Introduction to Social Media
COMM 305
Fall 2015

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Office: CI 205 (SC&I Building, 4 Huntington Street)
Office Hours: Monday and Thursday, 1:30pm-2:30pm (best by appointment)

Course Time: Monday and Thursday, 11:30am-12:50pm
Course Room: CI 103 (SC&I Building, 4 Huntington Street)
Course Website: sakai.rutgers.edu
Course Hashtag: #SCI305

Course Description
Social media services such as Facebook and Twitter represent a new class of communication platforms that have become quickly interwoven into the everyday lives of millions of people around the world. In this course we will draw on competing communication perspectives to explore the reasons behind the widespread popularity of these platforms. In doing so we will consider the role of individual choice, social influence, technological influence, and how these three perspectives can be combined. We will further explore the implications of social media for personal relationships, youth culture, organizations, social research, and personal privacy.

Learning Objectives
Upon the successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Apply multiple communication perspectives to make sense of social media adoption and use, through class discussion, the theory paper and the final projects.
- Understand the various methodological approaches that can be used to study social media by applying class discussion to reading material.
- Discuss social media intelligently using appropriate language and terminology derived from scholarly papers and class discussion.
- Understand the implications of social media for a variety of social issues through the course readings and class discussion.
- Think abstractly about the role of social media in personal and organizational contexts during class discussion and while writing the theory paper and final project.
**Required Readings**

There is no required textbook for this class. All readings will be posted on the course’s Sakai website (sakai.rutgers.edu). Log in using your Rutgers NetID, navigate to the SC&I 305 site, and browse the *Course Reading* page. The required and recommended materials for each week of class are also listed in the *Course Outline* section of this syllabus.

**Contact Information**

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions, ideas, problems, or concerns related to this course. The most reliable way to reach me is by sending an email to comm305@ognyanova.net. Using that address ensures that I can identify your message as related to this class and give it appropriate attention. I will typically respond within 3-5 days of receiving your email.

My office hours are held in CI 205, 1:30-2:30pm on Monday and Thursday. Email or come talk to me after class if you would like to schedule an appointment.

Use Twitter and the hashtag #SCI305 to share relevant news and readings with the class.

**Social Media Policy**

While you are in this class, I will not connect with you (follow, befriend, etc.) on any social media platform. I will not evaluate your online presence or posts, except the ones that you specifically ask me to look at, share in class, or tag with the course hashtag (#SCI305). We will discuss this policy during the weeks when we talk about privacy and anonymity, self-presentation, and imagined audiences online.

**Course Attendance**

Students are expected to attend all classes. If you need to miss a class, use the Rutgers University absence reporting website (sims.rutgers.edu/ssra) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. The system will automatically send me an email. If you are unable to attend classes for longer than one week, you should contact a dean of students who can help verify your circumstances. University policy excuses absences due to religious observance or participation, and permits students to make up work missed for that reason. Do notify me at least two weeks in advance if you are unable to come to class or take an exam due to religious observance.

On occasion, the university may have to cancel classes due to inclement weather. To check if classes are canceled, visit campusstatus.rutgers.edu or call 732-932-7799.

**Course Requirements and Evaluation**

*Class Participation (15%)*

All students are expected to be active participants in the conversations we will have around social media topics. You should read all the required materials carefully and thoroughly, identify their key points, think about their strengths and weaknesses, and be prepared to discuss them in class. Not only the frequency, but also the quality of your contributions will be considered. Also note that in this class, asking good questions will be just as important as giving good answers.

In addition to your participation in class, you are also encouraged to contribute to an online discussion. You can publish your comments and questions about the readings in the Sakai forum.
for this course. Contributing to the online discussion is not mandatory, but it can help increase your participation grade. Keep in mind that your grade will be based on your contributions throughout the semester. This means you cannot compensate for earlier lack of participation with high activity in the last few weeks of the class.

