

Social Media and Society – An elective course for undergraduate students in Sociology and Anthropology at Krea University (Term 3, 2025-26 AY)

Course Description: *Social Media & Society* examines digital platforms as central institutions of contemporary social life. Rather than treating social media as a discrete technological domain, the course conceptualizes platforms as socio-technical infrastructures that mediate visibility, labor, identity, governance, and inequality at scale. The course begins by analyzing the infrastructural and classificatory foundations of social networking systems before progressing to the forms of work, algorithmic reasoning, and public-making that they enable. Subsequent modules address the intensification of harm—misogyny, racism, casteism, extremism—as well as the emergence of illicit economies, trauma narratives, and new forms of digital care.

The syllabus combines foundational scholarship in Sociology, STS, and Media Studies with recent qualitative and theoretical studies from diverse global contexts. Across these readings, students engage with influencers, platform workers, nationalist publics, disability activists, sex workers, extremist groups, and content moderators—each case illustrating how platform architectures and governance regimes shape social practices and political possibilities. Particular attention is given to how systems of caste, race, gender, class, and ability are reproduced, contested, and regulated through metrics, recommendation systems, moderation decisions, and infrastructural design.

The course aims to cultivate a mode of inquiry attentive to theoretical rigor and empirical detail. Students develop the capacity to interpret platforms as environments of power and as sites of everyday meaning-making. By the end of the term, they will be able to articulate how social media systems structure contemporary social life and to critically assess the political, ethical, and epistemic implications of their design and governance.

Themes / Modules:

Week 1: Studying Social Media: Infrastructure studies meets Platform studies

Students encounter social media as an infrastructural system as opposed to a mere set of apps. Readings from this week introduce infrastructural ethnography, the history of social network sites, and the conceptual boundary between mediatization and mediation. The week establishes vocabulary for analyzing platforms as relational, material, and classificatory systems.

Week 2: What kinds of work does social media extract from us, and who does it really benefit?

This module examines the labor required to be visible, relatable, and monetizable online. Through classic digital labor theory and empirical work on influencers and entrepreneurial femininity, students trace how aspirational self-branding obscures mechanisms that facilitate the extraction of labor.

Week 3: How do people come to know, fear, and “game” social media algorithms? Students analyze how users imagine and “narrate” algorithmic systems—even when those systems remain opaque. The module explores feed ranking, invisibility, and the rise of “algorithmic self-making” on social media, emphasizing user tactics, anxieties, and vernacular theories of platform power.

Week 4: Who counts as ‘the public’ on social media?: On publics and counter-publics Using work on publics and counter-publics, students assess how platforms generate participation, exclusion, and networked affect. Cases range from gender-based violence to authenticity on BeReal and affective news storytelling during the Egyptian revolution.

Week 5: How dark can social media get?: Trolling, misogyny, extremism, content moderation This week foregrounds the toxic underside of platform cultures: trolling, the manosphere, teen boys’ and young mens’ uptake of Andrew Tate, and automated content moderation. Students learn to link harassment ecologies to broader political economies of attention and amplification.

Week 6: Illicit economies on social media platforms Students explore online sex work, male sex worker self-representation, platform affordances, and cryptomarkets. The module emphasizes blurred legalities, algorithmic drift, and how social media infrastructures enable, shape, and criminalize illicit livelihoods.

Week 7: Who bears the brunt of social media’s hate? This module examines racialized and casteist social media activity across Twitter, alt-tech spaces, and mainstream platforms. Students read on cyber-racism, misogynoir, and caste-based harassment, tracing how online violence expresses and reproduces structural hierarchies.

Week 8: When does ‘community’ turn into extremism? Students analyze extremist mobilization, incel communities, algorithmic enclaves, and radicalization on Reddit and 4chan/8chan. The emphasis is on affect, belonging, identity formation, and how platform affordances foster sectarian and supremacist world-building.

Week 9: Can sharing trauma or disability on social media be political? This week explores feminist digital activism, storytelling as political speech, grief vernaculars, and disability influencers’ negotiations with medical and social models. Students learn to read vulnerability and visibility as sites of contestation, solidarity, and risk.

