

POL106HS 2024
Contemporary Challenges to Democracy: Democracy in the Social Media Age
Department of Political Science, University of Toronto

Asynchronous Delivery with Weekly Synchronous Supplemental Lectures
Supplemental Lectures: Tuesdays, 10-11 AM on Zoom

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Course Description

Social media are the predominant means by which most of the world communicates and seeks and receives information today. Like all communication technologies, the character of social media can have an important influence on identity, society, and politics. Social media themselves are also important sites of political struggles, and are subject to varying types of state control and interference. In this course, we examine the relationship between democracy and social media. We will explore the underlying business model of social media, widely known as “surveillance capitalism,” and then discuss some of the ways the business model may distort public communications. We will look at disinformation on social media, and both targeted and mass surveillance undertaken in and through the platforms. We will also examine the overlooked ecological impacts of social media. Finally, we will explore ways to reform and regulate social media in the public interest. Assignments in the course are designed to help students develop critical thinking and writing skills. Students are expected to watch the recorded lectures and complete all of the required readings and assignments before the weekly tutorials begin. In mandatory tutorials and during optional supplemental lectures, students are expected to participate actively and engage with the major themes or topics in the course.

Asynchronous video lectures

Lectures for this course are recorded and delivered online. Recorded lectures will be uploaded to Quercus (under ‘Modules’) for viewing the week before the scheduled topic. Students must watch the recorded lectures and read the required readings before the weekly tutorials begin.

Synchronous online supplemental lectures (optional) and in-person or online tutorials (mandatory)

We will hold live supplemental lectures over Zoom on Tuesdays from 10 to 11 AM. Attendance is optional. During this time, there will be opportunities for students to ask questions and engage in discussions directly with the course instructor and Head TA.

Tutorials will be held synchronously. Participation in tutorials are mandatory. Students must sign-up for **either** online **or** in-person tutorials on ACORN. There will also be opportunities to post questions and undertake asynchronous discussions on Quercus Discussion Boards.

Session recordings

This course's Tuesday supplemental lecture sessions, including your potential participation, will be recorded on video and will be available to students in the course for viewing remotely and after each session.

All course videos and materials belong to your instructor, the University, and/or other sources depending on the specific facts of each situation, and are protected by copyright. Do not download, copy, or share any course or student materials or videos without the explicit permission of the instructor. For questions about recording and use of videos in which you appear, please contact me directly.

Course materials on Quercus

All readings will be available online and posted on Quercus. It is the student's responsibility to regularly check Quercus for communications from the teaching staff regarding the course content and assignments. [Journal articles](#) and [newspaper articles](#) listed in the syllabus are accessible for free either on the web or through the UofT Libraries' website. If you have questions about accessing the readings, please use the "Chat with a Librarian" function on the [UofT Libraries](#) homepage.

Course requirements

Participation: Eight weekly tutorial sessions	Tutorials are mandatory.	15%
Quiz: About POL106 Quiz	Due on Tue., Feb. 13 at Noon.	10%
Assignments: Three critical reflection essays.	Due on Mondays of your chosen week at Noon.	75%
Total		100%

Table 1. Course format and requirements for POL106

Please note that all assignments must be submitted on Quercus. In cases of technical difficulties only, you can submit your assignment via email to your assigned TA before the deadline.

Course and tutorial schedule

Tutorial #	Week #	Date	Class topic	Notes
1	1	9-Jan	Introduction	
2	2	16-Jan	The Internet and social media	
3	3	23-Jan	Surveillance capitalism	
-	4	30-Jan	Consent	NO TUTORIALS - Office hours only
4	5	6-Feb	Social media and behavioural sciences	
5	6	13-Feb	Mis- and dis-information	
READING WEEK		20-Feb		NO TUTORIALS, NO OFFICE HOURS, NO SUPPLEMENTAL LECTURE
6	7	27-Feb	Targeted digital espionage	
-	8	5-Mar	China's social credit	NO TUTORIALS - Office hours only
7	9	12-Mar	Superpower policing	
-	10	19-Mar	Ecological impact of digital electronics	NO TUTORIALS - Office hours only
8	11	26-Mar	COVID-19 and the 'new normal'	
-	12	2-Apr	What to do?	NO TUTORIALS, NO OFFICE HOURS

Table 2. Course and tutorial schedule for POL106

Have questions about the course, but unable to attend office hours or tutorials are not in session? Come to the Supplemental Lectures to get your questions answered!

