

# **SOC356H1: SOCIOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**Fall 2021 (Sep-Dec)**

**Mondays 6:10-8 pm**

**University of Toronto, St. George Campus**

**Location: SS 2118**

Instructor: Dr. Rui Hou

Email: [rui.hou@utoronto.ca](mailto:rui.hou@utoronto.ca)

Office Hour: Tuesday 2-3 pm

TA: Salwa Khan [slw.khan@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:slw.khan@mail.utoronto.ca).

Office Hour: Thursday 1-2 pm

## **Course Description**

Technology and society are unthinkable without each other — each provides the means and framework in which the other develops. Today, new digital technologies have had a profound influence on everyday life, social relations, government, commerce, the economy and the production and dissemination of knowledge. To explore this dynamic, this course investigates a wide array of questions on the interaction between technology, society, politics, and economics. We will discuss how our interactions with technologies, especially computers and the Internet, Big Data, social media, and other digital technologies, have become central for our understanding of contemporary social life. Students will also learn various theoretical perspectives regarding the technology-society relationship, as well as how the current sociological inquiry of digital technologies is influenced by the unique affordances of digital data and research methods.

The main objectives and learning outcomes associated with this course are as follows:

- To demonstrate knowledge of important concepts related to the research on digital technologies in sociology and other related disciplines
- To critically examine the lived experiences of digitally mediated society and existing theories developed to frame the interactions between technology and society.
- To improve academic writing skills and the ability to synthesize theoretical and empirical evidence to articulate a compelling argument and to motivate future research

**Prerequisite:** 1.0 SOC credit at the 200+ level

**Exclusion:** SOC331H1, SOC356Y1

Students not meeting this requirement will be removed at any time discovered and without notice.

## **Course Delivery**

Lectures will be pre-recorded for the first two weeks (Sep 13&20). After September 23, lectures will proceed as in-person. If there are restrictions in place in September, adjustments to course delivery will be made according to public health guidelines if required at that time. Students will be contacted directly by their instructors on the possible adjustments by email and through Quercus.

**Office Hours:** In the first two weeks, my office hours are by appointment on Tuesday from 2:00pm to 3:00pm via Zoom. After September 23, the information of in-person office hour will be updated

via Quercus.

### **Email**

When emailing the instructor or TA, please use your mail.utoronto.ca address. My goal is to answer emails from students within 48 hours, with the exception of those received on Fridays (these will be answered on Mondays or the next business day if the Monday is a holiday). If I have not responded to you within 48 hours, please do not hesitate to follow up. Please include “SOC356” in the subject line of the email.

### **Course Website**

The course website on Quercus contains the syllabus, announcements, posted lectures, readings, tutorial materials, discussion boards, assignment instructions, and grades. Students can also access Bb Collaborate through the course’s home page, which is the platform used for participating in synchronous sessions and attending office hours. Please note that students are responsible for regularly checking both Quercus and their official utoronto.ca email addresses for course updates.

### **Course Reading**

The required reading listed for each week will be provided on Quercus for students to read online or print. Readings marked as supplementary are not required and are not testable, although they are a great resource for those interested in reading more deeply about a particular topic and can be used as sources for the assignments.

### **Evaluation**

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Due date</i>
Participation	15%	Ongoing
Reading response	15%	Nov. 15
Movie review	20%	Oct 4
Critical question	15%	Oct 25
Term paper	35%	Dec. 13

#### *Movie Review (20)*

Topic: Students are asked to write a review of a movie/documentary (1000 words) dealing with digital technology. A list of movies attached with the syllabus is available, and these movies are pre-approved for review. Other movies can be chosen with the permission of the instructor/TA. You aren't expected to reference particular texts at this stage, rather it's about ideas: how to use sociological conceptual tools to examine the chosen movie content. But, if you do mention a particular work (book, article, website etc.), then please do cite it properly according to Sociology department guidelines. This is not simply about your personal opinion of the film! The majority of your paper should be academic (i.e., don't spend too much space reviewing the performance of actors/actresses).

