Course Information

Course Number: COMM 665
Course Title: Communication and Technology
Section: 601
Time: 4:10 PM - 6:40 PM, Wednesdays
Location: BLTN 213
Credit Hours: 3

Instructor Details

Instructor: Dr. Yiping Xia
Office: Bolton 309C
Phone: N/A
E-Mail: xia@tamu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00 – 11:30 (Zoom), Wednesdays 12:30 – 2 (in-person), or by appointment

Course Description

What is technology, what does it do, and what do people do with it? This course provides an overview of core concepts and frameworks for the critical study of communication technologies. We will focus on contemporary digital technologies, though the course will start off with historical and theoretical writings on studying technology writ large. Class readings explore the intersection between communication research and the social-scientific study of technology, drawing from diverse fields such as science and technology studies (STS), sociology of knowledge, and feminist technology studies.

Course Prerequisites

Graduate standing.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, all students should have:
- achieved an understanding of how society and technology shape each other
- acquired competence in explaining concepts and theories related to critical studies of digital technologies
- engaged with key texts in this course to comprehend how technology intersects with various forms of social inequity
- demonstrated critical reading and analytical skills by completing class assignments on time with adequate quality

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

There is one book that you will need to obtain: Alice Marwick's *The Private Is Political* (Yale University Press, 2023), which we will discuss in Week Eight.

All other course materials will be uploaded to Canvas by the instructor.

Grading Policy

The final course grade will be based on the following distribution:
Response memos (10 x 3%) = 30%
Discussion leadership (2 x 10%) = 20%
Final project 25%
Seminar participation 10%
Seminar attendance 15%

Response Memos 10 x 3% = 30%

Each week from Week Two to Week 14 (except for Spring Break which is Week Nine), you are required to submit a short Response Memo to the designated section on the Canvas site by 12pm on Wednesday.

You can skip up to TWO Response Memos without penalty; in other words, you should expect to submit 10 memos throughout the semester.

Once you submit the memo on time, you get full 3 points for the week – The instructor will NOT grade each memo individually, though the overall quality of your memos will affect your seminar participation grade.

Your memos should demonstrate that you have engaged with the assigned readings AND reflected upon how they can be related to your research/professional interests. Do not submit summaries of readings only.

Please limit the length of your memos to a maximum of ONE page double space.

Discussion leadership 2 x 10% = 20%

Each student will be the discussion leader TWICE during the semester (this is subject to change depending on the actual class size). The duties of the discussion leader include:
- Prepare a set of discussion questions based on the week's readings and email them to the class list by 12pm on Wednesday
- During class, briefly introduce the readings and kick off class discussion, as well as facilitate discussion alongside the instructor

Discussion questions should revolve around the key arguments that the authors make, how the readings relate to each other and to readings from earlier weeks, what kinds of new research the readings may spur, etc. Questions can also focus on specific passages or sections of some readings that you find especially enlightening, interesting, and/or problematic. The discussion leader should feel free to consult with the instructor prior to class regarding what questions might work best for class discussion.

The instructor will pass around a sign-up sheet during the class meeting in Week Two, and discussion leadership starts in Week Three and ends in Week 14 (except for Spring Break which is Week Nine).

Final Project 25%

At the end of the course, each student will submit a final project on a topic relevant to communication and technology. <u>You can choose a format that best suits your research/professional interest</u>, including extended literature review, original empirical study, well-defined research proposal, journalistic/arts project, development of a practical application, and so on. All methodological traditions are welcome.

Regardless of format, your project should engage substantially with the core ideas that we discuss throughout the semester, as well as draw from additional sources relevant to your topic. If you choose to do an original research study, please aim for a submission comparable to a standard conference paper. For other options, consult with me regarding specific expectations. No matter which format you select, you will NOT be graded according to the length of your submission; <u>it is the substance and quality of work that matters.</u>

<u>There will be a one-page prospectus outlining the topic, research questions and/or other goals of your project due in class (hard copy or email) in Week Eight (March 6th)</u>, but you are encouraged to speak with the instructor regarding your ideas for the final project well before this date. In Week 15, every student in the class will briefly present their project to the whole class.

Class Participation 10%

A seminar only works if every participant takes a part. Be prepared to talk about ideas, concepts, or examples from the readings each week prior to class, even if you are not the discussion leader for that week. Asking questions is a great way to get involved. Another factor in your participation grade is the quality of your weekly memos that should demonstrate your knowledge about the readings AND your personalized takeaways.

Graded Attendance 15%

The instructor will take attendance at the start of each class meeting. Each unexcused absence will result in a one-point deduction. Please communicate with the instructor in advance if you cannot attend a class meeting for any reason.