Participation

Tutorials (15%)

Tutorial participation is mandatory. There are 8 tutorial sessions/weeks in the course. During Reading Week, there will be no tutorials, no office hours, and no supplemental lectures.

Sign up for tutorials on [ACORN](#). Search for “POL106” (in Winter 2024) to see the list of tutorial sections and choose one based on your availability. You can also see all POL106 tutorials scheduled in the [timetable](#) by searching for “POL106.”

You can find more information about tutorials and TAs on Quercus. Information about TAs will be posted before the course begins in January 2024. Each TA will create their own Discussion Boards on Quercus where they may post announcements about their specific tutorials.

Your attendance and participation will be noted and evaluated by your teaching assistant (TA). Please come to tutorials having read the required readings and being prepared to participate actively in discussions.

Assignments

About POL106 quiz (10%)

Due date: Tue., Feb. 13 at Noon.

Details: The purpose of this quiz is to help you understand the course policies and expectations. You must answer the About POL106 quiz on Quercus.

Critical reflection essays (75%)

Due date and requirements:

- Essays are due on Mondays at Noon.
- You must submit two essays by Week 8 (March 5).
You can choose whichever week you would like to write an essay on between Weeks 1 and 8. There is no need to sign-up or report your week of choice to your TA.
- You must submit the third (last) essay by Week 11 (March 26).
You can choose whichever week you would like to write an essay on between Weeks 9 and 11. There is no need to sign-up or report your week of choice to your TA.

Length: 1,000-1,200 words, double spaced (excluding cover page and bibliography).

Worth: 25% per essay x 3 essays = 75% total.

Details: The purpose of this assignment is to help you to thoughtfully engage with the core arguments advanced in the readings, critically reflect on the topic each week, and develop critical thinking skills.

Each student will prepare 3 (three) critical reflection essays in 3 (three) different weeks. Each essay covers one week's worth of **all** of the required readings. That is, the essay must discuss and cite **all** of the required readings in your chosen week. You may write on any week, **except** for the first and last weeks (Weeks 1 and 12). The essay that you submit in any given week must be on that week's readings. Essays from previous week's readings will **NOT** be accepted.

What is a critical reflection essay? Is it just a summary of all of the required readings?

NO. A critical reflection essay is NOT just a summary of the required readings.

Your essay must not only clearly and briefly summarize the readings' main arguments, but also outline their strengths and weaknesses. That is, what is the main argument of each required reading? What are each of the reading's strengths? And what are its weaknesses? (In other words, how can the arguments and supporting evidence be improved?). At minimum, your essay must highlight 1 (one) strength and 1 (one) weakness of each required reading, and use high quality external sources (e.g., journal articles and book chapters) that support your argument. A minimum of 5 (five) high quality sources must be cited in the body of the essay and included in the bibliography page, **in addition** to all of the required readings.

Your essay will be evaluated by your assigned TA based on the assignment rubric, which is posted on Quercus. Essays should be typed using 12-point Times New Roman, double spaced with 1" (2.5 cm) margins, and submitted in PDF or Word format. Chicago Manual of Style 17th edition author-date citation should be used consistently and correctly throughout the paper. The title page should contain the following: The title of the paper, the author's name, the author's tutorial section and TA name, course number and name, instructor's name, and assignment due date.

Need help with writing the critical reflection essay assignment? To help you write the essay, read more about [critical reading](#) for critical writing. You are strongly encouraged to attend consultations (drop in or by appointment) with trained writing instructors at the UofT [Writing Centres](#) and obtain feedback on your draft essays before you submit them.

Need help finding high quality sources? Please use the "Chat with a Librarian" function on the [UofT Libraries](#) homepage.

