

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
Friendship@Facebook.com
Sociology 2112-ADE 2015
(Online)

Contacting the Instructor (Brian McMillan)

If you have any questions you would like to ask the instructor, please send to brian.mcmillan@lakeheadu.ca.

Course Description

This course of study examines the nature and consequences of new forms of social media and social networking. More specifically, the course offers a critical analysis of the impact that new types of digitized communications (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Skype, text messaging, blogging, email, mobile phones, the internet, and so on) are having on social interactions and personal relationships. To this end, the course introduces numerous analytical concepts and theories which are used to deepen our understanding of how social media are shaping our everyday lives and personal connections. Topics include a brief history of the internet, the digital divide, theories of technology such as Technological Determinism and Social Construction of Technology, the face-to-face vs. mediated-communications debate, the role of gender and culture in digitized media, social media and community development, social media and the development and maintenance of inter-personal relationships, and others. The course of study gives special attention to Twitter and Facebook.

Readings

The following books are required reading. They are important sources of information for written assignments and discussions. Please refer to the Course Schedule for reading times.

Required Books:

Baym, Nancy, 2010. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Polity. ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-4332-8

Murthy, Dhiraj. 2013. *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*. Polity. ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5239-9

Supplementary Online Articles: see Course Contents

Videos

The course of study includes several videos which address various issues of relevance to the course of study. The videos are readily available online at no cost to students. We will use the videos as the basis of our class discussions. All necessary information about the videos and discussions will be posted in our site's Table of Contents at the appropriate times. The viewing dates are found in the Course Schedule. See below for further information on Class Discussions.

Class Discussions

Class discussions will be based on a number of videos available online. At the time of this writing I am unsure about the level of interest in Assignment #1 where students are asked to create a Twitter account. If everyone is successful in doing so we can use Twitter as our discussion forum. For now, however, our default position will be to use D2L's Discussion Area to discuss the videos. You are expected to view the videos at the appropriate point in the course (see the Course Schedule for video viewing times) and post a comment about each video which reflects one or more key course concepts introduced and discussed in the readings. You are encouraged to read the comments of others and to respond, always in a courteous fashion. *Please note: your comments and responses in the Discussion Area must be posted by the deadline indicated in the Course Schedule.* While your comments/responses will not be systematically graded, the general quality and quantity of your responses will be noted and will contribute a maximum of 9% towards your final course grade. See the Course Schedule for video viewing times and deadlines for comments.

Note: to access the Discussions Area on our site, simply click the [Discussions](#) link on the navbar at the top of the site page.

Grading Scheme

Assignment #1.....	5%
Assignment #2.....	12%
Assignment #3.....	24%
Assignment #4.....	25%
Assignment #5.....	25%
Video Discussions.....	9%

Assignment #1

For 5% of your final course grade, you must create a Twitter account. You may be expected to use Twitter throughout the course to share links, discuss course material, ask questions, and address other aspects of the course of study. This assignment will ensure that all students have a working familiarity with one of today's most popular social media platforms, and will help elucidate one of this course's important case studies.

If you do not already have a Twitter account you must create one at Twitter.com. The account must be publicly visible (unlocked). You may use a pseudonym and limited bio-information to protect your privacy if you wish. If you use a pseudonym I must be informed of your ID so I can add you to the class list. The account must have at least a brief bio note (e.g., program, city of residence, nothing too personal), and a photograph or other avatar (not the Twitter default). If you already have a Twitter account that you use for personal communication, you may either use it here or create a new account specifically for this class.

Once you have created your Twitter account, the first thing to do is send me a tweet (to @rbmcmillan1) so I can confirm that you are signed up and ready to go. This step must be completed no later than Wednesday July 29th, 11:59 p.m. EST. Please note the following recommended activities that you should undertake over the duration of the course:

- Tweet a brief greeting to the class, perhaps indicating your principal reason for taking this course. Be sure to use our course's basic hashtag #LU2112ADE (not case sensitive) so that your classmates can follow your tweets. At this point you might read, with special interest, Murthy's brief discussion of Twitter's strategic use of hashtags in ch. 2 pp. 3-4. If you are unfamiliar with the purpose and use of hashtags, you might visit Twitter's own Help Centre at <https://support.twitter.com/> or try one of the trillion or so sites that offer assistance on using Twitter ; e.g., <http://techforluddites.com/the-twitter-hashtag-what-is-it-and-how-do-you-use-it/>
- Follow at least 10 people or organizations. Ideas for who to follow can be found by exploring lists, participating in online conversations, and checking your favorite blogs for Twitter IDs
- Share information by posting abbreviated links to at least 5 online items relevant to this course of study. These must be original tweets, and not retweeted links
- Create a Twitter list of resources on any topic you desire. Your list should include at least 5 sources/users
- Retweet at least 5 posts by people you follow. These should not be randomly chosen, but selected because of their usefulness and/or cleverness