#### *One Reading Response (15)*

Reading responses are designed to guide and sharpen your engagement with course texts. A reading

response asks the reader [you] to review the chosen reading and explain and defend your personal reaction to it. You will choose **one peer-review article**<sup>1</sup> from the course reading list and review it in the format of short essay (750 words). Two components should include in the writing: 1. A careful summary of the work's central features such as its main puzzle, research question, main thesis, and methodology. 2. A examine, explain and defense of your reaction to the work: you can either evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the chosen articles, or engage a critical conversation between the chosen article's argument/concept and your own life experience.

### *Final Project (15+35)*

Final projects will explore the nexus of digital technology and human life by completing a term paper. This assignment is split into two main parts:

- (1) Critical Question: The first is a critical question due on Oct 25 in which students outline their intended topic and a tentative research question which will be explored in the final term paper. You should choose a topic and use it to create a critical question for your term paper. The 'question' can be an actual question, a question with sub-questions, a statement to be discussed, a hypothesis to be tested, or any other way you can think of to problematize the subject. (The question can have a subtitle, and up to three sub-questions but no more). The question must be:
  1. Critical, that is it must challenge and go beyond the 'common-sense' and the mundane;
  2. Of sociological or more broadly social scientific interest;
  3. Possible to answer given the constraints of time and resources available to you;
  4. Justified with a brief 300-word outline.
  5. Supported by 10 indicative references (key examples of the kinds of sources you will use).
  
- (2) Term Paper: The second is a longer, finalized term paper (3000 words) that is due on Dec 15 and involves a detail clarification and exploration of your critical essay question (35%). It is expected that you show familiarity with social theories and empirical research, and approach the subject in a critical manner. More in-depth instructions will be posted on Quercus.

### *Participation (15)*

Participation will be assessed on the basis of in-class engagement and assessments. The instructor will randomly choose 3-5 class days in which you will complete a quiz, short writing assignment, or other activity. These activities are designed to demonstrate that you have done the reading and paid attention in lecture. If you miss more than three class sessions, it is likely to compromise your participation grade.

\*All assignments should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. They should include a cover page with a title, your name, student ID number, the course name, and the date. Assignments should be clearly formatted and proofread, with references cited correctly according to ASA guidelines.

**Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for medical reasons, need to email**

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<sup>1</sup> You can choose the reading from either the required reading list or the supplementary reading list, but you may notice that there are more peer-review articles in Supplementary Readings.

the instructor (not the TA), and declare their absence on the system (ACORN).

(NOTE: Because of Covid-19, students do NOT need to submit the usual documentation, i.e., medical notes or the Verification of Illness forms). Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

## Movie List

*Her*(2013) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

*Facebook Dilemma* (2018) Part 1 or Part 2

Part1 [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9207216/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9207216/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

Part2 [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9209914/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9209914/?ref=fn_al_tt_2)

*The Circle* (2017) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4287320/>

*Snowden* (2016) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3774114/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3774114/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

*Citizenfour* (2014) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4044364/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4044364/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

*iHuman* (2019) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11279794/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11279794/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

*The Social Dilemma* (2020) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11464826/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11464826/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

*In the Age of AI* (2019) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11240426/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11240426/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

*The Social Network* (2010) [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1285016/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1285016/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

*Nosedive (Black Mirror, 2016)* <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5497778/>

*Screening Surveillance* (2019) <https://www.sscqueens.org/projects/screening-surveillance>

Most movies in this list are offered by UofT Libraries, available for individual streaming when logged in with your UTORID. Individual title records are available in the UofT Libraries Catalogue. *Criterion-on-Demand* and *The Film Platform Collection* are the two suggested channels that you can use your UTORid to access more tech-related movie resources

More details in: <https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/cinema/watch-film>

## Grade Appeals

Instructors and teaching assistants take the marking of assignments very seriously and will work diligently to be fair, consistent, and accurate. Nonetheless, mistakes and oversights occasionally happen. In the case of a mathematical error, simply alert the TA or instructor of the error.

