

SM5366: EXPLORING DIGITAL CULTURE: ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Effective Term

Semester A 2026/27

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Exploring Digital Culture: Ethnographic Approaches to Social Media and Online Communities

Subject Code

SM - School of Creative Media

Course Number

5366

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 a hands-on exploration of the dynamic interplay between digital culture and digital ethnography through empirical studies of contemporary global online communities. Students will develop practical research skills in studying online social spaces, with a specific emphasis on social media platforms and their role in shaping identity, social support, safe spaces, and marginalized communities. We will center on applied qualitative research methods, particularly digital ethnography, to analyze collaborative practices in real-world social media environments. Key topics include: identity formation and social support in online communities, the design and dynamics of safe spaces, online health communities and their unique challenges, and ethnographic approaches to studying collaborative online behavior.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Account for and discuss the key ideas introduced in the class		x		
2	Analyze issues and ideas relevant to the social media			x	
3	Conceive and execute research and/or creative projects relevant to the topic of the class		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 and discussions involving key concepts and academic research relevant to social media and online community	1, 2
2	Discussions	Proposals for research projects on social media related topics	3
3	Discussions	Participation in and contribution to class projects	1, 2, 3

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	In-class critique and class participation	1, 2, 3	15		Yes
2	Group presentations on selected topics	2, 3	30	-	Yes
3	Final creative project/writing assignment	3	55	-	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Minimum Continuous Assessment Passing Requirement (%)

0

Minimum Examination Passing Requirement (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

Assessment of in-class critique and class participation (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, research and peer critique during the tutorial sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' sensibility to art and interpersonal sensitivity to his/her peer members.

Excellent

- (A+, A, A-) - Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate and positively steer class discussion.
- Evidence of extensive pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports.
- Readiness to share informed personal insights.
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues.

Good

- (B+, B, B-) - Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate and contribute to class discussion.
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports.

Fair

- (C+, C, C-) - Attentive in in-class participation, listening with comprehension, infrequent contribution.
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports.

Marginal

- (D) - Unmotivated to participate in in-class discussion.
- Inadequate pre-class preparation.

Failure

- (F) - Unwilling to participate in in-class discussion even when requested by the instructor.

- No evidence of pre-class preparation.

Assessment Task

Assessment of Group presentations on selected topics (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' capability of conducting research and presentations on selected topics in social media.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) - Excellent performance in presentation of selected topics, great engagement with audience, in-depth research on the topic

Good

(B+, B, B-) - Good performance in presentation of selected topics, good engagement with audience, somewhat in-depth research on the topic

Fair

(C+, C, C-) - Basic performance in presentation of selected topics, proper engagement with audience, some research on the topic

Marginal

(D) - Marginal performance in presentation of selected topics, minimal engagement with audience, minimal research on the topic

Failure

(F) - Poor performance in presentation of selected topics, little to no engagement with audience, no research on the topic

Assessment Task

Assessment of writing assignment (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources to write short essays on selected topics.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) - Rich content, excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, systematic composition
- Precision in argument, well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing literature

Good

(B+, B, B-) - Adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Reasonable organization with balanced structure and composition
- Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly differentiated issues, ability to interpret opinions independently

Fair

(C+, C, C-) - Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Fair organization with adequate structure and composition
- Relevant points made to the subject matter in question

Marginal

(D) - Weak content, limited use of resources

- Poor organization, structure and composition
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions

Failure

(F) - Inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources

- No organization, structure or/and composition
 - Irrelevant points to the subject matter, no ability to interpret opinions
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Assessment Task

Assessment of Creative Project. (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' ability to complete a creative project.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) - Present a high-quality proposal for a multimedia social media account

- Demonstrate great creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Good

(B+, B, B-) - Present a good-quality proposal for a multimedia social media account

- Demonstrate a good level of creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Fair

(C+, C, C-) - Present an acceptable quality proposal for a multimedia social media account

- Demonstrate certain level of creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Marginal

(D) - Present a marginal quality proposal for a multimedia social media account

- Demonstrate low level of creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Failure

(F) - Present a bad quality proposal for a multimedia social media account

- Demonstrate no creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)
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Assessment Task

Assessment of in-class critique and class participation (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

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

Excellent

A+, A, A-) - Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate and positively steer class discussion.

