

SOC356H1: SOCIOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGY

2024 Summer

Lecture Zoom Link available on Quercus.

Mon and Wed 1-3 pm

University of Toronto, St. George Campus

Instructor: Dr. Rui Hou

Email: rui.hou@utoronto.ca

Office Hour: Monday 4-5 pm or by appointment

TA: Andrew Cooper

Office Hour:

Course Description

Technology and society are unthinkable without each other — each provides the means and framework in which the other develops. Today, new digital technologies have had a profound influence on everyday life, social relations, government, commerce, the economy and the production and dissemination of knowledge. To explore this dynamic, this course investigates a wide array of questions on the interaction between technology, society, politics, and economics. We will discuss how our interactions with technologies, especially computers and the Internet, Big Data, social media, and other digital technologies, have become central for our understanding of contemporary social life. Students will also learn various theoretical perspectives regarding the technology-society relationship, as well as how the current sociological inquiry of digital technologies is influenced by the unique affordances of digital data and research methods.

The main objectives and learning outcomes associated with this course are as follows:

- To demonstrate knowledge of important concepts related to the research on digital technologies in sociology and other related disciplines
- To critically examine the lived experiences of digitally mediated society and existing theories developed to frame the interactions between technology and society.
- To improve academic writing skills and the ability to synthesize theoretical and empirical evidence to articulate a compelling argument and to motivate future research

Prerequisite: 1.0 SOC credit at the 200+ level

Exclusion: SOC331H1, SOC356Y1

Students not meeting this requirement will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

Course Delivery

Lectures will proceed as in-person. If there are restrictions in place in Winter Term, adjustments to course delivery will be made according to public health guidelines if required at that time. Students will be contacted directly by their instructors on the possible adjustments by email and through Quercus.

Office Hours: The information of in-person office hour will be updated via Quercus. Students can

also email the instructor to make the appointment for Zoom office hour.

Email

When emailing the instructor or TA, please use your mail.utoronto.ca address. My goal is to answer emails from students within 48 hours, with the exception of those received on Fridays (these will be answered on Mondays or the next business day if the Monday is a holiday). If I have not responded to you within 48 hours, please do not hesitate to follow up. Please include “SOC356” in the subject line of the email.

Course Website

The course website on Quercus contains the syllabus, announcements, posted lectures, readings, tutorial materials, discussion boards, assignment instructions, and grades. Students can also access Bb Collaborate through the course’s home page, which is the platform used for participating in synchronous sessions and attending office hours. Please note that students are responsible for regularly checking both Quercus and their official utoronto.ca email addresses for course updates.

Course Reading

The required reading listed for each week will be provided on Quercus for students to read online or print. Readings marked as supplementary are not required and are not testable, although they are a great resource for those interested in reading more deeply about a particular topic and can be used as sources for the assignments.

Evaluation

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Due date</i>
Participation	25%	Ongoing
Critical event analysis	10%	May 29
Movie review	10%	May 15
Critical question	15%	Jun 10
Term paper	40%	Jun 27

Movie Review (10)

Topic: Students are asked to write a review of a movie/documentary (1000 words) dealing with digital technology. A list of movies attached with the syllabus is available, and these movies are pre-approved for review. Other movies can be chosen with the permission of the instructor/TA. As part of my inclusive pedagogy, even though most pre-approved movies are produced by Hollywood, I encourage students to choose movies/documentaries from non-western countries. We expect students to bring in good tech-relevant visual materials that represent diverse worldview. This assignment aims to help you think how to use sociological conceptual tools to examine the chosen movie content. Remember, if you do mention a particular work (book, article, website etc.), then please do cite it properly according to Sociology department guidelines. This is not simply about your personal opinion of the film! The majority of your paper should be academic (i.e., don’t spend too much space reviewing the performance of actors/actresses).