Assignment #2

This is an online course with no lectures. This means that the bulk of the important course content is contained in the course's reading material. Nancy Baym's book, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, is our main text and the chief source of the important analytical concepts and theories needed to understand the role of social media in contemporary society and our everyday lives. It is the analytical concepts and theories identified and discussed in Baym's book that you must learn if you are going to develop an understanding of how the likes of Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, text messaging, Skype, blogging, gaming (and all other

examples of the new digitized forms of communication) are affecting our social interactions and relationships. Learning these important course concepts not only requires a careful reading of the Baym book, but also reflection on the meaning of the concepts and perhaps how these concepts relate to your own personal life, or perhaps to other concepts encountered in previous academic experiences. One way to facilitate a bit of reflection is through a bit of writing. I'm going to ask you to compile, on a chapter-by-chapter basis, a list of important terms and concepts/ideas/theories introduced and discussed in the Baym book. Although this is the kind of 'best practices' you should be doing anyway, **I will award a maximum of 12% towards your final course grade if and when you submit a single document containing all your lists of important terms and concepts for each chapter of the Baym book.** You must submit using Dropbox no later than Monday August 17th, 11:59 p.m. EST. Late submissions will NOT be accepted.

Please see below for an example of what I have in mind for a synopsis of Baym's chapter 1:

Important Terms/Concepts/Theories

"New Forms of Personal Connection" (Baym, ch. 1)

- Face-to-face conversations are rapidly being replaced by new forms of disembodied digital interaction... new social media such as Twitter and social networking sites such as Facebook are reshaping the ways in which we develop and maintain personal connections
- Two positions have emerged with respect to the mediation of social interaction and the impact on personal connections; 1) new digital media will erode the quality of communication and, by extension, undermine the integrity of our existing personal relationships; 2) these new means of communication will generate expanding opportunities to establish greater numbers of meaningful relationships marked by greater diversity
- Basic purpose of the book is to examine the impact of new social media on inter-personal relationships
- New digital media renders time and space virtually irrelevant; this has serious implications for our traditional notions of 'community' which have historically been premised upon physical proximity; also has implications for the 'pace of life'
- New social media give rise to the 'challenge of absent presence' wherein people, when using digitized media such as smart phones, may be physically present but emotionally and otherwise absent, giving rise to questions about the meaning of 'self'
- Using social media blurs the line between 'public' and 'private' realms, generating concerns about surveillance and loss of privacy
- The anonymity afforded by social media generates concerns about the authenticity of identity and presentation of self, and personal security; "On the internet, no one knows you're a dog"
- Social media, like all technologies, is a double-edge sword that cuts both ways; i.e., it increases our control over our environment, but at the same time imposes new controls and constraints upon us

- 7 key concepts as a useful analytical framework for comparing, contrasting, and evaluating social media and SNS's: interactivity; temporal structure; social cues; storage; replicability; reach; and mobility
- Places digital media in its historical context, and describes the emergence and evolution of the internet, from ARPANET to the WWW, from text-based to multi-media, the development of Web 2.0 and user-generated content, the emergence of social networking sites, landlines to mobiles
- Access to new social media, and the internet more generally, is unequally distributed across the populations, both nationally and globally; access is correlated with socio-demographics such as social class, income, education, race/ethnicity, region, etc.

Assignment #3

Nancy Baym, in her first chapter entitled “New Forms of Personal Connection”, identifies and discusses 7 key concepts she uses throughout her book to examine the various forms of social media and social networking and their impacts on communication and personal relationships (see pp. 6-12 “Seven Key Concepts”). More specifically, throughout her book she uses these 7 concepts, or *analytical tools* (degree of interactivity, nature of the temporal structure, richness of social cues, etc.) to compare/contrast the various social media, and to evaluate their ability to approximate the affordances of face-to-face communication, which is widely held to be the gold standard of social interaction. In Dhiraj Murthy’s first chapter entitled “What is Twitter?”, the author, among other things, describes the structure and dynamics of Twitter. **Your task in this assignment is to use Baym’s 7 analytical concepts to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Twitter as a means of fostering high quality personal connections and communications.** Your assignment must be based exclusively upon Baym’s and Murthy’s books (no other secondary sources). Your assignment must be 4-5 pages in length not including your title page or References page, double-spaced using 12 point Times New Roman font, and must use 1” margins. You must include a title page and a References page. The need to use a particular writing style (MLA, APA, ASA, etc.) does not apply for this assignment, but you must cite page numbers when and if you use direct quotations. Assignment #2 is worth a maximum of 24% of your final course grade. It must be submitted in Word format (no PDFs please) using our course site’s Dropbox (see the yellow nav bar at the top of the page). The deadline for this assignment is Sunday August 2, 11:59 p.m. EST. A late penalty of 5% per day applies to all late submissions.

