

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Course Title: Social Media & Society: Theory and Analysis

Course Code: SOSC 3000L

Credits: 3

Term: Fall 2026

Prerequisites: Nil

Co-requisites: Nil

Time: Wednesday & Friday 04:30PM - 05:50PM

Venue: Rm 5402, Lift 17-18

Name: Prof. Yunya Celine Song

Email: yunyasong@ust.hk

Office Hours: Room 4353, Friday 02:30PM-4:30PM

TA: ZHANG Carrie Jingyi (jzhangls@connect.ust.hk); LAO Ziyi (zlaoac@connect.ust.hk); ZHANG Anning (annizan@ust.hk)

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. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles*. Oxford University Press.
- Meikle, G. (2024). *Social Media: The Convergence of Public and Personal Communication*. Routledge.
- 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 (Sep 2–Nov 27, 2026)
Reading Memos (2)	15%	Wed, Sep 23, 2026; Wed, Oct 21, 2026
In-Class Quizzes (5; best 4 counted)	20%	Fri, Sep 18, 2026; Fri, Oct 9, 2026; Fri, Oct 23, 2026; Fri, Nov 6, 2026; Fri, Nov 13, 2026
Group Case Project & Final Presentation*	30%	Wed, Nov 25 & Fri, Nov 27, 2026 (Final Presentations); Fri, Dec 4, 2026 (Final Report Submission)
Final Exam	25%	Dec 7–19, 2026 (date to be announced)

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

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), conduct ethical and effective research on social media practices (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	Full Credit	Partial Credit	No Credit
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In-Class Contributions	Frequently contributes thoughtful, relevant ideas; builds on peers; respects discussion norms.	Occasional relevant contributions with limited extension of others' points.	Rarely contributes, or comments are off-topic/disruptive.
Peer Feedback	Specific, constructive, and helpful for improving others' work.	Adequate but lacks depth or specificity.	Missing or unconstructive.
Preparedness & Professionalism	Comes prepared, on time, attentive, and uses devices appropriately.	Some signs of preparation with minor lapses in timeliness or attention.	Unprepared, late, disengaged, or inappropriate device use.

2. Reading Memos (15%)

Each student will submit **two short reflective memos (around 500 words)** based on the assigned readings. These reading memos are not formal essays—they are concise, thoughtful reflections that connect course materials to relevant real-world examples or personal observations.

Purpose:

- Deepen engagement with key readings
- Practice critical thinking in a low-stress format
- Support your participation in later discussions and debates

Structure:

Each memo should:

1. Briefly summarize one or two central arguments from the assigned readings.
2. Reflect critically on their implications (e.g., strengths, limitations, or unanswered questions).
3. Connect these insights to a concrete real-world example or personal observation.

The goal is not to cover every detail, but to show that you have thought carefully about the readings and can apply them meaningfully.

Evaluation focuses on:

- Completion and effort

- Comprehension of key concepts
- Application to real-world examples
- Clarity and originality of insights

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.
Short Answer Application	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.

Generative AI tools may be used only where explicitly permitted. For reading memos and the group project, students may use AI for brainstorming, outlining, or slide design support, but any use must be disclosed and all submitted analysis must be their own. In-class quizzes and the final exam are closed-book assessments: AI tools, notes, books, and devices are not permitted. Passing off AI-generated text, images, or analysis as original work without disclosure constitutes academic misconduct. Students are responsible for fact-checking and properly citing any AI-assisted content.

Communication and Feedback

Marks will be released on Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback will highlight strengths, areas for improvement, and suggestions for revision or further learning. Please contact the instructor within five working days after feedback release for follow-up.

Late Submission and Resubmission 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.
6. Resubmission is not permitted unless explicitly approved by the instructor for documented emergencies or exceptional circumstances.

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

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the University's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

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

- **Week 1 (Sep 2 & 4, 2026): Introduction – Why Social Media Matter**

- **Sep 2 (Wed): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 2; Ch. 1 is a short orientation to the book — skim only).

- **Sep 4 (Fri): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

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

- **Week 2 (Sep 9 & 11, 2026): Platform Features & Media Affordances**

- **Sep 9 (Wed): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Meikle, G. (2024). *Social Media: The Convergence of Public and Personal Communication* (Ch. 1, “Communication”).

- **Sep 11 (Fri): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 3).