For more substantive appeals you must adhere to the following policies. To appeal a grade and have your work re-assessed, you must provide written justification to your TA explaining the basis for this reconsideration and, where relevant, attach your original assignment with comments. You should specifically address how you believe your assignment better met the criteria from the assignment guidelines while also taking into account the individual comments or community feedback. To start this re-assessment process, students must wait 24 hours following the return of the grades and comments—any grade appeals sent within this timeframe will not be considered. Note, that as per FAS policy, once your work has been re-assessed, the grade can go up, down, or remain the same based on this second evaluation. Subsequent appeals will go to the course instructor. Furthermore, no requests for grade appeals will be granted after two weeks following the return of the assignment's grade and feedback.

## **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the University of Toronto degree that you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves. Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) and other [integrity policies](#). To avoid issues related to plagiarism, please see the [advice](#) on documentation format and methods of properly integrating sources.

“Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>)”

Students agree that by taking this course, submitted works may be subjected to processing through *Ouriginal* for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the *Ouriginal* reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the *Ouriginal* service are described on the *Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site*. Assignments not submitted through *Ouriginal* will receive a grade of zero (0%) unless a student instead provides, along with their paper, sufficient secondary material (e.g. reading notes, outlines of paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own. The alternative (not submitting via *Ouriginal*) is in place because, strictly speaking, using *Ouriginal* is voluntary for students at the University of Toronto.

## **Accessibility**

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, contact your instructor as soon as possible to discuss how best to assist you in the course. Furthermore, if you are registered with [Accessibility Services](#), you must supply the appropriate documentation or your counselor will need send an email message on your behalf

## **Course Schedule**

Every attempt will be made to follow this schedule; however, it is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Any adjustments to topics or readings will be announced on Quercus.

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### **Week 1 (September 13): Introduction: Technological society and digitlised sociology**

#### Required Readings:

Selwyn, Neil, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology, Chapter 1*

Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology&Society (3rd Edition)*, Oxford University Press, pp1-22  
Supplementary Readings:

DiMaggio, Paul, Eszter Hargittai, W. Russell Neuman, and John P. Robinson. 2001. "Social Implications of the Internet." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1):307-336.

Fussey, Pete, and Silke Roth, 2020, "Digitizing Sociology: Continuity and Change in the Internet Era." *Sociology* 54, no. 4: 659–74.

Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, pp1-19

### ***Week 2(September 20): Theories and concepts***

#### Required Readings:

Selwyn, Neil, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology*, Chapter 2

Lupton, Deborah. *Digital sociology*. Routledge, 2014. pp.20-41

#### Supplementary Readings:

Klein, Hans K., and Daniel Lee Kleinman. 2002. "The social construction of technology: Structural considerations." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 27(1): 28-52.

Chayko, Mary. 2015. "The First Web Theorist? Georg Simmel and the Legacy of 'The Web of Group-Affiliations'." *Information, Communication, & Society* 18(12): 1419-1422.

Julien, Chris. 2015. "Bourdieu, social capital and online interaction." *Sociology* 49(2): 356-373.

Gunderson, Ryan. 2016. "The sociology of technology before the turn to technology." *Technology in Society* 47: 40-48.

Dafoe, Allan. 2015. "On Technological Determinism: A Typology, Scope Conditions, and a Mechanism." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 40(6): 1047–76.

### ***Week 3(September 27): Digital research methods***

#### Required Readings:

Neil Selwyn, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology*, Chapter 4

Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, pp.42-65

#### Supplementary Readings:

Ruppert, Evelyn, John Law, and Mike Savage. 2013. "Reassembling Social Science Methods: The Challenge of Digital Devices." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30(4): 22–46.

Edelmann, Achim, Tom Wolff, Danielle Montagne, and Christopher A. Bail. 2020. "Computational social science and sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 61-81.

Murthy, Dhiraj. 2008. "Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research." *Sociology* 42(5): 837-855.

Kaufmann, Mareile, and Meropi Tzanetakis. 2020. "Doing Internet Research with Hard-to-Reach Communities: Methodological Reflections on Gaining Meaningful Access." *Qualitative Research* 20 (6): 927–44.