Need help with managing or generating citations? Using the [Zotero](#) citation management tool is highly-recommended to help organize your sources and generate citations.

Course policies

Quercus: It is a student's responsibility to check the course page regularly for any announcements or information regarding the course. You must submit your assignments electronically through Quercus. In cases of technical difficulties with Quercus only, you can email your assignment to your assigned TA before the deadline.

Communication: Please use the appropriate Quercus Discussion Board to ask questions about the course and assignments. For questions or concerns that are personal and confidential in nature, please contact your assigned TA directly. Please remember to include the course code (POL106) in the subject line. Please be respectful in interacting with others in the course and treat all communication with the instructor as a professional form of communication with proper grammar, sentences, and formal greetings and sign-offs.

Office hours: Office hours are drop-in hours for students to meet with their assigned TAs. Please consult your assigned TA regarding their office hours. Please make sure to read the syllabus and the Quercus Discussion Boards for previously answered questions before asking your questions during office hours.

Accommodations: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If students have a disability or health consideration that requires accommodations, please contact Accessibility Services by email at disability.services@utoronto.ca or visit [Accessibility Services](#)' webpage. Please provide a copy of the accommodation letter to the assigned TA.

Academic integrity: It is a student's responsibility to include accurate [citations](#) of sources and to understand what constitutes [academic integrity](#) at UofT. Please note that no outside assistance is permitted on any of the course assignments, including tools like ChatGPT and other AI writing assistants. This course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development and to help you reach course learning outcomes. Read more about the use of ChatGPT on UofT's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#).

Citation style: This course uses the Chicago Manual of Style 17th edition author-date citation style (not footnotes). Consistent and accurate use of citations would help you avoid committing plagiarism in your writing. Cheating and plagiarism are serious academic offenses. [Read more](#) on how to avoid plagiarism.

Assignment submission: Assignments must be submitted electronically on Quercus. In case of technical difficulties only, assignments can be emailed directly to the assigned TA. Students may want to keep screenshots with time stamps of when assignments were submitted. It is a student's responsibility to ensure that submitted copies do not contain errors. Assignments that cannot be read or opened after the due date will be imposed with late penalties.

Absence declaration: If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, please inform your assigned TA right away. Regarding documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances, this documentation can be an [Absence Declaration](#) (via ACORN) or the University's [Verification of Student Illness or Injury](#) (VOI) form. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Extensions: Assignments in other courses or late registration in the course are **NOT** grounds for an extension. You should plan your calendar for the semester accordingly. Supporting documentation is required before any extension is granted, and the appropriate documentation must be submitted within one week of the late assignment. All requests for extensions or deferrals, along with the appropriate documentation, must be submitted to your assigned TA.

2 Days 'life happens' extension: Students are allowed to request an extension for 2 (two) days without explanation or documentation for the critical reflection essay assignments. To use this extension, students should email their assigned TA with the subject line "Life Happens" and a 2-day extension will be automatically applied without any questions. This extension can be used more than once. Late penalties will begin to accrue after the two days have passed.

Late penalty: Assignments handed in late without appropriate medical or other official documentation will be penalized **5% per day late (including weekends)**. These penalties can accumulate very quickly - so do not be late.

Grades: It is a student's responsibility to understand [what grades mean](#) in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. In this course, grades are **NOT** arbitrarily raised or lowered. There are no extra credits available. Students earn their grades throughout the term through class participation and assignments. A grading rubric is provided for each assignment and posted on Quercus.

Grading: Assignments are graded by TAs. We will try our best to grade and return your assignments within three weeks of the due date; at the same time, please keep in mind that this class is very large, so we appreciate your patience.

Grade audits: As POL106 is a large course with many teaching assistants, the course instructor conducts an audit of grades given by TAs before they are released to students. The purpose of grade audits is to ensure that no TA is being overly harsh in their assessments. Questions regarding grade audits should be directed to the course instructor. In this course, grades are **NOT** arbitrarily raised or lowered.

Grade appeals: Please note that grades can either go down, go up, or remain the same due to the appeal process. There is a **72-hour reflection period** after grades are released before appeal requests can be accepted. Appeal requests made before the reflection period ends will **not** receive a response and must be resent. Appeal requests must be made within 48-hours after the reflection period ends. Appeal requests outside of this period will **NOT** be accepted.

