

Interdisciplinary Lab B: Social Media Cultures

Design Studies, UTS
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Outline

The internet is 30-something years old, and social media just over 10 years old. Yet these systems have radically changed how most people around the world spend much of their time. The nature of what it means to be present as a person in society has been, for many people, fundamentally changed in the last decade.

This subject introduces you to a range of ways of critically making sense of the internet and social media. The focus of the subject is, on the one hand, on the interaction designs that empower digital connectivity, and, on the other hand, the way different cultures are responding to those interaction designs. Though the subject will expose you to a number of critical frameworks for interrogating online cultures, your own experiences using these platforms will be essential to how we, together, make sense of ‘social media cultures.’

This subject is a Lab, so combines desk research with collaboratively designed responses to that research. These collaborations will take place in part in the very contexts that you are seeking to critically examine, so you will need to develop strongly reflectively ways of working. The focus of those designed responses will depend on your Lab leader.

Subject learning objectives (SLOs)

On successful completion of this subject, students should be able to:

1. Understand the nature and demands of live design briefs
2. Collaborate in an interdisciplinary design context
3. Use design to effect change in complex situations
4. Plan and execute research in a professional manner
5. Connect design research to design generation and development and to be able to explain this
6. Undertake advanced reflective practice
7. Identify and appreciate different team roles
8. Use design arguments and rationales to work with complex and open briefs

Topics

- Introduction: What is the Internet
- The History and Practices of Social Media
- Personhood: from IRL to Profiles
- Taste Regimes and Mining for Correlations

- Fake News and the Adtech Economy
- Influencing, Trolling and Moderating
- Taylorism, Fordism and Beyond
- Deindustrialisation/Postindustrialisation
- Gig work and the Reputation Economy
- Self-Surveillance and Smart Homes
- Algorithmic Policing
- Empathetic Interaction Design

Assessment Tasks

Assessment task 1: Digital Self Audit

In this task you will undertake a self-audit of, and intervene in the creation of, your digital footprint and then critically reflect on this process to identify issues of significance. The aim of this task is to research how and when our personal data is collected and subsequently used by Internet platforms in order to manipulate our engagement, and then to critically reflect on the issues that arise because of this.

To complete this task, first you should spend a week examining your own social media and data creation habits and capture moments in which these are made visible to you by the system. You should then spend an additional week experimenting with ways of pushing back on the system to provoke a response. During your data collection, you should choose to either opt-in or out-out of your platform(/s) of choice.

Data can be captured in a range of forms; screen captures, diarised notes, mined data etc. Take the time to analyse this data closely: What do you notice about your social media habits? What affects do these platforms have on the way you go about your everyday activities? What kind of persona do online platforms reflect back to you? What gaps are evident between how you see yourself and what online platforms present? What happened when you adjusted the ways you interacted with the online platform? Can you identify aspects of the system that would benefit from a re-design? What socio-cultural implications exist in what you've noticed?

You should submit a 3-page document that provides an overview of your research activities, including an outline of your approach to data collection & analysis, evidence of salient moments in your data. In addition, you should write 300 words of critical reflection that explicitly discuss the issues you have identified. Aesthetic consideration should be taken into account when developing the visual presentation of your research.

Due: Online to Turnitin, Friday 5pm, Week 6
Type: Report
Objective(s): This task addresses the following subject learning objectives: 1, 4 and 8
Groupwork: Individual
Weight: 40%

Criteria linkages:

Depth of Engagement with research topic	30%	SLO 1
Quality of Presentation of Content	40%	SLO 4
Quality of Analysis	30%	SLO 8

Assessment task 2: Social Computing Intervention

In this task you will collaborate in groups to highlight a salient issue identified in research task 1 and present a critical response to this issue in the form of a design intervention. The focus of this task is to use design strategies to ‘un-black-box’ and make visible the issue you have identified to a selected audience/set of end users.

Drawing on material presented throughout the course and through your own research, your intervention should use strategies of subversion and/or provocation to provide audiences/end users with deeper insight about emergent issues related to online cultures, and the role that design and designers can perform in these complex systems.