Week 10: Who governs these platforms? What does it mean to govern them? Or govern using them? Or be governed by them? Students engage with digital constitutionalism, algorithmic governance, sexist techno-assemblages, and visibility moderation on social media. The module connects global political economy with everyday experiences of being ranked, muted, promoted, or erased.

Week 11: The future of Social Media x Society The final week synthesizes questions of scale, alternative infrastructures, political economy, and emerging forms of authoritarian platform power. Students reflect on what futures are being imagined or foreclosed—through AI moderation, decentralized networks, cooperative platforms, and geopolitical alignments—before an open discussion and final exam.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze** social media platforms as socio-technical infrastructures, identifying how architectures, affordances, metrics, and policies shape interaction, identity, and governance.
2. **Apply** key concepts from sociology, STS, media studies, and political anthropology—including (but not limited to) sociotechnical infrastructures, boundary objects, publics/counter-publics, algorithmic imaginaries, visibility labor, extremism, and digital constitutionalism—to empirical studies of platforms.
3. **Diagnose** how digital mechanisms such as recommendation systems, ranking, content moderation, and visibility regimes reproduce inequalities across caste, race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability.
4. **Interpret** online harms, illicit economies, and extremist ecologies using qualitative digital ethnography and global case studies, distinguishing structural conditions from individual behavior.
5. **Explain and evaluate** Global South perspectives on platform power, including caste discrimination, digital nationalism, feminist activism, and alternative platform infrastructures.
6. **Construct** clear, theoretically grounded arguments integrating scholarly readings with concrete platform practices, online communities, and digital artefacts.
7. **Reflect** critically on emerging futures of social media, including AI-driven governance, decentralized networks, alternative platform models, and forms of digital authoritarianism.

Pedagogical Style: This class would be executed as a “flipped” classroom – students will be expected to do their readings in advance of the class. Pedagogy will include lectures, review of readings, sharing audio-visual contents (short documentaries, pictures, films etc.) and discussions. Group discussions, brief oral presentations and worksheets will be an integral part of classroom activities. Students taking this course are expected to keep up with weekly readings, and be

present for the required number of in-class assessments etc. All readings will be made available to the class through Canvas, except when students are specifically requested to purchase materials.

Pre-requisites if any: No, but students who have taken SOCL 306 are likely to get the most out of this course.

Required and Recommended Reading(s):

Week 1: Studying Social Media: Infrastructure studies meets Platform studies (~99 pages)

Session 1:

- Boyd, Danah M., and Nicole B. Ellison. "Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship." *Journal of computer-mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 210-230.
- Star, Susan Leigh. "The ethnography of infrastructure." *American behavioral scientist* 43, no. 3 (1999): 377-391.
- Star, Susan Leigh. "This is not a boundary object: Reflections on the origin of a concept." *Science, technology, & human values* 35, no. 5 (2010): 601-617.

Session 2:

- Couldry, Nick. "Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling." *New media & society* 10, no. 3 (2008): 373-391.
- Gerlitz, Carolin, and Anne Helmond. "The like economy: Social buttons and the data-intensive web." *New media & society* 15, no. 8 (2013): 1348-1365.
- Plantin, Jean-Christophe, Carl Lagoze, Paul N. Edwards, and Christian Sandvig. "Infrastructure studies meet platform studies in the age of Google and Facebook." *New media & society* 20, no. 1 (2018): 293-310.

Week 2: What kinds of work does social media extract from us, and who does it really benefit? (~75 pages)

Session 1:

- Marwick, Alice E., and Danah Boyd. "I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience." *New media & society* 13, no. 1 (2011): 114-133.
- Terranova, Tiziana. "Free labor." In *Digital labor*, pp. 33-57. Routledge, 2012.

- Abidin, Crystal. "Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and# OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram." *Media International Australia* 161, no. 1 (2016): 86-100.

Session 2:

- Gandini, Alessandro. "Digital labour: An empty signifier?." *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no. 2 (2021): 369-380.
- Duffy, Brooke Erin, and Emily Hund. "'Having it all' on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers." *Social media+ society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 2056305115604337.

Week 3: How do people come to know, fear, and “game” social media algorithms? (~60 pages)

Session 1:

- Gillespie, Tarleton. "The relevance of algorithms." *Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society* 167, no. 2014 (2014): 167.
- Bucher, Taina. "Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook." *New media & society* 14, no. 7 (2012): 1164-1180.

