Course Description
This course will examine “social media” from a cultural perspective, with a focus on how media technologies figure in practices of everyday life and in the construction of social relationships and identities. Although many of our readings will deal with Social Network Sites (SNSs), we will attempt to form an expansive definition of what constitutes “social media.” We will also work from an expansive definition of “technology,” considering the term in a cultural sense to include various practices and tools used to communicate in everyday life.

Questions we will consider include: What falls under the definition of “social media”? What tools can we use to study the place of social media in culture? How can social media enable the formation of community? How is identity performed in/with social media? How are constructions of youth, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality mediated through social media technologies? Can social media technologies be a vehicle for political activism? How are social media used in marketing and advertising? What are the ethical issues associated with social media technologies? Is it possible to refuse social media?

Required Texts
Most of the readings will be posted as PDFs or links to the course website. You should also purchase the following book:


Assignments
Class twitter feed participation – 20%
We will hold an ongoing conversation about our observations of social media in contemporary culture in the form of a class twitter feed. You may either use your current twitter username or create one specifically for this course. Tweets should be personal thoughts/insights/questions, responses to readings or lectures, and/or links to relevant material on the web, and should include the course hashtag. You will be required to post a total of 40 tweets throughout the semester (a maximum of 10 of these may be links). Tallies will be taken at regular intervals to ensure regular participation.

Blog Posts – 30%
I will regularly tweet questions which you may expand upon in blog posts of a few paragraphs. I will occasionally retweet questions from your classmates, which may also be used as the basis for blog posts. These posts will require you to make connections between course readings/theories and your own observations/experiences of social media. You are also encouraged to post responses to other students’ blog posts. You will be required to post a total of 6 posts (a minimum of 2 of these must be original posts versus responses to other students’ posts). Again, tallies will be taken at regular intervals to ensure regular participation.
Research Paper – 30%
You will conduct research on a specific topic of your choosing related to social media. Your research may either be a review of literature or an empirical study (we will discuss this more in class). You will write up your study in an 8-10 page paper which will be due during the final exam period.

Research Presentation – 10%
You will create a multimedia presentation of your research, which you will share with the class as well as post online. You may choose to make a video, an audio podcast, and/or a slide presentation. The presentation should 1) explain the topic you researched, 2) describe the methods you used to conduct your research, 3) summarize your findings, and 4) point to directions for further research on the topic.

Participation/Attendance – 10%

Course Schedule

Week 1 (9/5): Introduction/Defining Social Media
Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*
Boyd, d. m. & Ellison, N. B. Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship.
Beer, D. Social network(ing) sites… revisiting the story so far: A response to danah boyd and Nicole Ellison.

Week 2 (9/12): Studying Social Media
Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*
Nardi, excerpts from *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*
Boelstorff, excerpts from *Coming of Age in Second Life*
Hargittai, “Whose Space? Differences Among Users and Non-Users of Social Network Sites”

Week 3 (9/19): Forming Community and Performing Identity through Social Media
Greenhow & Robelia, “Old Communication, New Literacies”
Donath & boyd, “Public Displays of Connection”
Weber, S., & Mitchell, C. “Imaging, keyboarding, and posting identities: Young people and new media technologies”
Marwick “I’m a lot more interesting than a Friendster profile:” Identity presentation, authenticity, and power in social networking services

Week 4 (9/26): Youth
boyd, d. Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life
Stald, Mobile identity: Youth, identity, and mobile communication media.
Herring, “Questioning the generational divide: Technological exoticism and adult constructions of online youth identity”
Boyd, “Social Steganography: Obtaining Privacy in Social Media”
Week 5 (10/3): Gender
Willett, “Consumer citizens online: Structure, agency, and gender in online participation”
Banet-Weiser, “Branding the post-feminist self: Girls’ video production and youtube”
Marwick, “Conspicuous and Authentic: Fashion Blogs, Style, and Consumption”

Week 6 (10/10): Race and Ethnicity
Boyd, “How Race and Class Shaped Facebook, Myspace”
Byrne, The future of (the) “race”: Identity, discourse, and the rise of computer-mediated public spheres
Thomas, “KPK, Inc.: Race, Nation, and Emergent Culture in Online Games”
Nakamura, “Race and Identity in Digital Media”

Week 7 (10/17): Sexuality
Gudelunas, “There’s an App for That”
Gudelunas, “Online Personal Ads: Community and Sex, Virtually”

Week 8 (10/24): Politics and Activism
Costanza-Chock, “New Social Movements in the Network Society”
Costanza-Chock, “The Immigrant Rights Movement on the Net”
Boyd, “Can Social Network Sites Enable Political Action?”

Week 9 (10/31): Learning about and Reaching Consumers I
Clemons, “The complex problem of monetizing virtual electronic social networks”
Mangold & Faulds, “Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix”
Kozinets, “How online communities are growing in power”

Week 10 (11/7): Learning about and Reaching Consumers II
Gillin, excerpts from The new influencers: A marketer’s guide to the new social media
Weber, excerpts from Marketing to the social web: How digital customer communities build your business

Week 11 (11/14): Ethical issues: Privacy, Labor, Identity Regulation
Andrejevic, excerpts from iSpy: Surveillance and power in the interactive era
Boyd, “Facebook’s Privacy Trainwreck”
Cheney-Lippold, TBA

Week 12 (11/21): Refusing Social Media
Portwood-Stacer, “Media Refusal: The Case of Facebook Abstainers”

Week 13 (11/28): Presentations

Week 14 (12/5): Presentations/Course Wrap-up

Week 15 (12/12): Research Paper Due