Murphy, Alexandra K., Colin Jerolmack, and DeAnna Smith. 2021 "Ethnography, Data Transparency, and the Information Age." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47:41-61.

### ***Week 4(October 4): Tech-driven interaction: social relationship and community***

#### Required Readings:

Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology &Society (3rd Edition)*, Oxford University Press, pp184-234

### Supplementary Readings:

- Rettie, Ruth. 2009. "Mobile phone communication: Extending Goffman to mediated interaction." *Sociology* 43(3): 421-438.
- Rettie, Ruth. 2009. "SMS: Exploiting the interactional characteristics of near-synchrony." *Information, Communication & Society* 12(8): 1131-1148.
- Murthy, Dhiraj. 2012. "Towards a sociological understanding of social media: Theorizing Twitter." *Sociology* 46(6): 1059-1073.
- Diamant-Cohen, A. and Golan, O. 2017. Downloading culture: community building in a decentralized file-sharing collective. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(11), pp.1737-1755.

### ***Week 5 (October 11, Thanksgiving, No class)***

### ***Week 6 (October 18): Tech-drive life: Identity, body, and emotions***

#### Required Readings:

- Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, Pp.164-187
- McStay, Andrew. 2018. Emotional AI: The rise of empathic media. Sage. pp1-28

#### Supplementary Readings:

- Goriunova, Olga. 2019. "The digital subject: People as data as persons." *Theory, Culture & Society* 36(6): 125-145.
- Goode, J., 2010. The digital identity divide: how technology knowledge impacts college students. *New media & society*, 12(3), pp.497-513.
- Sanders, Rachel. 2017. "Self-tracking in the digital era: Biopower, patriarchy, and the new biometric body projects." *Body & Society* 23(1): 36-63.
- Kennedy, Helen, and Rosemary Lucy Hill. 2018. "The feeling of numbers: Emotions in everyday engagements with data and their visualisation." *Sociology* 52(4): 830-848.
- Laura Grindstaff & Gabriella Torres Valencia. 2021. The filtered self: selfies and gendered media production, *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(5): 733-750

### ***Week 7 (October 25): Tech-driven inequality and digital divide***

#### Required Readings:

- Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology & Society* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press, pp119-139
- Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, Pp.117-140
- Halford, Susan, and Mike Savage. 2010. "Reconceptualizing digital social inequality." *Information, Communication & Society* 13(7): 937-955.

#### Supplementary Readings:

- Deursen, Alexander JAM van, and Jan AGM van Dijk. 2019. "The First-Level Digital Divide Shifts from Inequalities in Physical Access to Inequalities in Material Access." *New Media & Society* 21(2): 354-75.
- White, Patrick, and Neil Selwyn. 2013. "Moving on-line? An analysis of patterns of adult Internet use in the UK, 2002-2010." *Information, Communication & Society* 16(1): 1-27.
- Van Dijk, J.A., 2006. Digital divide research, achievements, and shortcomings. *Poetics*, 34(4-5), pp.221-235.

Hargittai E. 2010. 'Digital na(t)ives? Variation in Internet skills and uses among members of the "Net generation.."' *Sociological Inquiry* 80(1): 92–113.

Hargittai E and Dobransky K (2017) Old dogs, new clicks: digital inequality in skills and uses among older adults. *Canadian Journal of Communication* 42(2): 195–212.

Cruz, Taylor M. 2020. "Perils of Data-Driven Equity: Safety-Net Care and Big Data's Elusive Grasp on Health Inequality." *Big Data & Society*, (January, online first).

Kvasny, Lynette. 2006. "Cultural (re) production of digital inequality in a US community technology initiative." *Information, Communication & Society* 9(02): 160-181.

Brayne, S. 2017. "Big Data Surveillance: The Case of Policing." *American Sociological Review* 82(5):977–1008.

### ***Week 8(November 1): Digital labor***

#### Required Readings:

Quan-Haase, Anabel, 2020, *Technology & Society* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press, pp140-160.

Selwyn, Neil, 2019, *What is Digital Sociology, Chapter 1. Pp33-65*

#### Supplementary Readings:

Bucher, Eliane, and Christian Fieseler. 2017. "The flow of digital labor." *New media & society* 19(11): 1868-1886.