Late Work Policy

Late work is NOT accepted unless it is due to extraordinary circumstances. Please be reminded of the following:
- Response memo due by 12pm on Wednesday (Canvas, starting Week Two)
- Discussion questions (as discussion leader) due by 12pm on Wednesday (Email list)
- Prospectus for final project due March 6 in class (Email or hard copy)
- Final project due approximately one week from last class meeting

Course Schedule

Week One
Wed., Jan. 17
Introducing the course and ourselves
- Steven Shapin (2007). What Else is New? *New Yorker Magazine*
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/05/14/what-else-is-new
- Whitney Phillips (2019). It wasn't just the trolls: Early internet culture,"fun," and the fires of exclusionary laughter. *Social Media+ Society*, *5*(3), 2056305119849493.

Week Two
Wed., Jan. 24
How to Think about Technology in Society?
- Langdon Winner (1980). "Do artifacts have politics?". *Daedalus*, 121-136.
- Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker (1984). "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or, How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other," *Social Studies of Science 14*(3): 399-441.
- Langdon Winner, "Social Constructivism: Opening the Black Box and Finding it Empty," *Science as Culture 3* (1993): 427-452.
- Sally Wyatt (2008). Technological determinism is dead; long live technological determinism. *The handbook of science and technology studies, 3*, 165-180.
- (SKIM) Sharon Traweek (1993), "An Introduction to Cultural and Social Studies of Sciences and Technologies," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry 17*: 3-25.

Week Three
Wed., Jan. 31
Feminist Technology Studies
- Donna Haraway (1993). "A Cyborg Manifesto." Pp. 271-291 in *The Cultural Studies Reader.* Simon During, Editor. Routledge.
- Sandra Harding (1986). Chapter 1 in *The Science Question in Feminism.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press
- Donna Haraway (1991) "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 183-201. New York: Routledge.
- (SKIM) Judy Wajcman (2010). "Feminist theories of technology". *Cambridge journal of economics, 34*(1), 143-152.
- Lucy Suchman (2007). Feminist STS and the Sciences of the Artificial. In E. Hackett, O. Amsterdamska, M. Lynch & J. Wajcman (eds.), *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, Third Edition pp. 139-163. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Week Four
Wed., Feb. 7
Communication Technologies: A Look at History
- Walter J. Ong (2013). Chapters 3 & 4 in *Orality and literacy*. Routledge.
- Susan J. Douglas (2013). Introduction in Listening in: Radio and the American imagination. U of Minnesota Press.

- José van Dijck (2013). Chapters 1 & 2 in *The Culture of Connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press.

Week Five
Wed., Feb. 14
Hacking and The Internet
- Fred Turner (2010). Introduction & Chapter 1 in *From counterculture to cyberculture*.
- Nathan Schneider (2023). Homesteading on a Superhighway: The Californian Ideology and Everyday Politics. *International journal of communication (Online), 17*, 4255-4272.
- Christina Dunbar-Hester (2020). Introduction in *Hacking diversity: The politics of inclusion in open technology cultures*. Princeton University Press.
- Lilly U. Nguyen (2016). "Infrastructural Action in Vietnam: Inverting the Techno-Politics of Hacking in the Global South." *New Media & Society*, 1461444816629475.

Week Six
Wed., Feb. 21
Platforms: Economy and Governance
- Shoshana Zuboff (2019). Chapter 1 in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Routledge.
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). "Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social media+ society*, *1*(2), 2056305115604337.
- Philip M. Napoli & Robyn Caplan (2017). Why media companies insist they're not media companies, why they're wrong, and why it matters. *First Monday*, *22*(5).
- Tarleton Gillespie (2021). Chapters 1 & 8 in *Custodians of the Internet*. Yale University Press.

Week Seven
Wed., Feb. 28
Platforms: Users and Affordances
- Jenny L. Davis (2020). Chapters 1 & 2 in *How artifacts afford: The power and politics of everyday things*. MIT Press.
- Shaw, A. (2017). Encoding and decoding affordances: Stuart Hall and interactive media technologies. Media, Culture & Society, 39(4), 592-602.
- Matassi, M., Boczkowski, P. J., & Mitchelstein, E. (2019). Domesticating WhatsApp: Family, friends, work, and study in everyday communication. New Media & Society, 21(10), 2183–2200. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819841890
- Pyo, J., & Gu, J. (2023). Platforms as Cultural Infrastructures: Identity-Making Practices of WeChat and KakaoTalk in the Diaspora. *International Journal Of Communication, 17*, 22. Retrieved from https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/20954/4354

Week Eight
Wed., Mar. 6
Prospectus for final project DUE in class
Privacy, Harassment, & Wellbeing Online
- Marwick, A. E. (2023). *The Private Is Political: Networked Privacy and Social Media*. Yale University Press.