Design interventions can manifest either online or offline, or both. They can take any form of your choosing but should be developed in consultation with your tutor.

Groups will present their design interventions in-class in Week 10. All group members should contribute to, and speak, during presentation. Groups should submit documentation of their interventions in the form of a PDF to UTSONline at the conclusion of their presentation in Week 10.

Due: In-class & online to Turnitin, Friday 5pm, Week 10

Type: Project, Presentation

Objective(s): This task addresses the following subject learning objectives: 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7

Groupwork: Group, group and individually assessed

Weight: 40%

Criteria linkages:

Planning and management of group process	20%	SLO 2
Quality and creativity of design ideas	20%	SLO 1
Quality and creativity of design ideas	20%	SLO 3
Quality of production and presentation	20%	SLO 5
Quality of production and presentation	20%	SLO 7

Assessment task 3: Digital Self Reflection

In this task, you will critically review your design intervention from assessment 2. In that assessment, the aim was to produce a critical design intervention that ‘un-black-boxed’ and made visible issues of significance related to Internet platforms. The focus of this task is to test out, and reflect upon, your critical design intervention with real-world audiences/end users.

To complete this task, you should first identify and survey 2-3 audience members/end users for feedback about your critical design intervention. Those surveyed could be a relative, friend or

colleague, but must not be someone participating in Lab B. Your survey should take the form of a short interview containing 2-3 key questions that seeks feedback from individuals about their response to your design. Did you successfully ‘un-black-box’ and/or increase visibility of your salient issue? Were there any surprising or unexpected discoveries about your critical design intervention?

Drawing on insights you have gathered from your survey’s and your own reflections from assessment 2 & 3, you should then write 750-1000 words of reflection on any changes in attitudes or behaviours that have occurred as a result of what you have learned throughout the semester. Your reflection should contain explicit references to your survey responses, the lectures and readings/viewings in this subject (you should explicitly mention at least 4 concepts and readings/viewings). What have you discovered about the complexities of online cultures? What are some implications for designers in working in and around these complex systems?

Due: Online to Turnitin, Friday 5pm, Week 12

Type: Written reflection

Objective(s): This task addresses the following subject learning objectives: 3, 6 and 8

Groupwork: Individual

Weight: 20%

Criteria linkages:

Insightfulness of reflections 50% SLO 3

Clarity and professionalism of writing 25% SLO 6

Clarity and professionalism of writing 25% SLO 8

Subject Calendar

Week 1 March 13 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Introduction: What is the Internet

An introduction to information and computing, along with the history of ‘the internet’s development and the importance of ‘search.’

Readings:

Bell, G. 2017, ‘Fast, smart and connected: How to build our digital future’, *ABC Boyer Lectures*, 23 October, < <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/boyerlectures/genevieve-bell-fast-smart-connected-how-build-digital-future/9062060>>.

Week 2 March 20 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

The History and Practices of Social Media

An introduction to emergence of the cultural practices of social media.

Readings:

Abidin, C. 2015, Communicative Intimacies: Influence and Perceived Interconnectedness, in *ADA: Journal of New Media and Technology*, vol. 8, <<https://adanewmedia.org/2015/11/issue8-abidin/>>.

Hill, K. 2019, 'I Cut the 'Big Five' Tech Giants from My Life. It was Hell', *Gizmodo*, February 8, <<https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2019/02/i-cut-the-big-five-tech-giants-from-my-life-it-was-hell/>>.

Pardes, A. 2019, 'My Life Online—Without all the Metrics', *Wired*, 18 February, <<https://www.wired.com/story/experiment-social-media-demtricators/>>.

Week 3 March 27 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Personhood: from IRL to Profiles

Why and how humans think of themselves as having personalities and how this afforded current social media systems and economies.

Readings:

Menand, L. 2018, 'What Personality Tests Really Deliver', *The New Yorker*, 10 September, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/09/10/what-personality-tests-really-deliver>>.