**Reading Discussion (15%)**

Once during the semester, each student will take the role of a discussion leader. When it is your turn, you will do the recommended readings for that week (optional for the rest of the class) and prepare a brief written summary of their key points. That summary should be uploaded to the Sakai website before the start of the class (in the course site, go to Resources → Reading summaries, and select Upload Files from the Add drop-down menu).

Your main task will be to lead a 15-minute discussion on the issues that the readings bring up. It is your responsibility to make the discussion both relevant and engaging. If we have not already covered the main points of the recommended articles in class at the time, you may also have to give a brief 5-minute overview of the readings. Be sure to mention the questions they address, as well as their major findings.

Discussion leaders will typically work in groups of three, and will cover selected topics from the course outline. The list of topics that students can sign up for will be distributed in the second week of class.

**Midterm Exam (30%)**

The midterm exam, scheduled for October 19th, will include multiple-choice and open-ended questions about the material covered from day 1 through day 12 of the course. The exam will focus on key points from the lectures and the required readings. You can expect questions dealing with major principles and concepts explained in class, as well as their application to specific contexts, cases, or online platforms. For example, if social capital was included in the material for the exam (it is not), you could be asked to briefly explain how that construct may be defined and measured on a platform like Twitter.

If you have a verifiable excuse that prevents you from taking the exam on its original date, you can request a make-up exam at a later date. That request needs to be made as early as possible, before the day of the exam. Note that the make-up is likely to differ from the original exam in content and form, and may include additional material. If you miss the exam without prior notification or without a verifiable excuse, you can still request a make-up date, but 5 points (out of 30) will be deducted from your score.

**Final Paper & Presentation (30% & 10%)**

The final paper will examine one or more aspects of the social media topics addressed in this course. Students will work on the paper in groups of three or four people. You can form your own group and notify me via e-mail by September 24. Feel free to post on the class Sakai forum if you are looking for classmates with similar interests to join your group. Students who have not contacted me before the deadline will be randomly assigned to groups and notified about their assignment by September 28.

Your final paper may involve empirical data collection (e.g. a survey of social media users, interviews with social media developers, analysis of social media content, an online experiment, etc.). The project may also be theoretical: extending existing frameworks and concepts, or
applying them to new platforms and contexts (e.g. adapting current or proposing new models for the way individuals or organizations behave online).

The paper should be 12-15 pages long, double-spaced, using a 12-point font with a 1-inch margin on all sides. It should have the following structure:

(1) Introduction and background, including an overview of previous research in the area;
(2) Research questions or hypotheses, along with an appropriate justification of the hypotheses, or an explanation of the importance and originality of the research questions;
(3) A description of methods, analysis, and results for empirical papers, or a development of your argument or model for theoretical papers;
(4) A discussion section where you describe what you have learned from your study, and examine how it compares with previous findings in the literature;
(5) A bibliography containing the list of references cited in the paper.

You need to include at least 10 citations to academic works in empirical papers, and at least 15 in theoretical papers. Some of those references should be for studies you found on your own (as opposed to readings assigned in this class). The citations and bibliography should be formatted in APA style (one place where you can learn more about it is the Purdue Online Writing Lab).

All members of the group need to proofread the final draft of the paper before submitting it. You should confirm that it has the required formatting, and make sure that the text is clear, grammatically correct, and free of spelling errors.

Your group will have the following tasks:

October 8th: Submit a one-page proposal describing your research question and the way you intend to approach it (send it in an e-mail with subject “Paper proposal”). You will receive feedback suggesting that you proceed with the paper, or advising you to change your topic.

November 2nd: Submit a 3-4 page detailed outline of the paper that sketches the background, relevant literature, research questions, the data collection and analytical procedures (for empirical papers), the concepts or theoretical frameworks that you are developing or contributing to, and how (for theoretical papers). E-mail it with subject “Paper outline”.

December 7th & 10th: Groups will do a short presentation of their final paper in class.

December 12th: Submit the final paper via the Sakai course site (go to Assignments → Final paper).

Each group member needs to turn in the same paper separately. This will confirm that everyone agrees on and approves of the final version that is submitted. The paper should be added as a single-file attachment in PDF or Word format. Each group member should also write a brief description of their contributions to the final paper and paste it in the text submission window for the assignment on Sakai. In most cases, all group members will receive identical grades.

