Course Title: Social Media & Society: Theory and Analysis

Course Code: SOSC 3000L

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: Nil

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Course Description

From TikTok trends to influencer politics, this course examines social media as both technological systems and cultural forces that reshape how we communicate, form identities, build communities, and engage in public life. Students will explore the interplay between platform design, user behavior, and broader social structures, developing critical frameworks to analyze digital culture's impact on contemporary society.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. **Analyze how platform features shape user behavior and content creation**
2. **Evaluate how social media influences identity, community, and relationships**
3. **Critically assess inequality, bias, and power dynamics in digital environments**
4. **Apply key frameworks from media studies, sociology, and anthropology**
5. **Conduct ethical and effective research on social media practices**
6. **Communicate complex ideas clearly through writing and presentations**

Required Texts and Materials

• Humphreys, A. (2021). *Social Media: Enduring Principles*. Oxford University Press.

• Meikle, G. (2024). *Social Media: The Convergence of Public and Personal Communication*. Polity Press.

• Additional readings and videos via Canvas; access to major platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) as needed.

Assessment and Grading

This course uses criterion-referenced assessment (no curve). Rubrics are provided for major tasks

Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Structured Engagement	10%	Ongoing
Reading Memos (2)	15%	Wed, Sept 24, 2025**;** Wed, Oct 22, 2025
In-Class Quizzes (4)	20%	Fri, Sept 19, 2025**;** Fri, Oct 3, 2025;

		Fri, Oct 17, 2025; Fri, Oct 31, 2025; Fri, Nov 14, 2025
Group Case Project & Final Presentation*	30%	Wed, Nov 26 2025; Fri, Nov 28, 2025 (Final Presentation); Fri, Dec 5 2025 (Final Report Submission)
Final Exam	25%	Exam Week

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Structured Engagement	ILO2, ILO6	Assesses students' ability to evaluate how social media influences identity, community, and relationships across contexts (ILO2) and to communicate clearly and constructively in peer dialogue, including giving actionable feedback (ILO6).
Reading Memos	ILO3, ILO4, ILO6	The memos assess students' ability to critically evaluate readings (ILO 3), connect them to real-world examples (ILO 4), and reflect with clarity and originality (ILO 6).
In-Class Quizzes	ILO1, ILO3, ILO4	Low-stakes checks of core concepts and mechanisms (ILO1), brief critiques of inequality/bias scenarios (ILO3), and applied use of frameworks on mini-cases (ILO4).
Group Case Project & Presentation	ILO1, ILO3, ILO4, ILO5, ILO6	This project assesses students' ability to apply course theories to real-world cases (ILO 1), critically evaluate evidence (ILO 3), analyze case-specific phenomena (ILO 4), work collaboratively (ILO 5), and present findings effectively (ILO 6).
Final Exam	ILO1–ILO4, ILO6	The exam measures students' knowledge of course concepts (ILO 1), their ability to evaluate and apply these concepts (ILO 2, ILO 3), analyze real-world applications (ILO 4), and articulate their understanding clearly (ILO 6).

Grading Rubrics

1. Structured Engagement (10%)

Criteria	Excellent (Full Marks)	Satisfactory (Half Marks)	Poor (No Marks)
In-Class Contributions	Frequently contributes thoughtful, relevant ideas; builds on peers; respects discussion norms.	Occasional relevant contributions; limited extension of others' points.	Rarely contributes or comments are off-topic / disruptive.
Peer Feedback	Specific, constructive, and insightful; helps improve others' work.	Adequate but lacks depth or specificity.	Missing or unconstructive.
Preparedness & Professionalism	Comes prepared (readings noted), on time, attentive; uses devices appropriately.	Some signs of preparation; minor lapses in timeliness/attention.	Unprepared, late, disengaged, or inappropriate device use.