Critical Event analysis (10)

Different from the movie review, this assignment asks you to reflect on real-life event and think how technology is impacting our life or the society. You are required to find a piece of recent media, academic or industrial event (news stories, radio/podcasts, seminar, documentation film, youtuber video, conference presentation, industrial events, online events etc.) that resonates with the course theme. You will post your media object, along with a brief commentary (500 words) to explain what technology/device/app is covered in the event, how it is engaged with everyday life or a specific dimension of our society, what social justice or social equity issue will be impacted by the engaged technology.

Final Project

Final projects will explore the nexus of digital technology and human life by completing a term paper. This assignment is split into two main parts:

(1) Critical Question: The first is a critical question in which students outline their intended topic and a tentative research question which will be explored in the final term paper. You should choose a topic and use it to create a critical question for your term paper. The 'question' can be an actual question, a question with sub-questions, a statement to be discussed, a hypothesis to be tested, or any other way you can think of to problematize the subject. (The question can have a subtitle, and up to three sub-questions but no more). The question must be:

1. Critical, that is it must challenge and go beyond the 'common-sense' and the mundane;
2. Of sociological or more broadly social scientific interest;
3. Possible to answer given the constraints of time and resources available to you;
4. Justified with a brief 300-word outline.
5. Supported by at least 5 indicative references (key examples of the kinds of sources you will use).

(2) Term Paper: The second is a longer, finalized term paper (3000 words) that is due on June 27 and involves a detail clarification and exploration of your critical question. It is expected that you show familiarity with social theories and empirical research and approach the subject in a critical manner. More in-depth instructions will be posted on Quercus.

Participation (25)

Participation will be assessed on the basis of in-class engagement and assessments. The instructor will post 2-3 discussion questions at the end of each lecture. Students will be separated into small groups to discuss questions. Students should take note of their discussion results and upload it through Quercus. These activities are designed to demonstrate that you have done the reading and paid attention in lecture.

*All assignments should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. They should include a cover page with a title, your name, student ID number, the course name, and the date. Assignments should be clearly formatted and proofread, with references cited correctly according to ASA guidelines.

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for medical reasons, need to email

the instructor (not the TA), and declare their absence on the system (ACORN).

Movie List

Her (2013) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Facebook Dilemma (2018) Part 1 or Part 2

Part1 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9207216/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Part2 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9209914/?ref=fn_al_tt_2

The Circle (2017) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4287320/>

Snowden (2016) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3774114/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Citizenfour (2014) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4044364/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

iHuman (2019) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11279794/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Social Dilemma (2020) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11464826/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

In the Age of AI (2019) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11240426/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Social Network (2010) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1285016/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Nosedive (*Black Mirror*, 2016) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5497778/>

Screening Surveillance (2019) <https://www.sscqueens.org/projects/screening-surveillance>

Baymax! (2022) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13622958/>

Most movies in this list are offered by UofT Libraries, available for individual streaming when logged in with your UTORID. Individual title records are available in the UofT Libraries Catalogue. *Criterion-on-Demand* and *The Film Platform Collection* are the two suggested channels that you can use your UTORid to access more tech-related movie resources

More details in: <https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/cinema/watch-film>

Generative AI policy

Students may use artificial intelligence tools for proofreading and editing an assignment, but the final submitted assignment must be original work produced by the individual student alone. If generative AI is used for proofreading, this use must be documented in an appendix for each assignment. The documentation should include what tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how the results from the AI were incorporated into the submitted work.

Grade Appeals

Instructors and teaching assistants take the marking of assignments very seriously and will work diligently to be fair, consistent, and accurate. Nonetheless, mistakes and oversights occasionally happen. In the case of a mathematical error, simply alert the TA or instructor of the error.