Late papers will be accepted until December 15. However, each day of delay past the December 12 deadline will reduce your score by 5 points (out of the maximum possible 30 for the paper).

Extra Credit Opportunities

Two times during the semester you will have the opportunity to earn extra credit by answering a 10-minute quiz/short-answer question, or doing an activity in class. There will be no advance warning as to when those opportunities will be available. There will also be no make-up extra credit options available for students who are absent from class on that day. Each of the activities will be worth 1 point, and can add 1% to your final grade.
Another way to get extra credit is through social media participation. You are encouraged to tweet relevant observations, links to news, scholarly papers, and other materials pertinent to the topics discussed in class. The tweets should use the hashtag #SCI305. Students who post 12 or more thoughtful tweets related to the course material using that hashtag will get an additional 1 point and increase their final grade by 1%. Keep in mind that in order to get extra credit, you also need to tweet throughout the semester, and not just in the last few weeks of class.

Grade Breakdown & Scale
A and B grades in this class are reserved for outstanding work. To get a high grade, students need to participate actively in class, be thorough and careful in exam answers and papers, and demonstrate excellent understanding of the subject, critical thinking, and originality in their work.

If you have concerns about your course grade, schedule an appointment with me as early as possible during the semester to discuss it. Once the course grades are announced, they are final and will only be changed in case of an error in the computation of the student’s score.

The grade breakdown will be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Points Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0-15 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading discussion</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0-15 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0-30 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0-10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0-30 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0-100 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extra credit opportunities can contribute an additional 3% to your grade.

The final grade will be awarded according to the following scale:

- A  90-100%
- B+ 85-89%
- B  80-84%
- C+ 75-79%
- C  70-74%
- D  60-69%
- F  below 60%

Academic Integrity
You are required to complete your own assignments and exams, and always acknowledge the sources of contributions, materials, quotes, and ideas that you did not develop yourself. The consequences of scholastic dishonesty in this class and at Rutgers University in general are very serious. For more details, consult the University’s academic integrity policy. Any violation will at a minimum result in no credit earned for the assignment in question. Serious violations of academic integrity may prevent students from completing the course or their academic program. If you have questions about issues related to plagiarism or academic integrity, do not hesitate to contact me.
### Accommodation

This course will accommodate any student in need of assistance. Students with documented disabilities who need accommodations should contact the Rutgers Disabilities Services Office (see disabilityservices.rutgers.edu for details). You can also speak with a SC&I adviser by visiting the Office of Student Services in the SC&I Building, Room 214 or calling them at 848-932-7500 (dial 2 as your menu choice). Please contact me with information about the requested assistance and present your Letter of Accommodation as early in the semester as possible.

### Additional Resources

Note that the university offers a number of useful resources that you have access to and may take advantage of while in this course:

- For additional tutoring, training, or writing help, visit the Rutgers Learning Center (online at lrc.rutgers.edu) and the Writing Center (plangere.rutgers.edu).
- If you need a consultation on research materials and ways to find them, you can contact the Rutgers University subject specialist librarian for communication.
- If you need help with class schedule or registration, visit the Student Services Office located in CI 214, and online at comminfo.rutgers.edu/student-services.
- The SC&I IT Services can help you with various technological problems. You can find them in CI 120, by phone at 848-932-5555, or by email at help@comminfo.rutgers.edu.