Grade appeals process: Subsequent to the reflection period, if you have good reason to believe that you were assigned an inappropriate grade in an assignment, you must, within 48-hours, request to meet with the TA who graded your assignment to discuss the grade. After this meeting, you must, within 48-hours, submit to the TA a written request to re-grade your work. This written request is a short essay that identifies how and why you think the grade you received does not accurately evaluate the work you submitted.

If, subsequent to your first appeal, you are convinced that the mark is still incorrect, you may appeal in writing, within 48-hours after receiving the re-graded essay from your TA, to the course instructor and the Head TA. In this written request, you must include the originally submitted work, the original comments on your work and re-grading comments from your TA, and a short paragraph explaining why your work merits a higher mark than was awarded at appeal. The instructor's grade following this appeal process is final.

Resources

Assistance is available to help you learn

Have questions about finding relevant resources? [Ask a librarian.](#)

Have questions about improving your writing? [Speak to a writing instructor.](#)

Have issues with your assigned TA? Please make an appointment to speak with your assigned TA directly and privately. If issues persist, please contact the Head TA.

Need academic advising or personal counseling? Speak to your College's [Registrar's Office](#) (academic advisors). Your registrar can refer you to appropriate resources on campus if you are struggling with personal or academic issues that are affecting your school work. Please do not wait until the end of the term to get help.

This class is very large and it will be challenging for the teaching staff to respond immediately to everyone's emails. Therefore, ask your questions ahead of due dates, and before emailing us, please do the following:

1. **Check the syllabus and Quercus** for information about the course and assignments.
2. **Use the relevant Quercus discussion boards** to ask questions.
3. **Attend tutorials** and submit your questions to your assigned TA.
4. **Attend office hours** with your assigned TA.
5. **Ask your questions during the Tuesdays live supplemental lectures.**

Writing Support

[Learn more](#) about some important differences between high school rules and university expectations. If you are struggling with writing, you can get individual consultations with trained writing instructors during scheduled or drop-in appointments. Please consult the [Writing Centres](#) website for more information. You may also wish to take advantage of the [English Language Learning](#) (ELL) program, which supports all U of T undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts & Science (multilingual and native speakers) seeking to improve their English language skills.

Academic Success Centre and Mentors

Numerous services and workshops are offered by the [Academic Success Centre](#). Learn more about how you can obtain one-on-one help from [peer mentors](#) and [learning strategists](#). Resources are available to help you succeed, so do not hesitate to reach out and get help.

General Advice on Writing

- Keep in mind the assignment's purpose (as per the syllabus) while you write.
- Relate your thinking and analysis to the course's broader theme ("Democracy in the Social Media Age").
- Review the grading rubric provided and take note of the important components, such as citation style and voice.
- Meet with your TA in advance to ask questions about the assignment.
- Use an outline and start writing early, even before you are "ready" to write, as writing is a means for thinking through your thoughts or ideas.
- Present your draft essay to a writing instructor and get feedback.
- Budget time to revise or redraft (i.e., put the essay aside for a few days, allowing the mind to process it, so that you can see it more objectively when you return to it).
- Make sure to proofread the final copy start to finish (including the bibliography page) before submitting.

Health and wellness

If you are encountering difficulties that may impact your performance in this course, please speak to your TA as soon as it occurs and before it becomes unmanageable. Your [College Registrar's Office](#) also has academic advisors to help you in case you need academic, financial, or personal counseling. For example, on how to be successful at school, or how to manage stress due to balancing work and school or due to adjusting to life in Canada.

To find out more about mental health resources and services and find information about emergency support, please visit the UofT [Student Life Health and Wellness](#) website.

In distress or need emotional support? Please contact [UofT Telus Health Student Support](#) at 1-844-451-9700. Outside of North America, please call 001-416-380-6578 for mental health and counselling services in 146 languages for all UofT students.