For more substantive appeals you must adhere to the following policies. To appeal a grade and have your work re-assessed, you must provide written justification to your TA explaining the basis for this reconsideration and, where relevant, attach your original assignment with comments. You should specifically address how you believe your assignment better met the criteria from the assignment guidelines while also taking into account the individual comments or community feedback. To start this re-assessment process, students must wait 24 hours following the return of the grades and comments—any grade appeals sent within this timeframe will not be considered. Note, that as per FAS policy, once your work has been re-assessed, the grade can go up, down, or

remain the same based on this second evaluation. Subsequent appeals will go to the course instructor. Furthermore, no requests for grade appeals will be granted after two weeks following the return of the assignment's grade and feedback.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the University of Toronto degree that you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves. Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) and other [integrity policies](#). To avoid issues related to plagiarism, please see the [advice](#) on documentation format and methods of properly integrating sources.

“Sometimes, students will be required to submit their assignments to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).”

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Ouriginal will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own.

Accessibility

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, contact your instructor as soon as possible to discuss how best to assist you in the course. Furthermore, if you are registered with [Accessibility Services](#), you must supply the appropriate documentation or your counselor will need send an email message on your behalf

Course Schedule

Every attempt will be made to follow this schedule; however, it is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Any adjustments to topics or readings will be announced on Quercus.

May 6: Introduction

Required Readings:

Selwyn, Neil, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology, Chapter 1*

Supplementary Readings:

DiMaggio, Paul, Eszter Hargittai, W. Russell Neuman, and John P. Robinson. 2001. “Social Implications of the Internet.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1):307-336.

Fussey, Pete, and Silke Roth, 2020, “Digitizing Sociology: Continuity and Change in the Internet Era.” *Sociology* 54, no. 4: 659–74.

Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, pp1-19

May 8: Theories and concepts

Required Readings:

Selwyn, Neil, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology*, Chapter 2

Supplementary Readings:

Klein, Hans K., and Daniel Lee Kleinman. 2002. "The social construction of technology: Structural considerations." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 27(1): 28-52.

Chayko, Mary. 2015. "The First Web Theorist? Georg Simmel and the Legacy of 'The Web of Group-Affiliations'." *Information, Communication, & Society* 18(12): 1419-1422.

Julien, Chris. 2015. "Bourdieu, social capital and online interaction." *Sociology* 49(2): 356-373.

Gunderson, Ryan. 2016. "The sociology of technology before the turn to technology." *Technology in Society* 47: 40-48.

Dafoe, Allan. 2015. "On Technological Determinism: A Typology, Scope Conditions, and a Mechanism." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 40(6): 1047-76.

Lupton, Deborah. *Digital sociology*. Routledge, 2014. pp.20-41

May 13: Digital research methods

Required Readings:

Neil Selwyn, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology*, Chapter 4

Supplementary Readings:

Ruppert, Evelyn, John Law, and Mike Savage. 2013. "Reassembling Social Science Methods: The Challenge of Digital Devices." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30(4): 22-46.

Edelmann, Achim, Tom Wolff, Danielle Montagne, and Christopher A. Bail. 2020. "Computational social science and sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 61-81.

Murthy, Dhiraj. 2008. "Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research." *Sociology* 42(5): 837-855.

Kaufmann, Mareile, and Meropi Tzanetakis. 2020. "Doing Internet Research with Hard-to-Reach Communities: Methodological Reflections on Gaining Meaningful Access." *Qualitative Research* 20 (6): 927-44.

Murphy, Alexandra K., Colin Jerolmack, and DeAnna Smith. 2021 "Ethnography, Data Transparency, and the Information Age." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47:41-61.

Angele Christin 2020. The ethnographer and the algorithm: beyond the black box. *Theory and Society* 49:897-918

May 15: Tech-driven interaction: social relationship and intimacy

Required Readings:

Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology & Society* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press, pp208-234

Wilding, R. F, (2020). Relationships, and Technology. In *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Digital Media*. Oxford University Press.

Supplementary Readings:

Brubaker, J. R., Hayes, G. R., & Dourish, P. (2013). Beyond the grave: Facebook as a site for

the expansion of death and mourning. *The Information Society*, 29(3), 152-163.