2. Reading Memos (15%)

Criteria	Full Credit	Half Credit	No Credit
Completion and Effort	Fully completed with significant effort.	Moderately completed.	Little to no effort.
Comprehension	Demonstrates deep understanding of key concepts.	Partially understands key concepts.	Misunderstands or lacks comprehension.
Application	Connects reading to real-world examples effectively.	Limited or vague real-world connections.	No connection to real-world examples.
Clarity and Originality	Insightful and concise with original ideas.	Some originality but lacks clarity.	Unclear or lacks originality.

3. In-Class Quizzes (5; best 4 counted; 20%)

Structure (per quiz): ~10–12 minutes, 4 items
• 2 × MC/TF (core concepts/definitions)
• 1 × applied MC (mini-case)
• 1 × very short answer (2–3 sentences; concept applied to a scenario)

Scoring (per quiz = 5%)
• MC/TF & applied MC: right/wrong.
• Short answer (0–1 pt): 0 = off-target, 0.5 = generally relevant but vague, 1 = specific, correct, and applied.

Policies (closed-book):
• In-class, closed-book (no notes, books, or devices); individual work.
• 5 quizzes total; best 4 scores count (lowest is automatically dropped).
• No make-up for the dropped quiz. A second missed quiz requires documented emergency within 7 days.

Criteria	Full Credit	Half Credit	No Credit
Accuracy (MC/TF)	Correct responses on most items.	Mixed accuracy.	Predominantly incorrect or not attempted..

Criteria	Full Credit	Half Credit	No Credit
Team Coordination	Specific concept named and correctly applied; cites a concrete affordance/mechanism or trade-off.	Partially correct; generic or lacks mechanism.	Off-topic, unsupported, or blank.

4. Group Case Project & Final Presentation (30%)

In teams, analyze a real-world social media campaign, influencer, or phenomenon using course theories. Address a guiding analytical question.

Group Presentation

Criteria	Full Credit	Half Credit	No Credit
Participation	Presents as scheduled and contributes meaningfully.	Partial participation.	No presentation contribution.
Preparation	Strong preparation and collaboration.	Some preparation evident.	No preparation.

Group Critique

Criteria	Full Credit	Half Credit	No Credit
Delivery	Delivers critique during scheduled session.	Minimal critique effort.	No critique provided.
Preparation	Prior review of assigned group's work evident.	Some signs of preparation.	No preparation evident.

Peer Contribution Evaluation

- Includes responsibility, collaboration, and quality of work.
- Evaluations will adjust individual grades if underperformance is consistently raised.

Free-rider Policy

- If teammates report a member as not contributing, confidential peer evaluations will be used to inform an instructor review.
- If non-participation is verified, the instructor may reduce that student's share of the group grade.
- Affected students will be notified and may respond; decisions can be appealed to the programme office.

5. Final Exam (25%)

- **Format**:
  - Multiple-choice questions.
  - True/False questions.
  - Short-answer questions.
  - Application-based essay questions.

