



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Media and Information

Course: 401-Section 7 (3 credits)
Seminar for Upper Division Undergraduates and Masters Students

Social Dynamics of the Internet

Fall 2015

Instructor: William H. Dutton

Class Meetings: Communication Arts & Sciences Room 177
Time: Wednesdays 1.50PM - 4.40PM

Description

This course focuses on the social shaping of the Internet and its societal implications. Students are introduced to issues surrounding the social impact of the Internet and related media, communication and information technologies, including social media, mobile and the Internet of Things. The course will cover major issues, including implications for democracy, collective action, social networking, the quality of news and information, privacy, freedom of expression and the nature of work and economic development. Perspectives on how people design, use, regulate and otherwise shape technologies are covered. An emphasis in course readings and discussion is placed on theoretical perspectives and empirical approaches to challenging conventional wisdom about the social impact of the Internet and related technologies, such as the social media, mobile Internet, and the Internet of Things.

Objectives

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

- Explain major issues surrounding the role of the Internet in society;
- Understand key theories, concepts, technologies and policies tied to debates surrounding the social implications of the Internet and related digital media;
- Recognize and critically assess taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning claims about the impact of the Internet;
- Know how empirical observations can be marshaled to address alternative expectations about the role of the Internet;

- Be able to apply concepts, critical perspectives and empirical research to real issues facing individuals, households, business firms, particular institutions, communities, governments and their agencies, or nations.

Approach

Each week's session will be broken up into time periods focused in lecture, discussion, and student presentations. The instructor will use lectures to introduce each topic, and clarify key concepts, themes and issues. Readings are assigned that provide strong examples of how some researchers and other experts have addressed the key topics. Many readings are included that are critical of the social role of the Internet, while others provide very positive views of its potential. Students are encouraged not to take sides, but to explore these contrasting views to capture the ways in which intelligent observers can have diametrically opposed views on the problems and solutions. It is in the conflicts in this literature that many of the most important questions arise over whether technological innovations are good, bad or irrelevant.

Discussion will be emphasized to ensure students can address and apply the ideas developed in the lectures and readings to their own experience and concentrations in media, information and communication studies and to various academic and career objectives. Use of the Internet and social media, such as Twitter, will be an aspect of the course as a means to ensure that students can bring a shared sense of their potential as well as their limitations into the class. A term paper will provide an opportunity for students to look at one topic or issue in greater depth, and demonstrate their ability to apply relevant theory and research from the course.

Course Requirements

The course requires students to cover the readings and lectures, grasp key issues, be able to present key concepts and issues in the field, and understand basic approaches to research on the social dynamics of new media, and creatively consider ways to apply theory and research to policy and practice. To assess these goals, there will be the following requirements:

1. Mid-Term and Final Exams: There will be a mid-term and final examination, covering the readings, lectures, presentations, and discussion up to that point in the course.
2. Class Preparation. Prior to class, students should research key concepts, technologies and terms identified for each week's class. This can be done individually or in groups, but this preparation will enable us to free class time from covering material that is easily available online and in course readings.
3. Tweeting or Blogging on a Weekly Basis. Each student is expected to use Twitter or another publicly accessible blog to communicate some point based on the readings, lectures or discussion of each class, or relevant news coverage. These should be posted before, during or after each class, using the course hashtag: #MSU401
3. Class Presentation. During the semester, each student will make two (2) 10-15

minute class presentations. The presentation should focus on an issue tied to subject of that week's class. You can focus on a 'recommended' or 'further reading' assigned for the particular week in which the presentation is delivered, such as a chapter from a book, or a journal article or a government report, although the presenter can make the case for an alternative reading that is central to their interests and the subject.

4. Each student will write a 4,000-5,000 word final term paper, applying concepts and methods reviewed in this course to an issue or case study focused on the social dynamics of the Internet, as broadly defined in this course. Short (250-500 word) proposals for term paper topics, cases, and approaches should be emailed to Bill Dutton after the mid-term, but before October 21st, and the final paper must be emailed to Bill Dutton (wdutton at msu.edu) by 5 pm on December 16, 2015.