Gershon, I. (2010). *The Breakup 2.0*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Manago, A. M., & Vaughn, L. (2015). Social media, friendship, and happiness in the millennial generation. *Friendship and happiness*, 187-206.

Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2011, September). The drama! Teen conflict, gossip, and bullying in networked publics. In *Teen Conflict, Gossip, and Bullying in Networked Publics* (September 12, 2011). *A Decade in Internet Time: Symposium on the Dynamics of the Internet and Society*.

Standlee, A. (2019). Friendship and online filtering: The use of social media to construct offline social networks. *New media & society*, 21(3), 770-785.

May 20: Victoria Day No class

May 22 Tech-driven interaction: Collectivity and Community

Required Readings:

Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology & Society* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press, pp184-207

Supplementary Readings

Diamant-Cohen, A. and Golan, O. (2017). Downloading culture: community building in a decentralized file-sharing collective. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(11), pp.1737-1755.

Julien, C. (2015). "Bourdieu, social capital and online interaction." *Sociology* 49(2):356-373.

Rettie, R. (2009). "Mobile phone communication: Extending Goffman to mediated interaction." *Sociology* 43(3): 421-438.

Robards, B., Byron, P., & D'Souza, S. (2020). LGBTQ+ Communities and Digital Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Digital Media*. Oxford University Press

Jankowski, N. W. (2006). Creating community with media: History, theories and scientific investigations. *The handbook of new media*, 55-74.

Norris, P. (1996). Does television erode social capital? A reply to Putnam. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 29(3), 474-480.

May 27: Tech-drive life: Identity, body, and emotions

Required Readings:

Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, Pp.164-187

McStay, Andrew. 2018. *Emotional AI: The rise of empathic media*. Sage. pp1-28

Supplementary Readings:

Goriunova, Olga. 2019. "The digital subject: People as data as persons." *Theory, Culture & Society* 36(6): 125-145.

Goode, J., 2010. The digital identity divide: how technology knowledge impacts college students. *New media & society*, 12(3), pp.497-513.

Sanders, Rachel. 2017. "Self-tracking in the digital era: Biopower, patriarchy, and the new biometric body projects." *Body & Society* 23(1): 36-63.

Kennedy, Helen, and Rosemary Lucy Hill. 2018. "The feeling of numbers: Emotions in everyday engagements with data and their visualisation." *Sociology* 52(4): 830-848.

Laura Grindstaff & Gabriella Torres Valencia. 2021. The filtered self: selfies and gendered media production, *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(5): 733-750

May 29: Tech-driven inequality and digital divide

Required Readings:

- Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology & Society* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press, pp119-139
- Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, Pp.117-140
- Halford, Susan, and Mike Savage. 2010. "Reconceptualizing digital social inequality." *Information, Communication & Society* 13(7): 937-955.

Supplementary Readings:

- Deursen, Alexander JAM van, and Jan AGM van Dijk. 2019. "The First-Level Digital Divide Shifts from Inequalities in Physical Access to Inequalities in Material Access." *New Media & Society* 21(2): 354–75.
- White, Patrick, and Neil Selwyn. 2013. "Moving on-line? An analysis of patterns of adult Internet use in the UK, 2002–2010." *Information, Communication & Society* 16(1): 1-27.
- Van Dijk, J.A., 2006. Digital divide research, achievements, and shortcomings. *Poetics*, 34(4-5), pp.221-235.
- Hargittai E. 2010. "Digital natives? Variation in Internet skills and uses among members of the "Net generation.." *Sociological Inquiry* 80(1): 92–113.
- Hargittai E and Dobransky K (2017) Old dogs, new clicks: digital inequality in skills and uses among older adults. *Canadian Journal of Communication* 42(2): 195–212.
- Cruz, Taylor M. 2020. "Perils of Data-Driven Equity: Safety-Net Care and Big Data's Elusive Grasp on Health Inequality." *Big Data & Society*, (January, online first).
- Kvasny, Lynette. 2006. "Cultural (re) production of digital inequality in a US community technology initiative." *Information, Communication & Society* 9(02): 160-181.
- Brayne, S. 2017. "Big Data Surveillance: The Case of Policing." *American Sociological Review* 82(5):977–1008.