Criteria	Full Credit	Half Credit	No Credit
Conceptual Understanding	Demonstrates comprehensive understanding.	Partial understanding of concepts.	Lacks understanding.
Clear Articulation	Ideas are well-articulated and concise.	Somewhat clear but lacks precision.	Poor articulation or incoherent.
Application	Effectively applies concepts to real-world contexts.	Limited application or vague examples.	No application to real-world context.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates frequent, thoughtful, and relevant contributions to discussions (**Structured Engagement**). Shows deep comprehension of readings and connects them insightfully to real-world examples (**Reading Memos**). Performs strongly and consistently on **In-Class Quizzes** (accurate MC/TF; specific, well-applied short answers). **Group Case Project & Presentation** exhibit rigorous framing, correct use of frameworks, solid evidence/methods/ethics, and polished delivery. **Final Exam** responses are precise, well structured, and apply concepts effectively to real contexts.
B	Good Performance	Contributes relevant ideas consistently (**Structured Engagement**). Shows good comprehension of readings with some real-world connections (**Reading Memos**). Achieves generally good but occasionally uneven results on **In-Class Quizzes**. **Group Project** shows sound preparation and collaboration with minor gaps in analysis or delivery. **Final Exam** demonstrates good understanding and application, with small issues in depth or clarity.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Occasionally contributes with some relevant ideas (**Structured Engagement**). Displays adequate understanding of readings and provides basic, sometimes generic examples (**Reading Memos**). **In-Class Quiz** results are mixed (some correct recognition; short answers tend to be vague). **Group Project** is mostly descriptive with minimal synthesis; delivery acceptable. **Final Exam** shows adequate understanding but limited depth, precision, or application to real contexts.
D	Marginal Pass	Rarely participates or offers limited, non-constructive input (**Structured Engagement**). Demonstrates only threshold understanding of readings, with minimal real-world linkage (**Reading Memos**). **In-Class Quizzes** show low accuracy or missing items. **Group Project** contribution is minimal; weak preparation or collaboration. **Final Exam** responses are unclear, incomplete, or show weak application of concepts. Meets only basic passing requirements.
F	Fail	Fails to contribute meaningfully (**Structured Engagement**). Shows insufficient understanding of readings with no real-world connection (**Reading Memos**). **In-Class Quizzes** largely unattempted or incorrect. Does not participate effectively in the **Group Project** or fails to submit. **Final Exam** is incoherent,

		shows no understanding of key concepts, and does not meet minimum performance thresholds.

Course AI Policy

Generative AI tools may be used **only** where explicitly permitted (e.g., idea brainstorming or slide layout) and must be disclosed in submissions. Uploading prompts or receiving generated text/images that you pass off as original analysis without disclosure constitutes academic misconduct. You are responsible for fact-checking and proper citation of any AI-assisted content.

Communication and Feedback

Marks will be released on Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback highlights strengths and areas for improvement. Please contact the instructor within five working days after feedback release for follow-up.

Late Submission Policy

All assignments and assessments have a clear deadline. Late submissions will receive partial credit according to the schedule below unless a documented exception (e.g., a medical certificate) is approved.

1. Submission within 24 hours after the posted deadline: accepted but graded with a maximum of 60% of the assignment's possible points.
2. Submission between 24 and 48 hours after the posted deadline: accepted but graded with a maximum of 30% of the assignment's possible points.
3. Submission more than 48 hours after the posted deadline: no credit accepted (0%).
4. Late submission of final project reports and final exam will not be accepted and will receive 0%, except where a documented exception has been approved in advance.
5. Documented emergencies (e.g., medical) may be considered—notify the instructor/TA as soon as feasible and supply supporting documentation.

Course announcements/email reminders will be posted one week and three days before each major deadline.

Academic Integrity

Students must uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance for academic misconduct. Please refer to the Academic Registry guidance on plagiarism and cheating.

Additional Resources

Selected methods primers (e.g., digital ethnography, social network analysis) and case repositories will be provided on Canvas. Sample workshop worksheets (platform audit, bias detection, network mapping) will be made available throughout the term.

Class Schedule

The class schedule may be adjusted over time. Final exam dates will be finalized once the add/drop period has ended.

- Week 1: Introduction – Why Social Media Matter

- Week 2: Platform Features & Media Affordances

- Week 3: Attention Economy & Metrics

- Week 4: Identity, Privacy & Co-Creation

- Week 5: Inequality in the Digital Space

- Week 6: Race, Gender & Platform Bias

- Week 7: Social Networks & Virtual Communities

- Week 8: Memes, Fandoms & Participatory Culture

- Week 9: Social Media Marketing, Influence & Digital Labor

- Week 10: Politics, Protest & Platformed Activism

- Week 11: Law, Governance & Platform Ethics

- Week 12: Research Project Workshop & Submission

- Week 13: Final Presentations & Course Wrap-up