### Course Outline

The course schedule is subject to change: materials may be added or replaced during the semester based on relevant current events, new research, and student interests. If that happens, the changes will be reflected on the Sakai website and announced in class/over email.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1 – Thu, September 3</th>
<th>Day 8 – Mon, September 28</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course and syllabus review</td>
<td>Social relationships &amp; discussion ties I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2 – Tue, September 8</td>
<td>Day 9 – Thu, October 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding social media I</td>
<td>Social networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3 – Thu, September 10</td>
<td>Day 10 – Mon, October 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding social media II</td>
<td>Social analytics I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4 – Mon, September 14</td>
<td>Day 11 – Thu, October 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-presentation &amp; identity management</td>
<td>Social analytics II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5 – Thu, September 17</td>
<td>Day 12 – Mon, October 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credibility &amp; deception</td>
<td>Social influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6 – Mon, September 21</td>
<td>Day 13 – Thu, October 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Privacy &amp; anonymity</td>
<td>Social capital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 7 – Thu, September 24</td>
<td>Day 14 – Mon, October 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationships &amp; discussion ties I</td>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 15 – Thu, October 22</td>
<td>Day 18 – Mon, November 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual communities</td>
<td>Social mobilization &amp; protests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 16 – Mon, October 26</td>
<td>Day 19 – Thu, November 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic engagement</td>
<td>Algorithmic social reality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 17 – Thu, October 29</td>
<td>Day 20 – Mon, November 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political participation</td>
<td>The filter bubble</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 18 – Mon, November 2</td>
<td>Day 21 – Thu, November 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social mobilization &amp; protests</td>
<td>Social media users</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 22 – Mon, November 16</td>
<td>Day 23 – Thu, November 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethics of social media research</td>
<td>No class: Group work day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 24 – Mon, November 23</td>
<td>Day 25 – Mon, November 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media in organizations</td>
<td>News &amp; information diffusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 26 – Thu, December 3</td>
<td>Day 27 – Mon, December 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional &amp; social media</td>
<td>Final presentations I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 28 – Thu, December 10</td>
<td>Day 29 – Mon, December 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final presentations II</td>
<td>Final presentations III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Day 1 – Thu, September 3
Course and syllabus review

Day 2 – Tue, September 8
Understanding social media I


Day 3 – Thu, September 10
Understanding social media II


Day 4 – Mon, September 14
Self-presentation and identity management


Day 5 – Thu, September 17
Credibility and deception


Day 6 – Mon, September 21
Privacy and anonymity


**Required:** Skim through this and this Pew report about American attitudes towards privacy.


Day 7 – Thu, September 24
Social relationships & discussion ties I


**Recommended:** Turkle, S. (2012). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York, NY: Basic Books., Ch. 8: Always on.


**Assignment:** Forming groups.
Day 8 – Mon, September 28
Social relationships & discussion ties II

Pew Research (2011) Social networking sites and our lives. Read p.22-31


Day 9 – Thu, October 1
Social networks


Recommended: The Networks, Crowds, and Markets book is available online – you can browse through it and read chapters that interest you.


Day 10 – Mon, October 5
Social analytics I

Ch.1 Introduction & skim through Ch.5 Centrality.


Day 11 – Thu, October 8
Social analytics II

Required: Check out the user guides for Twitter Analytics and Facebook page insights.


Assignment: Final paper topic proposal (1 page).
Day 12 – Mon, October 12
Social influence


Day 13 – Thu, October 15
Social capital


Day 14 – Mon, October 19
Midterm exam

Day 15 – Thu, October 22
Virtual communities


Day 16 – Mon, October 26
Civic engagement


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Day 17 – Thu, October 29
Political participation


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Day 18 – Mon, November 2
Social mobilization and protests


**Assignment:** Final paper outline (3-4 pages).
Day 19 – Thu, November 5
Algorithmic social reality


Day 20 – Mon, November 9
The filter bubble


Day 21 – Thu, November 12
Social media users


Day 22 – Mon, November 16
Ethics of social media research


Day 23 – Thu, November 19
No class: Group work day

Assignment: Group meetings (online or offline).

Day 24 – Mon, November 23
Social media in organizations


Thu, November 26
Thanksgiving break

Day 25 – Mon, November 30
News and information diffusion


Day 26 – Thu, December 3
Traditional media and social media


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Day 27 – Mon, December 7
Final presentations I
Assignment: Final presentations.

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Day 28 – Thu, December 10
Final presentations II
Assignment: Final presentations.

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Sat, December 12
Final paper
Assignment: Final paper due.