The Good2Talk Student Helpline is also available at 1-866-925-5454 for professional counselling, information and referrals helpline for mental health, addictions and students well-being. [Click here](#) for more information on mental health support.

The risks of international, online learning

The global pandemic has forced us to radically transform the way we work, teach and learn. Our homes, wherever that is in the world, are now our new classrooms. **However, there is something really important we need to discuss:** If you are a citizen of another country, and/or accessing your courses at the University of Toronto from a jurisdiction outside of Canada, you remain subject to the laws of the country in which you are residing, or any country of which you have citizenship.

You may be assigned readings, or discuss topics that are against the law in other nation-state jurisdictions. Your online activities may be monitored or surveilled from within the country where you are studying. There is nothing that the University of Toronto can do about this reality. You may be already familiar with this problem or this may be a new concern. Either way, it's important that you know your local laws.

Mainland China students

In order to provide access to University of Toronto (U of T) online resources for students and others residing in mainland China, U of T has signed a contract with Alibaba for a network service. Chinese companies are required to operate in accordance with China's cyber security laws and there is an inherent risk of monitoring individuals in mainland China using any network solution. Unfortunately, there is no simple or secure alternative we can recommend to reduce your risks of connecting from mainland China.

Please note that this course deals with highly sensitive material in the context of China's information control regime. You may wish to consider alternative courses as a consequence.

Course evaluations

At the end of the term, you will have an opportunity to provide feedback about the course and your teaching assistants (TAs) using an online evaluation form. However, **please do not wait**

until the end of the term to contact the course instructor if you have any questions or concerns about the course.

Your feedback in a course evaluation is anonymous, but it is shared with the instructor and teaching assistants, as well as read by others at UofT, including department chairs, faculty deans, the provost, and the president. Course and TA evaluations are used for a variety of purposes, including as part of an academic job application (e.g., for TAs to apply for course instructor/professor jobs) and to make changes and improvements to individual courses.

Comments that are not related to the course or your learning experience would diminish the value of your feedback. For example, it is not helpful to include personal insults about your instructor or TA in your feedback. Instead, please provide specific and constructive suggestions regarding the course and instructional behaviours (e.g., tutorials and office hours), so that we can improve your learning experience. Thank you in advance for completing the course evaluation.

Course materials

1. Introduction and Overview (Jan. 9)

This week, we go through the course's subject matter, breakdown the assignments, explain tutorials, and introduce our head TA, Irene Poetranto. We talk about course readings, grade appeals, cheating, and accessibility issues.

- **Required Readings**

- Paul Edwards, University of Michigan, School of Information. "How to Read a Book, 5.0." <http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

This resource is essential reading for the entire course. It gives you some tips on how to approach reading with a strategy - a set of skills that will benefit you not just for this course, but also for all of your other courses as well.

- Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, "They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing." ([Hard copies](#) available through U of T Libraries. You can also find copies of the book online using a search engine of your choice or you can purchase used or new copies from your favourite bookstores.)

Whereas the previous resource teaches you how to read, this resource teaches you how to analyze an article, and then how to write. Start with Part 1 - Chapter 1 ("Starting with What Others Are Saying") and Chapter 2 ("The Art of Summarizing") this week, and then read the rest of the volume in subsequent weeks.

2. What is the Internet? What is Social Media? (Jan. 16)

The Internet is all around you, and impossible to ignore. But how much about that device in your hand do you really know and what it connects you to? This week we take a close look at the communications environment that surrounds us: the Internet, social media, and all of the supporting technologies that underlie it. We explore how it's all organized, define some of its central characteristics and then discuss what those characteristics might mean for how we communicate.