Siciliano, Michael L. 2016."Control from on high: Cloud-computing, skill, and acute frustration among analytics workers in the digital publishing industry." In *Research in the Sociology of Work*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited

Postigo, Hector. 2016. "The Socio-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money." *New Media & Society* 18(2): 332–49.

### ***Week 9 (November 8, Reading Week)***

### ***Week 10(November 15): Platform economy and surveillance capitalism***

#### Required Readings:

Kenney, Martin, and John Zysman. "The Rise of the Platform Economy." *Issues in Science and Technology* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2016).

Zuboff, Shoshana, Norma Möllers, David Murakami Wood, and David Lyon. 2019. "Surveillance Capitalism: An Interview with Shoshana Zuboff." *Surveillance & Society* 17(1/2): 257-266.

#### Supplementary Readings:

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2015. "Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization." *Journal of information technology* 30(1): 75-89.

Vallas, Steven, and Juliet B. Schor. 2020. "What do platforms do? Understanding the gig economy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 273-294.

Schor, Juliet B., and Steven P. Vallas. 2021. "The Sharing Economy: Rhetoric and Reality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47: 369-389

### ***Week 11(November 22) Digital participation and tech-driven repression***

#### Required Readings:



Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge. pp.141-163

Deibert, Ron. 2015. "Authoritarianism goes global: cyberspace under siege." *Journal of Democracy* 26(3): 64-78.

Supplementary Readings:

Lei, Ya-Wen. 2021. "Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture and Collective Contention in China's Platform Economy." *American Sociological Review* 86(2): 279–309.

MacKinnon, R., 2011. Liberation Technology: China's "Networked Authoritarianism". *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), pp.32-46.

Julia Velkova & Anne Kaun (2021) Algorithmic resistance: media practices and the politics of repair, *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(4): 523-540

***Week 12(November 29): Digital culture***

Required Readings:

Deuze, Mark. 2006. "Participation, remediation, bricolage: Considering principal components of a digital culture." *The information society* 22(2): 63-75.

Lyon, David. "Digital citizenship and surveillance| Surveillance culture: engagement, exposure, and ethics in digital modernity." *International Journal of Communication* 11(19):824-842

Supplementary Readings:

Kecheng Fang (2020) Turning a communist party leader into an internet meme: the political and apolitical aspects of China's toad worship culture, *Information, Communication & Society*, 23:1, 38-58

Brian Elliott (2018) Work, culture, and play in the neoliberal condition, *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(9): 1279-1292

McLean, Paul. 2016. *Culture in networks*. John Wiley & Sons, 2016: Chapter 1

***Week 13(December 6): New directions and future challenges***

Required Readings:

Lupton, Deborah. 2014. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge. Chapter 5

Jenna Burrell and Marion Fourcade. 2021. The Society of Algorithms. *Annual Review of Sociology* 47:213-237

Supplementary Readings:

Joyce, Kelly, Laurel Smith-Doerr, Sharla Alegria, Susan Bell, Taylor Cruz, Steve G. Hoffman, Safiya Umoja Noble, and Benjamin Shestakofsky. 2021. "Toward a Sociology of Artificial Intelligence: A Call for Research on Inequalities and Structural Change." *Socius*, online first

Ruppert, Evelyn, Engin Isin, and Didier Bigo. 2017. "Data politics." *Big data & society* 4(2): 1-7

***Week 14(Pre-recorded lecture will be available as the make-up for Thanksgiving Monday): Digital societies during the Pandemic***

Required Readings:

Vallee, Mickey.2020. "Doing Nothing Does Something: Embodiment and Data in the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Big Data & Society*, Online first.

Wamsley D, Chin-Yee B. 2020. COVID-19, Digital health technology and the politics of the

unprecedented. *Big Data & Society*. Online first

Liu, Chuncheng, and Ross Graham. 2020. "Making Sense of Algorithms: Relational Perception of Contact Tracing and Risk Assessment during COVID-19." *Big Data & Society*. Online first.

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