Weighting of Assessments for Semester Grade:

Mid-term exam: 25%

Final exam: 25%

Two class presentations, discussion, preparation and blogging: 25%

Term paper 25%

Plagiarism

Students should review the University's policy on plagiarism at: <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/plagiarism-policy.html> and ensure that all the work you present in this class is the product of your own effort.

Contact Information

Office Hours: Wednesday, 12.30pm – 1.30pm; or by appointment, The Quello Center, Com Arts and Sciences Building 406, Phone: (517) 432-8001 E-mail: wdutton at msu.edu

Readings

Required

Graham, M., and Dutton, W. H. (2014) (eds), *Society & the Internet: How Networks of Information and Communication are Changing our Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keen, A. (2015), *The Internet Is Not The Answer*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Rainie, L., and Wellman, B. (2012), *Networking: The New Social Operating System*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Additional for Graduate Students

Dutton, W. H. (2014) (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*, paperback edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Further Readings

Optional readings are recommended under each topic covered in this course. While not required, they will be of value to students with a particular interest in the topic, or who choose to write a term paper of relevance to the topic. Students are also urged to consult with the instructor about readings of relevance to their term paper ideas, and to also source their own content on the Internet.

Schedule of Topics and Activities

Date	Topic or Activity
9 Sept	Introduction to Course and Topics
16 Sept	1. Digital Inequalities
23 Sept	2. Digital Identities and Communities
30 Sept	3. Children, Race and Gender Online
7 Oct	4. The New Internet World
14 Oct	Mid-Term Exam
21 Oct	5. Quality and Diversity of Content
28 Oct	6. Government Online
4 Nov	7. Digital Politics, Collective Action, and Social Movements
11 Nov	8. The Nature of Work, Services and Consumption
18 Nov	9. The Internet and Development
25 Nov	10. The Future of Content Delivery and Network Neutrality
2 Dec	11. Global, National, and Commercial Governance of Privacy & Expression
9 Dec	12. Dynamics of Internet Futures
16 Dec	Final Exam & Papers Due

9 Sept: Introduction to Course and Topics

This first week will focus on describing the course topic of this course along with its objectives, approach and readings. We will then begin a discussion of key issues concerning the Internet and society.

Readings:

Dutton & Graham, Introduction, pp. 1-20 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Krotoski, 'Inventing the Internet: Scapegoat, Sin Eater, and Trickster', pp. 23-35 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Keen (2015), *The Internet is Not the Answer*. start reading and complete by mid-term.

Graduate Students

Dutton, 'Internet Studies' in *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 1-23.

16 Sept: Topic 1. Digital Inequalities

Access to the Internet, and to the skills and resources to use it effectively are likely to reinforce socioeconomic inequalities in society, raising issues around a 'digital divide' and 'digital inequalities'. These issues can be viewed across multiple levels, such as individuals, households, businesses, and governments. What accounts for these variations in access, and what differences will it make? How could they be addressed?

Readings:

Blank & Dutton, 'Next Generation Internet Users' pp. 36-52 in Graham & Dutton (2014).

Keen (2015): 1-33

Graduate Students

Hargittai, E. (2014), Digital Inequality in The Oxford Handbook, pp. 129-150.

23 Sept: Topic 2. Digital Identities and Communities

How do/should people identify themselves online, such as on social media? Does it matter? Is anonymity a source of inappropriate behavior online, or a central requirement for free expression? The selfie seems to be an aspect of the centrality of the Internet in conveying one's identity, and the 2016 Presidential election has been called the first 'selfie election'.

Readings

Hogan & Wellman, 'The Relational Self-Portrait: Selfies Meet Social Networks', pp. 53-66 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Rainie, and Wellman (2012), pp. 1-113.

Graduate Students

Ellison and boyd (2014), 'Sociality through Social Network Sites', *The Oxford Handbook*, pp, 151-72.