- **Required Readings**

- Bob Dormon. (2016) "How the Internet works: Submarine fiber, brains in jars, and coaxial cables," *Ars Technica*.
<https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2016/05/how-the-internet-works-submarine-cables-data-centres-last-mile/>
- Winseck, Dwayne. 2019. "Internet Infrastructure and the Persistent Myth of U.S. Hegemony." In *Information, Technology and Control in a Changing World: Understanding Power Structures in the 21st Century*, edited by Blayne Haggart, Kathryn Henne, and Natasha Tusikov, 93–120. International Political Economy Series. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14540-8_5.
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- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- "Introduction." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society.
- CBC Massey Lecture 1: [Love at that Device in Your Hand](#)
- [CBC Spark Episode 482](#): The Politics of Technology
- [CBC Spark Episode: Spark Summer Episode One](#): From Sea to Sky (especially the second half on undersea cables)
- TVO The Agenda: "[The End of the World Wide Web](#)" (30:06)
- The Urban, Infrastructural Geography Of 'The Cloud' by @alanwiig
<https://link.medium.com/PcsgFitiUab>.
- Bueger, Christian, and Tobias Liebetrau. 2021. "Protecting Hidden Infrastructure: The Security Politics of the Global Submarine Data Cable Network." *Contemporary Security Policy* 42 (3): 391–413.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2021.1907129>.
- Hoffmann, Stacie, Dominique Lazanski, and Emily Taylor. 2020. "Standardising the Splinternet: How China's Technical Standards Could Fragment the Internet." *Journal of Cyber Policy* 5 (2): 239–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23738871.2020.1805482>.
- Thorat, Dhanashree. 2019. "Colonial Topographies of Internet Infrastructure: The Sedimented and Linked Networks of the Telegraph and Submarine Fiber Optic Internet." *South Asian Review* 40 (3): 252–67.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2019.1599563>.

3. Surveillance Capitalism (Jan. 23)

Social media and most tech platforms today describe themselves in many different ways that highlight their fun and convenience (e.g., “All the world’s information at your fingertips.”). But deep down, their underlying business model is about monitoring as much data as they can extract from their users for purposes of targeted advertising. We are, in essence, the livestock for their data farms.

- **Required Readings**

- Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. “‘We Make Them Dance’: Surveillance Capitalism, the Rise of Instrumentarian Power, and the Threat to Human Rights.” In *Human Rights in the Age of Platforms*, edited by Rikke Frank Jørgensen. The MIT Press. <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.7551/mitpress/11304.001.0001>.
- Gustafson, Bruce. 2020. “‘Your Data’ Is a Myth.” *The Startup* (blog). July 22, 2020. <https://medium.com/swlh/your-data-is-a-myth-37997abcc82a>.

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- “Chapter One: The Market for our Minds.” RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society.
- CBC Massey Lecture 2: [The Market for Our Minds](#)
- “In Real Life” (IRL) Podcast Season 4 Episode 5: [“The Surveillance Economy”](#)
- Yeung, Karen. 2018. “Five Fears about Mass Predictive Personalization in an Age of Surveillance Capitalism.” *International Data Privacy Law* 8 (3): 258–69. <https://doi.org/10.1093/idpl/ipy020>.
- Wood, David Murakami, and Torin Monahan. 2019. “Editorial: Platform Surveillance.” *Surveillance & Society* 17 (1/2): 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v17i1/2.13237>.
- Huberman, Jenny. 2021. “Amazon Go, Surveillance Capitalism, and the Ideology of Convenience.” *Economic Anthropology* 8 (2): 337–49. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sea2.12211>.

4. To Consent or Not to Consent (Jan. 30)

We swipe them away on a daily basis like mosquitoes on a humid, summer day. But to what, exactly, are we consenting when we agree to the “terms of service” on our social media platforms and applications? This week, we explore this question in depth, and focus on the ways consent processes have been trivialized but with serious consequences for user’s privacy, security and property rights.

- **Required Readings**

- Lee, Crystal, and Jonathan Zong. 2019. "Consent Is Not an Ethical Rubber Stamp." *Slate*, August 30, 2019.
<https://slate.com/technology/2019/08/consent-facial-recognition-data-privacy-technology.html>.
- Bashir, Masooda, Carol Hayes, April D. Lambert, and Jay P. Kesan. 2015. "Online Privacy and Informed Consent: The Dilemma of Information Asymmetry." *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 52 (1): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pr2.2015.145052010043>.