- Evidence of extensive pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports.
- Readiness to share informed personal insights.
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues.

Good

- (B+, B) - Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate and contribute to class discussion.
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports.

Marginal

- (B-, C+, C) - Unmotivated to participate in in-class discussion.
- Inadequate pre-class preparation.

Failure

- (F) - Unwilling to participate in in-class discussion even when requested by the instructor.
- No evidence of pre-class preparation.
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Assessment Task

Assessment of group presentations on selected topics (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' capability of conducting research and presentations on selected topics in social media.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) - Excellent performance in presentation of selected topics, great engagement with audience, in-depth research on the topic

Good

(B+, B) - Good performance in presentation of selected topics, good engagement with audience, somewhat in-depth research on the topic

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) - Marginal performance in presentation of selected topics, minimal engagement with audience, minimal research on the topic

Failure

(F) - Poor performance in presentation of selected topics, little to no engagement with audience, no research on the topic

Assessment Task

Assessment of writing assignment (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources to write short essays on selected topics.

Excellent

- (A+, A, A-) - Rich content, excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, systematic composition
 - Precision in argument, well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing literature

Good

(B+, B) - Adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Reasonable organization with balanced structure and composition
- Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly differentiated issues, ability to interpret opinions independently

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) - Weak content, limited use of resources
- Poor organization, structure and composition
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions

Failure

(F) - Inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources
- No organization, structure or/and composition
- Irrelevant points to the subject matter, no ability to interpret opinions

Assessment Task

Assessment of Creative Projects (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' ability to complete a creative project.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) - Present a high-quality proposal for a multimedia social media account
- Demonstrate great creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Good

(B+, B) - Present a good-quality proposal for a multimedia social media account
- Demonstrate a good level of creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) - Present a marginal quality proposal for a multimedia social media account
- Demonstrate low level of creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Failure

(F) - Present a bad quality proposal for a multimedia social media account
- Demonstrate no creativity in translating scripts into multimedia content (creativity/novelty, aesthetics, storytelling authenticity, and utility/social values)

Additional Information for AR

Other specific rubrics may be included depending on the nature of assessment tasks assigned by the course leader. Normally, material to be assessed may include empirical research projects, creative/practical projects, oral presentations, and participation in online and in-class discussions.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

social media, digital ethnography, CSCW, online community, social media studies

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Blomberg, J., & Karasti, H. (2013). Reflections on 25 years of ethnography in CSCW. <i>Computer supported cooperative work (CSCW)</i> , 22(4), 373-423.
2	Bonilla, Y., & Rosa, J. (2015). #Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States. <i>American ethnologist</i> , 42(1), 4-17.
3	Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). "Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. <i>Social media+ society</i> , 1(2), 2056305115604337.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Young, A. L., & Miller, A. D. (2019, May). "This Girl is on Fire" Sensemaking in an Online Health Community for Vulvodynia. In <i>Proceedings of the 2019 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems</i> (pp. 1-13).
2	Zhang, R., Eschler, J., & Reddy, M. (2018). Online support groups for depression in China: Culturally shaped interactions and motivations. <i>Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)</i> , 27(3), 327-354.
3	Freeman, G., Bardzell, J., & Bardzell, S. (2016, May). Revisiting computer-mediated intimacy: In-game marriage and dyadic gameplay in Audition. In <i>Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems</i> (pp. 4325-4336).
4	Chen, Z., Lan, X., Piao, J., Zhang, Y., & Li, Y. (2022). A mixed-methods analysis of the algorithm-mediated labor of online food deliverers in China. <i>Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction</i> , 6(CSCW2), 1-24.