Resnick, B. 2018, 'Cambridge Analytica's "psychographic microtargeting": what's bullshit and what's legit', *Vox*, 26 March, <<https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/3/23/17152564/cambridge-analytica-psychographic-microtargeting-what>>.

Week 4 April 3 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Taste Regimes and Mining for Correlations

Bourdieu's analyses of Social and Cultural Capital as the basis for the correlation of likes in non-like categories exploited by pattern-finding machine learning.

Readings:

Lee, S. 2018, 'Here's How Cornell Scientist Brian Wansink Turned Shoddy Data into Viral Studies About How We Eat', *Buzzfeed*, 28 February, <<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stephaniemlee/brian-wansink-cornell-p-hacking>>.

Madrigal, A. 2014, 'How Netflix Reverse-Engineered Hollywood', *The Atlantic*, 2 January, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/01/how-netflix-reverse-engineered-hollywood/282679/>>.

Week 5 April 10 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Fake News and the Adtech Economy

The drift from advertising to adtech and the way in which the attention economy has eroded the epistemology of journalism.

Readings:

Bridle, J. 2017, 'Something is wrong on the Internet', *Medium*, 6 November, <<https://medium.com/@jamesbridle/something-is-wrong-on-the-internet-c39c471271d2>>.

Leslie, T., Hoad, N. & Spraggon, B. 2018, 'Can you tell a fake video from a real one?', *ABC Storylab*, 3 October, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-27/fake-news-part-one/10308638>>.

TED, 2018, 'The nightmare videos of childrens' YouTube – and what's wrong with the internet today', *YouTube*, 13 July, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9EKV2nSU8w>>.

The Future Makers, 2018, 'Has AI changed the way we find the truth?', podcast, 6 December, <<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/has-ai-changed-way-we-find-truth>>.

The Zero Hour, 2015, 'The Black Box Society (w/ Frank Pasquale)', *YouTube*, 22 January, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjkTJzxII54>>.

Week 6 April 17 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Influencing, Trolling and Moderating

Digital Influencers and Cultural Intermediaries, Memes and Virality, and the dispute between freedom of speech and content moderation.

Readings:

Andersen, M. 2018, 'How Feminists in China Are Using Emoji to Avoid Censorship', *Wired*, 30th March, <<https://www.wired.com/story/china-feminism-emoji-censorship/>>.

Hall, C. 2018, 'Welcome to China's KOL Clone Factories', *Business of Fashion*, 6 June, <<https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/global-currents/welcome-to-chinas-kol-clone-factories>>.

O'Neill, K. 2019, 'Facebook's '10 Year Challenge' is Just a Harmless Meme—Right?', *Wired*, 15 January, <<https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-10-year-meme-challenge/>>.

Suzor, N. 2019, 'YouTube stops recommending alt-right channels', *Digital Social Contract*, 27 February, <<https://digitalsocialcontract.net/youtube-stops-recommending-alt-right-videos-6523ed6af60f>>.

Vincent, J. 2019, 'AI won't relieve the misery of Facebook's human moderators', *The Verge*, 27 February, < <https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/27/18242724/facebook-moderation-ai-artificial-intelligence-platforms>>.

Easter April 24 No Classes Scheduled

Week 7 May 1 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Taylorism, Fordism and Beyond

The ways in which work has been organized to maximize efficient productivity by capitalism.

Readings:

Gregg, M. 2018, *Counterproductive: Time management in the Knowledge Economy*, Duke University Press, London, pp. 3—22, < https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-1-4780-0090-7_601.pdf>.

Jeff Quitney, 2012, 'Time-Motion Study: "The Easier Way" 1946 General Motors Corporation, Employee Cooperation Staff', *YouTube*, < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9vIhPszb2I>>.

The Curious Classroom, 2013, 'A Brief Introduction into Marxism', *YouTube*, 2 August, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0GFSUu5UzA>>.

Week 8 May 8 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Deindustrialisation/ Postindustrialisation

As service and information economies arise, work is reorganized around new kinds of practices that are supposed to afford flexibility and 'innovation.'