Week Nine
Wed., Mar. 13
Spring Break

Week Ten
Wed., Mar. 20
Digital oppression & digital activism
- Ruha Benjamin (2019). Selected chapters in *Race after Technology*. Polity.
- Jackson, S. J., & Foucault Welles, B. (2015). Hijacking# myNYPD: Social media dissent and networked counterpublics. *Journal of communication*, *65*(6), 932-952.
- Jen Schradie (2019), Selected chapters in *The Revolution That Wasn't: How Digital Activism Favors Conservatives*.

Week Eleven
Wed., Mar. 27
Mis/Disinformation
- Yochai Benkler, Robert Farris, & Hal Roberts (2018). Chapter 3 in *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Yunkang Yang, Trevor Davis, & Matthew Hindman (2023). Visual Misinformation on Facebook. *Journal of Communication*
- Yini Zhang, Fan Chen, & Josephine Lukito (2023). Network amplification of politicized information and misinformation about COVID-19 by conservative media and partisan influencers on Twitter. *Political Communication*, *40*(1), 24-47.
- P. M. Krafft & Joan Donovan (2020). Disinformation by design: The use of evidence collages and platform filtering in a media manipulation campaign. *Political Communication, 37* (2), 194–214.
- Francesca B. Tripodi, Lauren C. Garcia, & Alice E. Marwick (2023). 'Do your own research': affordance activation and disinformation spread. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-17.

Week Twelve
Wed., Apr. 3
Social Media and Politics
- Jonathan Corpus Ong & Jason Vincent A. Cabañes (2019) When disinformation studies meets production studies: Social identities and moral justifications in the political trolling industry. *International Journal of Communication 13*: 20.
- Rongbin Han (2015). Defending the authoritarian regime online: China's "voluntary fifty-cent army." *The China Quarterly , (224)*, 1006-1025.
- Pablo Boczkowski (2020). Chapters 1 & 4 in *Abundance: On the Experience of Living in a World of Information Plenty*
- Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon, David Lazer, et al (2023). Asymmetric ideological segregation in exposure to political news on Facebook. *Science 381*(6656). https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.ade7138

Week Thirteen
Wed., Apr. 10
Algorithms
- Nick Seaver (2023). Selected chapters in *Computing Taste*
- Safiya Noble (2018). Selected chapters in *Algorithms of Oppression.* New York: NYU Press.
- Minocher, X., & Randall, C. (2020). Predictable policing: New technology, old bias, and future resistance in big data surveillance. *Convergence, 26*(5-6), 1108-1124. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856520933838

Week Fourteen
Wed., Apr. 17
Data Science
- Catherine D'ignazio & Lauren F. Klein (2023). Selected chapters in *Data feminism*. MIT press.
- Sasha Costanza-Chock (2020). Selected chapters in *Design justice: Community-led practices to build the worlds we need*. The MIT Press.

Week Fifteen
Wed., Apr. 24
Wrap-up and Final Presentations

Statement on Inclusive Excellence in Communication Courses

Department of Communication & Journalism instructors are committed to inclusive teaching and learning. Our classrooms, virtual spaces, practices, and interactions provide learning experiences that respect diversity, enable participation and consider a variety of learning needs and preferences. The Aggie Core Values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity and selfless service in addition to civility, and the ability to listen and to observe others are the foundation of a welcoming instructional climate. Active, thoughtful and respectful participation in all aspects of the course supports a more inclusive classroom environment, as well as our mutual responsibilities to the campus community. In the event that discussion turns disrespectful or appears to be proceeding with questionable integrity, instructors will make every attempt to facilitate mutual understanding and inclusive excellence in the classroom space.

University Policies

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to Student Rule 7 in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to Student Rule 7 in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" (Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at [aggiehonor.tamu.edu](#).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit [disability.tamu.edu](#).

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.

- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns related to mental and/or physical health in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with University Health Services or download the TELUS Health Student Support app for 24/7 access to professional counseling in multiple languages. Walk-in services for urgent, non-emergency needs are available during normal business hours at University Health Services locations; call 979.458.4584 for details.

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's Title IX webpage.

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors influencing a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care practices by utilizing the resources and services available through University Health Services. Students needing a listening ear can call the Texas A&M Helpline (979.845.2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends for mental health peer support while classes are in session. The TELUS Health Student Support app provides access to professional counseling in multiple languages anytime, anywhere by phone or chat, and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24-hour emergency support at 988 or 988lifeline.org.

Students needing a listening ear can contact University Health Services (979.458.4584) or call the Texas A&M Helpline (979.845.2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends while classes are in session. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or at 988lifeline.org.