- **Week 3 (Sep 16 & 18, 2026): Attention Economy & Metrics**

- **Sep 16 (Wed): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 4).

- **Sep 18 (Fri): In-class Quiz 1**

Reading:

Abidin, C. (2021). “Mapping Internet Celebrity on TikTok: Exploring Attention Economies and Visibility Labours.” *Cultural Science Journal*, 12(1), 77–103. Read pp. 77–84 and “Future Research: TikTok Influencers and TikTok Creator Fund” section.

- **Week 4 (Sep 23 & 25, 2026): Identity, Privacy & Visibility**

- **Sep 23 (Wed): Reading Memo 1 due**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 6).

- **Sep 25 (Fri): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Meikle, G. (2024). *Social Media: The Convergence of Public and Personal Communication* (Ch. 5, “Visibility”).

- **Week 5 (Sep 30 & Oct 2, 2026): News and Propaganda in the Social Media Era**

- **Sep 30 (Wed): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Meikle, G. (2024). *Social Media: The Convergence of Public and Personal Communication* (Ch. 4, "News").

- **Oct 2 (Fri): Guest lecture**

Reading:

Marwick, A., & Lewis, R. (2017). *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online*. Data & Society. Read the Executive Summary together with the accompanying Case Studies.

- **Week 6 (Oct 7 & 9, 2026): Digital Inequality, Race, Gender & Platform Bias**

- **Oct 7 (Wed): Guest lecture**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 8).

- **Oct 9 (Fri): In-class Quiz 2**

Reading:

Caplan, R., Donovan, J., Hanson, L., & Matthews, J. (2018). *Algorithmic Accountability: A Primer*. Data & Society.

Recommended: Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 7, sections on literacy and capital, and social class).

- **Week 7 (Oct 14 & 16, 2026): Social Networks & Virtual Communities**

- **Oct 14 (Wed): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 9).

- **Oct 16 (Fri): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 10).

Recommended: Wang, H., & Chang, J. (2025). "Lifestyle Feminism on RedNote: Digital Platforms, Mediated Intimacy, and the Duality of an Enclaved Feminist Public Sphere." *Social Media + Society*.

- **Week 8 (Oct 21 & 23, 2026): Memes, Fandoms & Participatory Culture**

- **Oct 21 (Wed): Reading Memo 2 due**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 12).

- **Oct 23 (Fri): In-class Quiz 3**

Reading:

Meikle, G. (2024). *Social Media: The Convergence of Public and Personal Communication* (Ch. 3, "Remix").

- **Week 9 (Oct 28 & 30, 2026): Social Media Marketing, Influence & Digital Labor**

- **Oct 28 (Wed): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 11).

- **Oct 30 (Fri): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Fan, J. (2024). "In and against the Platform: Navigating Precarity for Instagram and Xiaohongshu (Red) Influencers." *New Media & Society*. Read introduction and discussion only.

- **Week 10 (Nov 4 & 6, 2026): Politics, Protest & Platformed Activism**

- **Nov 4 (Wed): Guest lecture**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 13).

- **Nov 6 (Fri): In-class Quiz 4**

Reading:

Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press. (Ch. 6, "Platforms and Algorithms")

- **Week 11 (Nov 11 & 13, 2026): Law, Governance & Platform Ethics**

- **Nov 11 (Wed): Regular class meeting**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 14).

- **Nov 13 (Fri): In-class Quiz 5**

Reading:

Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (Ch. 1, "All Platforms Moderate"). Yale University Press.

- **Week 12 (Nov 18 & 20, 2026): Research Project Workshop & Submission**

- **Nov 18 (Wed): Research project workshop**

Reading:

Humphreys, A. (2016). *Social Media: Enduring Principles* (Ch. 4, revisit the section "Methods for Studying Social Media").

- **Nov 20 (Fri): Research project workshop / submission preparation**

Reading:

Quan-Haase, A., & Sloan, L. (Eds.). (2022). *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (2nd ed., Introduction). SAGE.

- **Week 13 (Nov 25 & 27, 2026): Final Presentations & Course Wrap-up**

- **Nov 25 (Wed): Group presentations**

No assigned readings.

- **Nov 27 (Fri): Group presentations & course wrap-up**

No assigned readings.

- **Final Project Report Due:** Dec 4 (Fri)

- **Final Exam:** Dec 7–19, 2026 (date to be announced)