Internet Studies

Class schedule:---   *Class Location:* ---
Class Instructor: Katherine Valde   *E-mail*: kgvalde@bu.edu

Course Description

This course explores the emerging interdisciplinary field of Internet Studies. We will investigate questions such as: Is the internet changing how culture evolves? Is credibility different online and offline? How are our online lives inheriting the racial and gender bias of our offline lives? Is the internet making us more connected or more alone? Is there an inherent conflict between privacy and information? This course will not only be about the internet, but will engage with the internet through creating and responding to online content. Students will leave this course with a deeper understanding of some of the social, political, cultural, psychological, and philosophical aspects of the internet.

Grading

Blog posts – 25%
>   Students will create their own blogs where they will be expected to post summary responses to class readings ten times throughout the semester. These posts are expected to be around the length of one page at 1.5-line spacing. Students will also be expected to respond to and interact with the blogs of their classmates at least ten times. Responses are expected to be at least one robust paragraph.

Short Paper 1 – 20%
Short Paper 2 – 20%
>   Short papers will be 4-5 pages that offer some critical engagement with one of the topics from the first two units, respectively. Further guidelines for the construction of good academic papers will be provided in class.

Participation – 15%
>   Participation will be assessed on student's active engagement with the material. The most important portion for this is behavior and involvement during class meetings. Engagement beyond what is required with fellow classmates or the professor online can also count towards class participation.

Final Project – 20%
>   For this project students will be expected to create some type of online content. This could range from YouTube videos, to podcasts, to creating a new Wikipedia entry. Students will choose their own topics. Topics and project proposals must be approved by Week 13.

Schedule of Readings

Unit 1: Memes and Cultural Evolution
Week 1: The Internet and "Emerging Media"
>   "Plato and Aristotle on the Emerging Medium" by David Roochnik
>   Video: "Moralizing Technology and the ethics of things" by Peter-Paul Verbeek at TEDxTwenteU found here

Week 2: Cultural Evolution and Memes
>   Video: "Memes 101: How Cultural Evolution Works" by Daniel Dennett found here
>   "Meme's Eye View" in *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds* by Daniel Dennett

Week 3: Cultural Evolution
> Video: "Why Human Evolution Matters" by PBS Crash Course Big History found [here](#)
> "A Cultural Evolution Approach to Digital Media" by Alberto Acerbi

Week 4: Memes on the Internet
> "What makes a video go viral? An analysis of emotional contagion and Internet memes" by Rosanna Guadagno, Daniel Rempala, Shannon Murphy, and Bradley Okdie
> "What Makes A Meme So Catchy?" by Nicki Lisa Cole
> "We Asked a 'Meme Scientist' What Makes a Meme Go Viral" by Isabelle Hellyer (interview with Ari Sprool)

Week 5: Memes on the Internet
> "How the Internet Subverts Cultural Transmission" by Jerome Barkow
> "Kanye West, the Internet, and Cultural Evolution" by Zeynep Tufekci (response to above)

Week 6: The Singularity
> Video: "Are Memes & Internet Culture Creating a Singularity?" by Idea Channel of PBS Digital Studios found [here](#)
> "The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis" by David Chalmers
> **PARER 1 DUE**

Unit 2: Truth and Trust

Week 7: Knowledge and the Internet
> "Rethinking Knowledge in the Internet Age" By David Weinberger
> "Google-Knowing" in *The Internet of Us: Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Age of Big Data* by Michael P. Lynch

Week 8: Credibility on the Internet
> "The affordance effect: Gatekeeping and (non)reciprocal journalism on Twitter" by Jacob Groshek and Edson Tandoc
> Video: "How the current Internet culture undermines expertise" by Andrew Keen at TEDxUtrecht found [here](#)

Week 9: Fake News and Epistemic Responsibility
> Podcast: "Fake News: An Origin Story" by NPR Hidden Brain found [here](#)
> Video: "Anti-Vaxxers, Conspiracy Theories, and Epistemic Responsibility" by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found [here](#)
> "Fake News and the Internet Shell Game" by Michael P. Lynch

Week 10: Fake News and Epistemic Responsibility
> Video: "Muddied Waters: Online Disinformation during Crisis Events" by Katie Starbird found [here](#)
> "Escape the Echo Chamber" by C. Thi Nguyen

Week 11: Gender and Racial Bias in A.I.
> *NYT Sunday Review* "AI's White Guy Problem"
> Podcast: "How Humans Bias AI with Kris Hammond" by The AI podcast found [here](#)
> **PAPER 2 DUE**

Unit 3: Connection and Privacy
Week 12: Alone or Together?
      "Hiding Behind The Screen" by Roger Scruton
      "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" by Jean M. Twenge

Week 13: Activism on the Internet
      "The Revolution will not be Tweeted" by Malcolm Gladwell
      "The Political Power of Social Media" by Clay Shirky

Week 14: Information or Privacy?
      "Privacy: Information Friction" in _The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality_ by Luciano Floridi
      Podcast: "What Kind of Idiot Gets Phished?" by Reply All (Gimlet Media) found here

Week 15: Identity and the Self
      "E-personality" in _Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality_ by Elias Aboujaoude
      "The self and the Internet: Variations on the illusion of one self" by Jayne Gackenbach and Heather von Stackelberg
      Video: "Identity in the Digital World" by Alec Couros from TEDxLangleyED found here

Week 16: **Final Projects Due**