Syllabus

Theories and methods for researching connective media

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Cornell Tech

Tuesdays 12 noon - 3pm

The course looks at several way of studying connective media, from different perspectives such as computer-mediated communication, theories from sociology and ethnographic methods. Through studying these theories, students learn how to approach their own research projects and how to study particular characteristics of online social media. Research projects will be done in pairs or groups of three and address targeted aspects of behavior around connective media, design the study on the theories and methods taught. From the course, students should be able to independently conduct an empirical study of social media characteristics in relation to both mobile, desktop and mixed media. The course will consist of essays, smaller assignments and a large research project. Lectures will be based on a set of relevant academic readings with discussion and student presentations.

Class Objectives

The course introduces important concepts, terms, and theories that are used to study the interaction going on through connective media, particularly online social networks. Approximately one third of the course will be devoted to exploring different kinds of online communities; another third will focus on different approaches to studying social media, and the final third of the course will teach in practice how to conduct user studies that will inform design as well as behavioral characteristics of connective media. The component of the course connects social science theories with the goals of designers, online community managers and online community participants. The course will approach analysis of social media on several levels: individual, social, and collectives – and present perspectives from multiple disciplines.

The class has three goals:

- Provide the students with a broad understanding of different types of online communities and connective media from user as well as research perspectives,

- Introducing the students to distinct disciplinary differences of research approaches to connective media and online communities, and enable them to apply each one to studies of online social media.

- Provide students with practical expertise in studying specific aspects of behavior and experiences around the use and and practices of connective media.

Class Requirements

Readings:

There will be a selection of reading for each class where some will be presented by students and others will be basis for in-class discussion. Readings in blue will be presented by students. See the schedule for details of readings.

Participation:

Participation is mandatory, and due to the class just meeting once per week, it is important to attend each session. In case of illness or other excusable absence, please inform the instructor before class.

Essays:

The course includes two essays, an introductory essay due February 24th and a topical essay due March 10th, see page 3 and separate instructions for details.

Presentations:

The class will be partly based on in-class presentations. Each student will present one papers over the semester, as well as lead discussion on the paper and related subject. Each presentation should summarize the research, highlight related work, and discuss the implications for research within the different areas. The final project will also be presented in class, throughout the course.

Research project:

The majority of the grade and the biggest part of the class is the research project. This project is an actual mini-research project that should result in a report appropriate to be submitted to a scientific conference or workshop. It should focus on user experiences and behavior in relation to connective media, specifically outlining one narrow research problem. The research project should be conducted in pairs or groups of three, groups chosen by students themselves.

Grading:

Intro essay: 10%
Topic essay: 10%
Presentations: 20%
Participation: 20%
Final project: 40%

Schedule

Tuesday January 27th 12 noon-3pm

Cancelled due to Snowstorm

Tuesday February 3rd 12 noon - 3pm

In this class students are introduced to the course and the syllabus. A short lecture is given with an overview of different research approaches to connective media.

Readings: none

First essay:

Find an online social media service that has been particularly useful or meaningful to you. Try to stay away from the obvious Facebook and Twitter. Write an account of how this has been meaningful and how that differs from the original or present goals of the site or service. Describe how that could have been addressed through research. Suggest a research approach. Approximately 2-4 pages, single spaced.

Tuesday February 10th 12 noon-3pm

Research method: Developing research questions
Topic: Early stages of Social Media

Readings:

Nardi, B., Whittaker, S., Bradner, E. CSCW2000 Interaction and outeraction: instant messaging in action

Nardi, B., Schiano, D. and Gumbrecht, M. CSCW 2004. Blogging as social activity, or, would you let 900 million people read your diary?

Tuesday February 24th 12 noon-3pm

Research method: Content analysis

Topic: Forums as Social Media

First essay is due, second essay is introduced

Readings:

Huh, J. CSCW 2015. Clinical Questions in Online Health Communities: The Case of "See your doctor" Threads.

Li, et al. GROUP 2014. Losing It Online: Characterizing Participation in an Online Weight Loss Community.

Tuesday March 3rd 12 noon-3pm

Research method: Participant observation and qualitative studies

Topic: Self-presentation and Identity

Readings:

Identity and deception in the Virutal Community, by J. S. Donath. 1998. http://smg.media.mit.edu/people/Judith/Identity/IdentityDeception.html

Ellison, N., Heino, R. and Gibbs, J. (2006): Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment

Tuesday March 10th 12noon-3pm

Research method: Statistics and Longitudinal studies

Topic: Emotions Online

Topical essay due. Introduction to Final Project

Bazarova et al., CSCW 2015: Social Sharing of Emotions on Facebook: Channel Differences, Satisfaction, and Replies

Steinfield, C., Ellison, N. B. and Lampe, C. 2008: Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: A longitudinal analysis

Tuesday March 17th 12noon-3pm

Class cancelled: Watch Jeffrey Hancock's keynote from CSCW, start brainstorming about final project.

Tuesday March 24th 12 noon-3pm
Ethical Issues in research

Ethics and Facebook paper: Students should watch the keynote talk at CSCW 2015 by Jeffrey Hancock from previous week and we will discuss.

Readings:

Cramer, A., Guillory, J. E. and Hancock, J. 2014. Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks.

Bruckman, A. 2006. Teaching Students to Study Online Communities Ethically. Journal of Information Ethics.

Presentations of research questions for final project

Tuesday April 7th 12 noon-3pm
Research method: Mixed Methods
Topic: Peer Production Communities
Readings:

Lampe et al. CHI 2010: Motivations to participate in online communities.

Antin, J. CHI 2011: My kind of people?: perceptions about wikipedia contributors and their motivations.

Tuesday April 14th 12noon-3pm
Research method: Interview methods
Topic: Civic Engagement
Readings:

Quan-Haase et al., 2002: Capitalizing on the net: Social contact, civic engagement, and sense of community.

Briones et al. 2010: Keeping up with the digital age: How the American Red Cross uses social media to build relationships/

Tuesday April 21st 12noon-3pm
Research method: Comparative research design
Topic: Friendships on Social Media
Readings:

Shlovski, I., Barkhuus, L., Bornoe, N. and Kaye, J., CSCW 2015. Friendship Maintenance in the Digital Age. [link available after CSCW]

Gilbert, E., Karahalios, K. and Sandvig, C. CHI 2008: The network in the garden: an empirical analysis of social media in rural life.

Presentations of data and preliminary findings from final project

Tuesday April 28th 12 noon-3pm

Research method: Case studies

Esthetic Social Media

Readings:

Humphries, S. 2009: The economies within an online social network market : A case study of Ravelry.

Hochman, N. and Manovich., L. 2013: Zooming into an Instagram City: Reading the local through social media.

Tuesday May 5th 12 noon-3pm

Research method: Experience Sampling

Topic: Mobile Social Media

Final Project due, presentations of final projects.

Barkhuus, L. and Tashiro, J. CHI 2010. Socialization in the Age of Facebook.

Consolvo, S. and Walker, M. IEEE Pervasive Computing, 2003. Using the experience sampling method to evaluate ubicomp applications.