Session 2:

- Schellewald, Andreas. "Theorizing “stories about algorithms” as a mechanism in the formation and maintenance of algorithmic imaginaries." *Social Media+ Society* 8, no. 1 (2022): 20563051221077025.
- Bhandari, Aparajita, and Sara Bimo. "Why's everyone on TikTok now? The algorithmized self and the future of self-making on social media." *Social media+ society* 8, no. 1 (2022): 20563051221086241.

Week 4: Who counts as ‘the public’ on social media?: On publics and counter-publics (~80 pages)

Session 1:

- Warner, Michael. *Publics and counterpublics*. Princeton University Press, 2021. (Selection)
- Sujon, Zoetanya, Harry T. Dyer, and Felipe Bonow Soares. "Social Media and Society: Platforms, Publics, and Anti-Publics." *Social Media+ Society* 11, no. 3 (2025): 20563051251368234.
- Morales, Esteban, Jaigris Hodson, Yimin Chen, Kaitlynn Mendes, George Veletsianos, and Chandell Gosse. "'Stop Being so Fkn Soft': Masculinity, Politics, and the Acceptance of Gender-Based Online Violence Myths Among Young Canadian Men." *Social Media+ Society* 11, no. 3 (2025): 20563051251358754.

Session 2:

- Papacharissi, Zizi, and Maria de Fatima Oliveira. "Affective news and networked publics: The rhythms of news storytelling on# Egypt." *Journal of communication* 62, no. 2 (2012): 266-282.
- Taylor, Zari A. "Everyone stop what you're doing and BeReal: Live networked publics and authenticity on BeReal." *Social Media+ Society* 9, no. 4 (2023): 20563051231216959.

Week 5: How dark can social media get?: Trolling, misogyny, extremism, content moderation (~60 pages)

Session 1:

- Phillips, Whitney. "The house that fox built: Anonymous, spectacle, and cycles of amplification." *Television & New Media* 14, no. 6 (2013): 494-509.
- Ging, Debbie. "Alphas, betas, and incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere." *Men and masculinities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 638-657.

Session 2:

- Haslop, Craig, Jessica Ringrose, Idil Cambazoglu, and Betsy Milne. "Mainstreaming the manosphere's misogyny through affective homosocial currencies: Exploring how teen boys navigate the Andrew Tate effect." *Social Media+ Society* 10, no. 1 (2024): 20563051241228811.
- Gorwa, Robert, Reuben Binns, and Christian Katzenbach. "Algorithmic content moderation: Technical and political challenges in the automation of platform governance." *Big Data & Society* 7, no. 1 (2020): 2053951719897945.

Week 6: Illicit economies on social media platforms (~66 pages)

Session 1:

- Swords, Jon, Mary Laing, and Ian R. Cook. "Platforms, sex work and their interconnectedness." *Sexualities* 26, no. 3 (2023): 277-297.
- Rand, Helen M., and Hanne M. Stegeman. "Navigating and resisting platform affordances: Online sex work as digital labor." *Gender, Work & Organization* 30, no. 6 (2023): 2102-2118.
- Ryan, Paul. "# Follow: exploring the role of social media in the online construction of male sex worker lives in Dublin, Ireland." *Gender, Place & Culture* 23, no. 12 (2016): 1713-1724.

Session 2:

- Haynie, Dana L., and Scott W. Duxbury. "Online Illegal Cryptomarkets." *Annual Review of Sociology* 50 (2024).

- Aagesen, Kristoffer, and Jakob Demant. "From Gray to Black markets—A quasi-experimental study on algorithmically driven digital drift opportunities on social media." *Deviant Behavior* (2025): 1-14.

Week 7: Who bears the brunt of social media's hate? (~66 pages)

Session 1:

- Daniels, Jessie. "Race and racism in Internet studies: A review and critique." *new media & society* 15, no. 5 (2013): 695-719.
- Brock, André. "From the blackhand side: Twitter as a cultural conversation." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56, no. 4 (2012): 529-549.