30 Sept: Topic 3. Children, Race and Gender Online

The protection of children from unwanted and harmful content has been a major issue behind efforts to better control content online and access to it. Increasingly, racist and sexist language and threats online have caused many to rethink their support for free expression online, whether on social media or in the gaming environment. Are there factors, unique to the online world, that are fuelling these problems, and what can be done to address them?

Readings

Nash, 'The Politics of Children's Internet Use', pp. 67-80 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Nakamura, 'Gender and Race Online', pp. 81-95 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Rainie and Wellman (2012): 117-170.

7 Oct4: Topic 4. The New Internet World

Access to the Internet, and the production and consumption of information, and not evenly distributed across the globe. How has access changed overtime, and what difference does it make?

Readings

Graham, 'Internet Geographies', pp. 99-116 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Blosover et al, 'China and the US in the New Internet World', pp. 117-34 in Graham and Dutton (2014)

Graduate Students

Cardoso, et al (2014), 'Cross-National Perspectives from the World Internet Project' in *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 216-36.

14 Oct: Mid-Term Exam

The mid-term will provide an opportunity to review the lectures and readings, and demonstrate an understanding of key issues and concepts. The exam will be in class during the first hour and thirty minutes. The second part of class will be devoted to a class discussion of possible term paper topics.

21 Oct: Topic 5. Quality and Diversity of Content

Too many, the Internet has been seen as a force that is undermining the quality and diversity of information and entertainment. What are the rationales underpinning these concerns, and what evidence exists to support or counter these claims? Instead of opening up a globally rich source of diverse content, is the Internet actually reducing

the scope of information to which we are exposed? This topic can be explored in multiple settings, such as for news, entertainment, and science, as covered in the readings for this week.

Readings

Newman et al, 'Social Media and the News', pp. 135-49 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Sung Wook Ji & Waterman, 'The Impact of the Internet on Media Industries', pp. 149-63 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Schroeder, 'Big Data', pp. 164-76 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Graduate Students

Mitchelstein, E., and Boczkowski, P. (2014), 'Tradition and Transformation in Online New Production and Consumption' in *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 378-400.

Further Readings

Carr, N. (2011), *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Doctorow, C. (2014), *Information Doesn't Want to Be Free: Laws for the Internet Age*. San Francisco: McSweeney's.

28 Oct: Topic 6. Government Online

In the 1960s and 70s, research began to explore the impact of computers in government. Today, the focus has shifted to the role the Internet along with new media such as social media and mobile Internet might play in government provision of information and services. What issues are raised as governments move online? Should moves in this direction be slowed down, speeded up, or approached quite differently?

Readings

Lips, 'Transforming Government-by Default?', pp. 179-94 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Coleman & Blumler, 'The Wisdom of Which Crowd?', pp. 195-208 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

4 Nov: Topic 7. Digital Politics, Collective Action, and the Fifth Estate

Does the Internet provide a new platform that could reconfigure the role of individuals and political movements in politics and elections? Will it be a source for political

instability, democratic populism, or a delusion that will simply reinforce existing structures of power and influence?

Readings

González-Bailón, 'Online Social Networks and Bottom-Up Politics', pp. 209-22 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Margetts, et al, 'Big Data and Collective Action', pp. 223-37 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Dubois & Dutton, 'Empowering Citizens of the Internet Age', pp. 238-53 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Graduate Students

Lilleker, D. G., and Vedel, 'The Internet in Campaigns and Elections in The Oxford Handbook, pp. 401-20.

Recommended

Castells, M. (2009), *Communication Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 5, Reprogramming Communication Networks, pp. 299-415.

Katz, J. E., Barris, M., and Jain, A. (2013), *The Social Media President: Barack Obama and the Politics of Digital Engagement*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Morozov (2011), *The Net Delusion*. New York: Penguin Books.

11 Nov: Topic 8. The Nature of Work, Services and Consumption

It was often said that the key to the television industry was the competition of eyeballs – count the eyeballs and divide by two. Is the same true of Internet firms as millions of firms compete for your limited attention? However, the transformational potential of the Internet on the nature of work is one of the most significant issues of the digital age. An example of how the Internet is reshaping the legal profession will be used to spur discussion of other jobs and professions.