Assignment #4

In Baym’s chapter entitled “Communities and Networks”, the author wades into the debate regarding the impact of new digital media on community development. Has community been lost as a result of the widespread use of the likes of Twitter, Facebook, instant messaging, Skype, blogs, etc., or has community been gained? Or has community simply been transformed? Baym offers an analytical framework comprised of 5 concepts: sense of space; shared practice; shared resources and support; shared identities; and interpersonal relationships. Murthy examines the

same debate in his book with a specific focus on Twitter and the concept *homophily*. **Your task in Assignment #3 is to write a paper in which you take a position in this debate with a specific focus on Twitter; that is, do the new social media and social networking sites, in particular Twitter, enhance community development, undermine community development, or do they simply transform traditional meanings of ‘community’?** You must incorporate into your paper the concept *homophily* (see Murthy), the analytical framework mentioned above and found in Baym’s chapter 4, and you must apply these concepts to the subject matter of two (2) of the following Murthy chapters: ch. 4, ch. 5, ch. 6, or ch. 7. Your assignment must be based exclusively on Baym’s and Murthy’s books (no other secondary sources). Your assignment must be 4-5 pages in length not including your title page or References page, double-spaced using 12 point Times New Roman font, and must use 1” margins. You must include a title page and a References page. The need to use a particular writing style (MLA, APA, ASA, etc.) does not apply for this assignment, but you must cite page numbers when and if you use direct quotations. Assignment #4 is worth a maximum of 25% of your final course grade. It must be submitted in Word format (no PDFs please) using our course site’s Dropbox (see the yellow nav bar at the top of the page). The deadline for this assignment is Sunday August 9th, 11:59 p.m. EST. A late penalty of 5% per day applies to all late submissions.

Assignment #5

Details of Assignment #5 will be released by Monday August 3, 9:00 a.m. EST. Assignment #5 will focus on Facebook and entail the application of concepts from Baym’s chapters 5 and 6 as well as a number of supplementary online articles. The assignment will be the same length as your previous written assignments, will be weighted at 25% of your final course grade, and will have a deadline of Sunday August 16th, 11:59 p.m. EST.

Course Schedule

Monday July 27

Readings: “New Forms of Personal Connection” (Baym, ch. 1)

Tuesday July 28

Readings: “What is Twitter?” (Murthy, ch. 1)

Wednesday July 29

Video: see Course Contents

Assignment #1 Deadline 11:59 p.m. EST

Thursday July 30

Readings: “Making New Media Make Sense” (Baym, ch. 2)

Friday July 31

Readings: “Contextualizing Twitter” (Murthy, ch. 2)

Sunday August 2

Assignment #3 Deadline 11:59 p.m. EST

Monday August 3 Civic Holiday

Tuesday August 4

Readings: “Communication in Digital Spaces” (Baym, ch. 3)

Recommended Reading: “Theorizing Twitter” (Murthy, ch. 3, pp. 37-41 (“Telepresence and Immediacy”))

Deadline for Wed. July 29 video discussions, 11:59 p.m. EST

Wednesday August 5

Readings: “Communities and Networks” (Baym, ch. 4)

“Theorizing Twitter” (Murthy, ch. 3, pp. 35-37 only (“Twitter and Homophily”))

Thursday August 6

Readings: “Twitter and Journalism” (Murthy, ch. 4)

OR

“Twitter and Disasters” (Murthy, ch. 5)

Friday August 7

Readings: “Twitter and Activism” (Murthy, ch. 6)

OR

“Twitter and Health” (Murthy, ch. 7)

Sunday August 9

Assignment #4 Deadline 11:59 p.m. EST

Monday August 10

Video: see Course Contents

Tuesday August 11

Readings: “New Relationships, New Selves?” (Baym, ch. 5)

Wednesday August 12

Supplementary Readings: TBA

Thursday August 13

Readings: “Digital Media in Relational Development and Maintenance” (Baym, ch. 6)

Deadline for Mon. Aug. 10 video discussions, 11:59 p.m. EST

Friday August 14

Supplementary Readings: TBA

Sunday August 16

Assignment #5 Deadline, 11:59 p.m. EST

Monday August 17

Readings: “Conclusion: The Myth of Cyberspace” (Baym, pp. 150-55)

Video: see Course Contents

Assignment #2 Deadline, 11:59 p.m. EST

Tuesday August 18

Deadline for Mon. Aug 17th video discussions, 11:59 p.m. EST

End