Readings:

Lepore, J. 2014, 'The Disruption Machine – What the gospel of innovation gets wrong', *The New Yorker*, 23 June, < <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/23/the-disruption-machine>>.

Lepore, J. 2019, 'Are Robots Competing for your Job?', *The New Yorker*, 4 March, < <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/04/are-robots-competing-for-your-job>>.

Stein, J.A. 2017, 'Is 2017 the year to ditch the term 'innovation'?', *The Conversation*, January 19, viewed 5 March 2019, <<https://theconversation.com/is-2017-the-year-to-ditch-the-term-innovation-71483>>.

Week 9 May 15 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Gig work and the Reputation Economy

The drift from the Sharing Economy to the Gig Economy and the matching and reputation systems that underlie these new ways of working.

Readings:

Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019, 'The Amazon Race', *ABC Storylab*, 27 February, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-27/amazon-warehouse-workers-game-race/10803346?pfmredir=sm>>.

CBC News, 2018, 'The Cleaners' *Who Scrub Social Media*', video recording, *YouTube*, May 5, viewed 26 February 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwbwxStnI3M&feature=youtu.be>>.

Newton, C. 2019, 'The Trauma Floor: The secret lives of Facebook moderators in America', *The Verge*, 25 February, <<https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/25/18229714/cognizant-facebook-content-moderator-interviews-trauma-working-conditions-arizona>>.

Rosenblatt, A. 2018, 'Uber as a Symbol of the New Economy', in *Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work*, book excerpt, <https://ssir.org/book_reviews/entry/uber_as_a_symbol_of_the_new_economy#>.

Week 10 May 22 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Self-Surveillance and Smart Homes

The consumer adoption of domestic surveillance systems in the form of 'Conversational User Interface' devices controlling the home and its occupants.

Readings:

Constine, J. 2019, 'Facebook pays teens to install VPN that spies on them', *TechCrunch*, viewed 5 March, <<https://techcrunch.com/2019/01/29/facebook-project-atlas/>>.

Neff, G. 2017, 'Exploring the world of self-tracking: who wants our data and why?', *Oxford Internet Institute*, 7 April, <<https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/blog/exploring-the-world-of-self-tracking-who-wants-our-data-and-why/>>.

Strengers, Y. 2015 'Smart homes promise to end the 'wife drought', but where do women fit in?', *The Conversation*, <<https://theconversation.com/smart-homes-promise-to-end-the-wife-drought-but-where-do-women-fit-in-50976>>.

Week 11 May 29 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Algorithmic Policing

The development of Artificial Intelligence and the danger of biases that are being structured into data processing used for predictive purposes.

Readings:

Herder, J. 2019, 'The Power of Platforms: How biopolitical companies threaten democracy', *Public Seminar*, 25 January, <<http://www.publicseminar.org/2019/01/the-power-of-platforms/>>.

Neff, G. 2018, 'Does AI Have Gender?', *Oxford Internet Institute*, video recording, 25 June, <<https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/videos/does-ai-have-gender/>>.

PdF on YouTube, 2016, 'Safiya Noble | Challenging the Algorithms of Oppression', *YouTube*, 15 June, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRVZozEEWIE>>.

101 East, 2018, 'China's Spying Eyes – Investigating China's Social Credit system which seeks to reward good behaviour and punish what is considered bad', *Aljazeera*, 15 November, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2018/11/china-spying-eyes-181115060044471.html>>.

Week 12 June 5 Lecture 2-3pm Workshop: 9am-12, or 3pm-6

Empathetic Interaction Design

How interaction design can take responsibility for promoting diversity rather than reductively universalizing.

Readings:

Abidin, C. & Gn, J. 2018, 'Between art and application: Special issue on emoji epistemology', *First Monday*, vol. 23, no. 9, <<https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/9410/7576>>.

Talks at Google, 2017, 'Sara Wachter-Boettcher: "Technically Wrong: Sexist Apps, Biased Algorithms [...]"', 28 November, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IG5zU0DdM_4>.