Session 2:

- Lawson, Caitlin E. "Platform vulnerabilities: Harassment and misogynoir in the digital attack on Leslie Jones." *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no. 6 (2018): 818-833.
- Singh, Dhyan. "Dalits' encounters with casteism on social media: a thematic analysis." *Information, Communication & Society* 28, no. 2 (2025): 335-353.

Week 8: When does 'community' turn into extremism? (~71 pages)

Session 1:

- Awan, Imran. "Cyber-extremism: Isis and the power of social media." *Society* 54, no. 2 (2017): 138-149.
- Preston, Kayla, Michael Halpin, and Finlay Maguire. "The black pill: New technology and the male supremacy of involuntarily celibate men." *Men and masculinities* 24, no. 5 (2021): 823-841.

Session 2:

- Lim, Merlyna. "Freedom to hate: social media, algorithmic enclaves, and the rise of tribal nationalism in Indonesia." *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2017): 411-427.
- Gaudette, Tiana, Ryan Scrivens, Garth Davies, and Richard Frank. "Upvoting extremism: Collective identity formation and the extreme right on Reddit." *New Media & Society* 23, no. 12 (2021): 3491-3508.
- Rieger, Diana, Anna Sophie Kümpel, Maximilian Wich, Toni Kiening, and Georg Groh. "Assessing the extent and types of hate speech in fringe communities: A case study of alt-right communities on 8chan, 4chan, and Reddit." *Social Media+ Society* 7, no. 4 (2021): 20563051211052906.

Week 9: Can sharing trauma or disability on social media be political? (~61 pages)

Session 1:

- Pain, Paromita. "“It took me quite a long time to develop a voice”: Examining feminist digital activism in the Indian# MeToo movement." *New Media & Society* 23, no. 11 (2021): 3139-3155.
- Lokot, Tetyana. "# IAmNotAfraidToSayIt: stories of sexual violence as everyday political speech on Facebook." *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no. 6 (2018): 802-817.

Session 2:

- Eriksson Krutrök, Moa. "Algorithmic closeness in mourning: Vernaculars of the hashtag# grief on TikTok." *Social Media+ Society* 7, no. 3 (2021): 20563051211042396.
- Harris, Kyle, and Erin Willis. "Disability influencers and self-representation: The intersecting medical and social models of disability on Instagram." *New Media & Society* (2025): 14614448251373025.

Week 10: Who governs these platforms? What does it mean to govern them? Or govern using them? Or be governed by them? (~50 pages)

Session 1:

- Suzor, Nicolas. "Digital constitutionalism: Using the rule of law to evaluate the legitimacy of governance by platforms." *Social Media+ Society* 4, no. 3 (2018): 2056305118787812.
- Issar, Shiv, and Aneesh Aneesh. "What is algorithmic governance?." *Sociology Compass* 16, no. 1 (2022): e12955.

Session 2:

- Gerrard, Ysabel, and Helen Thornham. "Content moderation: Social media's sexist assemblages." *New Media & Society* 22, no. 7 (2020): 1266-1286.
- Zeng, Jing, and D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye. "From content moderation to visibility moderation: A case study of platform governance on TikTok." *Policy & Internet* 14, no. 1 (2022): 79-95.

Week 11: The future of Social Media x Society (~21 pages)

Session 1:

- Gillespie, Tarleton. "Content moderation, AI, and the question of scale." *Big Data & Society* 7, no. 2 (2020): 2053951720943234.

- Mannell, Kate, and Eden T. Smith. "Alternative social media and the complexities of a more participatory culture: A view from Scuttlebutt." *Social Media+ Society* 8, no. 3 (2022): 20563051221122448.
- Narayan, Devika. "The political economy of digital platforms: Key directions." *Platforms & Society* 1 (2024): 29768624241263071.
- Akbari, Azadeh. "Big Tech authoritarianism: Political synergies of an emerging power." *Dialogues on Digital Society* (2025): 29768640251370968.

Session 2: Open discussion. No new readings.

Assessment Components: **

Sr. No.	Component	Weightage
1	Attendance	10%
2	Two multiple-choice quizzes (Two highest scores of three scores recorded)	30% (15% per quiz)
3	Trimester long journal activity	30%
4	Open note final exam	30%
	Total	100 %