Jun 3: Digital labor and technological work

Required Readings:

- Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology & Society* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press, pp140-160.
- Selwyn, Neil, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology, Chapter 1. Pp33-65*
- Xiao, 2023, OpenAI Used Kenyan Workers Making \$2 an Hour to Filter Traumatic Content from ChatGPT, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxn3kw/openai-used-kenyan-workers-making-dollar2-an-hour-to-filter-traumatic-content-from-chatgpt>

Supplementary Readings:

- Vallas, Steven, and Juliet B. Schor. 2020. "What do platforms do? Understanding the gig economy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 273-294.
- Bucher, Eliane, and Christian Fieseler. 2017. "The flow of digital labor." *New media & society* 19(11): 1868-1886.
- Siciliano, Michael L. 2016. "Control from on high: Cloud-computing, skill, and acute frustration among analytics workers in the digital publishing industry." In *Research in the Sociology of Work*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited

Postigo, Hector. 2016. "The Socio-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money." *New Media & Society* 18(2): 332–49.

Jun 5: Platform economy and surveillance capitalism

Required Readings:

Schor, Juliet B., and Steven P. Vallas. 2021. "The Sharing Economy: Rhetoric and Reality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47: 369-389

Zuboff, Shoshana, Norma Möllers, David Murakami Wood, and David Lyon. 2019. "Surveillance Capitalism: An Interview with Shoshana Zuboff." *Surveillance & Society* 17(1/2): 257-266. Or watch this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcADchWhwUk&t=94s>

Supplementary Readings:

Kenney, Martin, and John Zysman. "The Rise of the Platform Economy." *Issues in Science and Technology* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2016).

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2015. "Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization." *Journal of information technology* 30(1): 75-89.

Lei, Ya-Wen. 2021. "Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture and Collective Contention in China's Platform Economy." *American Sociological Review* 86(2): 279–309.

June 10 Digital participation and tech-driven repression

Required Readings:

Diamond, L. (2010). Liberation Technology. *Journal of Democracy*, 21(3), 69-83.

Deibert, Ron. 2015. "Authoritarianism goes global: cyberspace under siege." *Journal of Democracy* 26(3): 64-78.

Supplementary Readings:

MacKinnon, R., 2011. Liberation Technology: China's "Networked Authoritarianism". *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), pp.32-46.

Julia Velkova & Anne Kaun (2021) Algorithmic resistance: media practices and the politics of repair, *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(4): 523-540

June 12: Cultural dimensions of digital society

Required Readings:

Deuze, Mark. 2006. "Participation, remediation, bricolage: Considering principal components of a digital culture." *The information society* 22(2): 63-75.

Lyon, David. "Digital citizenship and surveillance| Surveillance culture: engagement, exposure, and ethics in digital modernity." *International Journal of Communication* 11(19):824-842

Supplementary Readings:

Kecheng Fang (2020) Turning a communist party leader into an internet meme: the political and apolitical aspects of China's toad worship culture, *Information, Communication & Society*, 23:1, 38-58

Brian Elliott (2018) Work, culture, and play in the neoliberal condition, *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(9): 1279-1292

McLean, Paul. 2016. *Culture in networks*. John Wiley & Sons, 2016: Chapter 1

June 17: Privacy, Ethics, and Future

Zajko, M. (2022). Artificial intelligence, algorithms, and social inequality: Sociological contributions to contemporary debates. *Sociology Compass*, 16(3), e12962.

Liu, Z. (2021). Sociological perspectives on artificial intelligence: A typological reading. *Sociology Compass*, 15(3), e12851.