerald Publishing.
3	Elfvig-Hwang, J. (2020). Media, Cosmetic Surgery and Aspirational Beauty Aesthetics of the Ageing Body in South Korea. Asian Studies Review, 00(00), 1–15.

4	Jerslev, A. (2016). In the time of the microcelebrity: Celebrification and the YouTuber Zoella. <i>International Journal of Communication</i> , 10, 5233–5251.
5	Coates, J. (2014). Rogue diva flows: Aoi Sola’ s reception in the Chinese media and mobile celebrity. <i>Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema</i> , 6(1), 89–103.