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- CBC Massey Lecture #3: [Toxic Addiction Machines](#) (first half)
- Chapter Two "Toxic Addiction Machines." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society" (first half).
- Berinato, Scott. 2018. "Stop Thinking About Consent: It Isn't Possible and It Isn't Right." *Harvard Business Review*, September 24, 2018.
<https://hbr.org/2018/09/stop-thinking-about-consent-it-isnt-possible-and-it-isnt-right>.
- Custers, Bart, Francien Dechesne, Wolter Pieters, Bart Schermer, and Simone van der Hof. 2018. "Consent and Privacy." In *The Routledge Handbook of the Ethics of Consent*. Routledge.
<https://www-taylorfrancis-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781351028264-23/consent-privacy-bart-custers-francien-dechesne-wolter-pieters-bart-schermer-simone-van-der-hof>.
- Hanlon, Annmarie, and Karen Jones. 2023. "Ethical Concerns about Social Media Privacy Policies: Do Users Have the Ability to Comprehend Their Consent Actions?" *Journal of Strategic Marketing*: 1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2023.2232817>.
- Murdoch, Blake. 2021. "Privacy and Artificial Intelligence: Challenges for Protecting Health Information in a New Era." *BMC Medical Ethics* 22 (1): 122.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-021-00687-3>.

5. Social Media Addiction and Behavioral Sciences (Feb. 6)

You know the feeling: *you panic when you can't find your device*. In order to capture and retain user's interests, social media platforms and application designers make our devices and applications as compelling as possible. These design features tap into our cognitive traits and instincts, borrowing from behavioral psychology and other large-scale experiments. But at what cost?

- **Required Readings**

- Richtel, Matt. 2023. "Is Social Media Addictive? Here's What the Science Says." *The New York Times*, October 25, 2023, sec. Health. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/25/health/social-media-addiction.html>.
- Philipp Lorenz-Spreen, Stephan Lewandowsky, Cass R. Sunstein & Ralph Hertwig, How behavioural sciences can promote truth, autonomy and democratic discourse online, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2020), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-020-0889-7>.

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- CBC Massey Lecture #3: [Toxic Addiction Machines](#) (second half)
- Chapter Two "Toxic Addiction Machines." RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society" (middle parts of chapter).
- Baughan, Amanda. 2021. "It's Not Just Bad Behavior – Why Social Media Design Makes It Hard to Have Constructive Disagreements Online." *The Conversation* (blog). July 7, 2021. <http://theconversation.com/its-not-just-bad-behavior-why-social-media-design-makes-it-hard-to-have-constructive-disagreements-online-161337>.
- Guess, Andrew M., Neil Malhotra, Jennifer Pan, Pablo Barberá, Hunt Allcott, Taylor Brown, Adriana Crespo-Tenorio, et al. 2023. "How Do Social Media Feed Algorithms Affect Attitudes and Behavior in an Election Campaign?" *Science* 381 (6656): 398–404. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abp9364>.
- Saura, José Ramón, Daniel Palacios-Marqués, and Agustín Iturricha-Fernández. 2021. "Ethical Design in Social Media: Assessing the Main Performance Measurements of User Online Behavior Modification." *Journal of Business Research* 129 (May): 271–81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.001>.
- Bhargava, Vikram R., and Manuel Velasquez. 2021. "Ethics of the Attention Economy: The Problem of Social Media Addiction." *Business Ethics Quarterly* 31 (3): 321–59. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2020.32>.

6. Misinformation, Disinformation, Subversion, Dark PR (Feb. 13)

An ecosystem that is designed to promote extreme, sensational, and emotional content turns out to be the ideal environment for those who wish to undermine accountability, sow division, and seed chaos. This week, we examine how social media has become a giant "disinformation laboratory" for influence and subversion operations, and a burgeoning "dark PR" marketplace that knows no boundaries.

- **Required Readings**

- Woolley, Samuel C. 2022. "Digital Propaganda: The Power of Influencers." *Journal of Democracy* 33 (3): 115–29.