Readings

Raine and Wellman (2012): 171-221.

Taylor, 'Scarcity of Attention for a Medium of Abundance', pp. 257-71.

Susskind, 'The Internet in the Law', pp. 272-84 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Graduate Students

Cusumano and Goeldi (2014), 'New Businesses and New Business Models' in *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 239-261.

Recommended

Brynjolfsson, E., and McAfee, A. (2014). *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. London: W. W. Norton.

Carr, N. (2015), *The Glass Cage: Where Automation is Taking Us*. London: The Bodley Head.

Wajcman, J. (2015), *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Time in Digital Capitalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

18 Nov: Topic 9. The Internet and Development

In reshaping the nature of work, the Internet also extends the potential to reconfigure what jobs go where. Will the Internet reinforce traditional patterns of employment and development, or more transformational outcomes locally and globally? Why? This topic gives us an opportunity to look at efforts to use the Internet for local development efforts, such as in Detroit, as well as international initiatives to support the developing world.

Readings

Mann, 'The Digital Divide and Employment', pp. 285-300 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Graham, 'A Critical Perspective on the Potential of the Internet at the Margins of the Global Economy', pp. 301-16.

Graduate Students

Unwin, 'The Internet and Development' in *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 531-54.

25 Nov: Topic 10. The Future of Content Delivery and Network Neutrality

The Internet is linked to major changes in what people watch on what devices and over what networks. Many are disconnecting from television, but increasingly watching film and video services online and on mobile devices. What are the trends and what risks do they create for who is exposed to what content? Efforts to keep the Internet open have led to regulatory initiatives to support network neutrality. What is it, and what will be its role in the future of content delivery?

Readings

Raine, and Wellman (2012): 223-51.

Noam, 'Next-Generation Content for Next-Generation Networks', pp. 319-32 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Recommended

Doctorow, C. (2014), *Information Doesn't Want to be Free: Laws for the Internet Age*. San Francisco, CA: McSweeney's.

2 Dec: Topic 11. Global, National and Commercial Governance of Privacy and Expression

As the Internet has provided a global platform for the sharing of information, it has also created demands for governing expression and privacy and other human rights online. National regimes for governing privacy and freedom of expression are being challenged by the global reach of the Internet and social media, as well as by the growing centrality of private social media platforms.

Readings

Millard, 'Data Privacy in the Clouds', pp. 333-47 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

DeNardis, 'The Social Media Challenge to Internet Governance', pp. 348-359 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Graduate Students

DeNardis (2014), 'The Emerging Field of Internet Governance' in *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 555-75.

Bennett and Parsons (2014), 'Privacy and Surveillance' in *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 486-508.

Nash (2014), 'Analyzing Freedom of Expression Online' in *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 441-63.

Recommended

Howard, P. N. (2015), *Pax Technica: How the Internet of Things May Set Us Free or Lock Us Up*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

9 Dec: Topic 12. Dynamics of Internet Futures

Much of this course has looked at historical and empirically anchored trends, but policy and practice are, and have always been, driven in part by visions of the future of communication. Futures perspectives on the Internet are no less important.

Readings

Raine, and Wellman (2012): 254-302.

Wilks, 'Beyond the Internet and Web', pp. 360-73 in Graham & Dutton (2014)

Recommended

Janier, J. (2013), *Who Owns the Future?* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Schmidt, E., and Cohen, J. (2013), *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*. London: John Murray.

16 Dec: Final Exam & Presentations of Papers

The first part of this class will be focused on an inclass, written exam, covering all the readings and lectures over the semester. The second part will provide an opportunity for students to present a brief overview of their term paper. What was your topic? How did you take a fresh look at this topic? What did you conclude? What would you need to know more about in order to address the questions raised by your study?

Hartley, J., Burgess, J., and Bruns, A. (2013) (eds), *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.