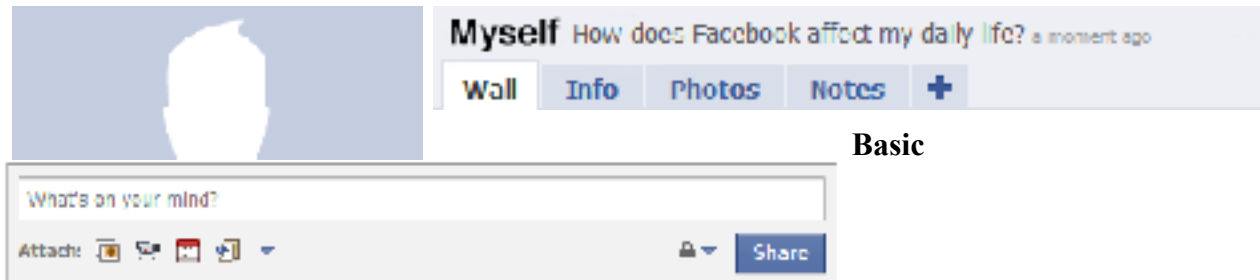


Sociology of Facebook and Online Social Networks



Information

Course:	Sociology 88SA
Quarter:	UCLA Spring 2010
Room:	Humanities A68
Time:	Friday, 1:00PM-1:50PM
Website:	TBA
Student Facilitator:	Eric Kim
Email:	eric.j.kim@ucla.edu (Heading: RE: Sociology of Facebook)

Course Description:

Have these phrases and scenarios become a part of your everyday language?

- Within relationships: “It’s not official until it’s Facebook official”
- With first encounters: “Remember to ‘Facebook’ me!”
- Even for birthdays: 100+ “Happy Birthday!” Facebook posts and no phone calls

Online social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter have dramatically altered the ways in which individuals in society interact with one another. When it comes to many college students, no longer do individuals give each other phone calls, but instead they write on each other’s “Facebook walls.” No longer are diaries private, but instead they are now public and available for all to see on blogs. Although the Internet is overcoming the distance gap in terms of communication, how authentic are these cyber-relationships? Can relationships now be defined by quantity instead of quality? Is the Internet ultimately bringing us closer together, or further apart?

Course Objectives:

In this seminar, students will explore how online social networking websites affect their own self-presentations and interpersonal interactions through readings, journals,

and experiments. Sociological theory will be used as a backbone for all the concepts taught in the course, and full student participation is essential in succeeding and gaining a personally enriching experience from the course.

Are social networking websites simply fun and convenient ways to connect and keep in touch with friends and family or should they be seen as a threat to face-to-face interaction? By the end of the course, students will be able to formulate their own opinions on whether the Internet brings them closer or further apart from others in society.

Expectations and Grading

Attendance and Participation: Attendance and participation are essential in gaining a fulfilling and rewarding experience in this seminar. Therefore, if students miss two or more classes, they will automatically receive a “no pass” grade. If students arrive to class more than *ten minutes* late without an approved excuse emailed beforehand, they will be marked as absent.

The seminar will be fueled by discussion of the readings and experiments, which makes student participation and interaction mandatory. Therefore every week, students are expected to speak in class at least once, discussing the week’s reading or assignment.

Readings: The assigned readings contain the backbone of this class: sociological theory and application. Therefore all readings must be completed **prior** to attending class, as they will be discussed during our meeting. All readings will be available online on the course website.

Experiments: Students are expected to complete all of the experiments assigned each week and journal their experiences. Each experiment will correspond with the readings or issues discussed for the week which will help students gain a fulfilling, hands-on approach to experiencing the effect of online social networking websites within their lives.

Journals: After each student has completed their assignment for the week, they are expected to type up a full **two paragraph** response which both addresses their personal experiences with the assignment, and also relates back to the reading. Journals which do not refer back to the readings will not be given credit.

Furthermore, these journals must be posted to your personal blogs before meeting in class. (Refer to Student Blog section)

Laptop Policy: Laptop use during class is **prohibited**. This is not a lecture-intensive course, and thus allows notes to be easily taken by hand. Although laptops can be useful, in discussion-based classes it merely distracts and takes away from the quality of the overall discussion.

Final Paper: Students are expected to write a final paper addressing the question: “Does the internet bring people closer or further apart?” The paper will be due in-class during Week 10, and must be **2-3 pages** (doubled spaced). Students must include references to the assigned readings and assignments. Other personal experiences may be included in the paper.

Student Blogs: For this seminar, students are required to create a Wordpress blog (which will be later linked to the class blog). On their blogs, students are expected to post **weekly journals** as well as their **final essay**. Since the class blog is hosted on Wordpress, it will be easier for students to leave comments on fellow student blogs as well as on the class blog.
(Signup on <http://wordpress.com>)

Class Blog: There is a class blog available to anybody who is interested. Feel free to post interesting articles, blog entries, photos, or even art pertaining to this class. Contributions to this blog are not mandatory, but highly encouraged. (<http://sociologyoffacebook.com>)

Course Outline

Week 1 “Web 2.0”

The Internet is no longer just data spoon-fed to the masses, but rather a platform which allows users to create, exchange, and facilitate information on a mass-scale. Through these changes in online interaction, communication as we know it is no longer the same. How does “Web 2.0” differ from “Web 1.0” and what other implications does “Web 2.0” have in store for individuals in this online age?

Optional Reading:

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Time’s Person of the year: You
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html |
|---|

Optional Assignment:

Devote an hour in total exploring these following websites:
-Digg.com, Reddit.com, Stumbleupon.com, Delicious.com

From one of these websites, find and post at least one interesting article, photograph, or video you have found on either website to the class blog. Comment on one of your fellow classmates’ submissions.

Week 2 “Facebook generation”

Topic: Ambient Awareness

The creation of Facebook and other online social networking websites has revolutionized the ways in which individuals interact and perceive the world. Although Facebook may allow users to keep in touch more easily, what potential problems does the use of Facebook create? Does the publicity of Facebook profiles and "status updates" promote the dissolution of privacy in modern day society?

Required Readings:

1. Brave New world of Digital Intimacy:
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/magazine/07awareness-t.html?_r=2&ref=technology&pagewanted=all

Experiment:

For one full day (from when you wake up until you sleep), update your Facebook status every two hours. This can be done from your computer or your phone.

Week 3 “Our Online Selves”

With the creation of "personal homepages" such as the Facebook profile, individuals are now able to portray their self-image in profile pictures or descriptions in any way they want, fine-tuning the information they choose to share with others. However, how true is the "online self" compared to the "off-line self"? In which ways do individuals try to change their portrayal of self in online and offline interactions?

Required Readings:

1. Cheung, "Identity Construction and Self-Presentation on Personal Homepages" (POR IV, pg. 310-320)

Experiment:

Chat with a random stranger for at least thirty minutes online and try to convince them of a false online persona. (I.e. Pretend that you are a female if you are a male, pretend you are a different age, make up an occupation, etc). Omegle (<http://omegle.com/>) can start you on random one-on-one conversations.

Week 4 “Online Communities”

With the advent of the Internet, the world becomes a smaller place and links individuals from all over the globe through online communities. A simple Google search can yield an online forum or community for almost every single interest or hobby that exists. However, do online communities facilitate the same deep and intrapersonal connections that individuals build in off-line communities when they can meet face-to-face?

Required Readings:

1. Carter, Denise(2005) 'Living in virtual communities: an ethnography of human relationships in cyberspace', *Information, Communication & Society*, 8: 2,
(Start reading on “Cybercity” on pg. 153 until “Conclusion” on pg. 165)

Experiment:

Join an online community forum based on any interests or hobbies you have. Read the interactions that people are having with one another. Create your own discussion topic, and reply to discussion topics that others have written.

Week 5 “Cyber-Addiction”

Studies show that Internet addiction is a serious and rapidly growing epidemic. Access to the Internet allows individuals to be constantly “connected” to the world around them through blogs, online social networking websites, RSS feeds, and email. Furthermore, the Internet allows for easy access to entertainment through YouTube, online games, and blogs on celebrity culture, which further distract individuals. Why do individuals in society feel the urge to constantly be connected and entertained? What happens when individuals “disconnect” from the online sphere?

Required Readings

1. Postman, Neil. (1986). *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Penguin. The Huxleyan Warning: (pg. 155-163)

Experiment:

For one day, do not surf the internet or check your email (on your computer or cell-phone). Preferably schedule this on a day that you do not have classes, (Friday, Saturday, or Sunday).

Week 6 “Online Networking”

One of the most frequently cited reasons that individuals use Facebook is in order to “keep in touch” with one another. What are the other reasons why people use Facebook, and how can an individual benefit by using Facebook?

Required Readings:

1. Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The Benefits of Facebook “Friends:” Social Capital and College Students’ Use of Online Social Network Sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, (pg. 1145-1148, pg. 1153-1165)

Experiment:

On Facebook, add status updates asking for favors that you need or questions that you might not know the answer to. See whether the people who respond your questions are close to you, and whether they are able to help you or give you useful answers.

Week 7 “Online Privacy”

Online social networking websites such as Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter all advocate users to provide private information to be seen in public view. However what kind of implications do these have for the individual? How much information are individuals willing to share with the rest of the world? How much information are social networking websites sharing about you to the rest of the world without you knowing it?

Required Readings:

1. Barnes, Susan B.. “A privacy paradox: Social networking in the United States” *First Monday* [Online], Volume 11 Number 9 (4 September 2006), (pg. 1-10)

Experiment:

TBA

Week 8 “Online vs Offline Interactions”

Is chatting with somebody online the same as chatting with them in person? Are emoticons able to accurately portray happiness, anger, humor, or even sarcasm? Why are we more comfortable talking to others online than talking with them in person? Has society become more “socially awkward” than in previous generations?

Required Readings:

1. Hampton, Keith N, Wellman, Barry (1999). Netville Online and Offline: Observing and Surveying a Wired Suburb. *American Behavioral Scientist*; 43; 475 (pg. TBA)

Experiment:

Have a twenty minute long conversation with a friend online, on the phone, and in person (Could be the same person or different friends).

Week 9 “The Internet and happiness”

The Internet has made life easier and more convenient for everybody, but is it actually improving our standard of life and making us happier? From recent surveys, we are not happier than we were 50 years ago. Why is this? We will explore how the Internet and online interactions affect our happiness and our sense of self-worth.

Required Readings:

1. Uesugi, Shiro. Where is the “Happiness on the Internet? - “Cyberized and Civilized” “Convenient and Conventional”. *Matsuyama University*. (Pg. TBA)

Experiment:

TBA

Week 10 “The Future of Online Communities”

How will the Internet change the ways in which we interact in the future?

Required Readings:

1. Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2009). Social Network Sites and Society: Current Trends and Future Possibilities. *Interactions*. (Pg. TBA)

***Final Paper Due on Personal Blog!**