- Ethan Zuckerman. “When the internet becomes unknowable,” (November 2, 2023). Prospect.
<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/ideas/technology/63752/when-internet-becomes-unknowable-social-media-tools>

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- Chapter Two “Toxic Addiction Machines.” RESET: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society” (final part of the chapter).
- Seitz, Amanda, Eric Tucker, and Mike Catalini. 2022. “How China’s TikTok, Facebook Influencers Push Propaganda.” *AP News*, March 30, 2022.
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- Fisher, Max. 2021. “Disinformation for Hire, a Shadow Industry, Is Quietly Booming.” *The New York Times*, July 25, 2021, sec. World.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/25/world/europe/disinformation-social-media.html>.
- Brustein, Joshua. 2020. “Facebook Prepares for Wave of Influencer Marketing in Politics.” *Bloomberg.Com*, February 14, 2020.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-14/facebook-tackles-influencer-marketing-campaigns-in-politics>.
- Joseff, Katie, and Samuel Wooley. 2023. “Social Media Influencers and the 2020 U.S. Election: Paying ‘Regular People’ for Digital Campaign Communication.” Austin, Texas: Center for Media Engagement - The University of Texas at Austin.
<https://mediaengagement.org/research/social-media-influencers-and-the-2020-election/>.
- Ong, Jonathan Corpus, and Ross Tapsell. 2022. “Demystifying Disinformation Shadow Economies: Fake News Work Models in Indonesia and the Philippines.” *Asian Journal of Communication* 32 (3): 251–67.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2021.1971270>.
- Gaw, Fatima, Jon B. A. Bunquin, Samuel I. Cabbuag, Jose M. H. Lanuza, Noreen H. Sapalo, and Al-Habbyel B. Yusoph. 2023. “Political Economy of Covert Influence Operations in the 2022 Philippine Elections.” *Internews*.
<https://internews.org/resource/political-economy-of-covert-influence-operations-in-the-2022-philippine-elections/>.

7. Targeted Digital Espionage (Feb. 27)

It was conventional wisdom to believe that social media and the Internet would empower civil society and bring about liberalization and democratization. It turns out that an ecosystem that is highly insecure, invasive by design, and poorly

regulated is an autocrat's best friend. Using sophisticated and readily available surveillance technologies, nation-state intelligence and security services, and even large unethical corporations, can organize far-reaching targeted digital espionage campaigns against their adversaries -- often with lethal consequences for victims.

- **Required Readings**

- Ní Aoláin, Fionnuala, and Adriana Edmeades Jones. 2023. "Spyware Out of the Shadows: The Need for A New International Regulatory Approach." *Just Security* (blog). May 16, 2023.
<https://www.justsecurity.org/86558/spyware-out-of-the-shadows-the-need-for-a-new-international-regulatory-approach/>.
- Deibert, Ronald J. "The Autocrat in Your iPhone." *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2022.
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/autocrat-in-your-iphone-mercenary-spyware-ronald-deibert>.

- **Recommended Readings and Other Materials**

- CBC Massey Lecture 4: [A Great Leap Forward ... For the Abuse of Power](#).
- RESET, "A Great Leap Forward for the Abuse of Power," (Chapter 3 - first half).
- Kitroeff, Natalie, and Ronen Bergman. 2023. "How Mexico Became the Biggest User of the World's Most Notorious Spy Tool." *The New York Times*, April 18, 2023, sec. World.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/18/world/americas/pegasus-spyware-mexico.html>.
- Allen, Nathaniel, and Matthew La Lime. n.d. "How Digital Espionage Tools Exacerbate Authoritarianism across Africa." *Brookings* (blog). Accessed November 10, 2023.
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- Deibert, Ronald. 2022. "Protecting Society From Surveillance Spyware." *Issues in Science and Technology* (blog). January 19, 2022.
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<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/04/25/how-democracies-spy-on-their-citizens>.
- Deibert, Ronald J. 2022. "Subversion Inc: The Age of Private Espionage." *Journal of Democracy* 33 (2): 28–44.
<https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1353/jod.2022.0016>.

- Kotliar, Dan M., and Elinor Carmi. 2023. "Keeping Pegasus on the Wing: Legitimizing Cyber Espionage." *Information, Communication & Society*, no. 0: 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.2245873>.

8. China's Social Credit and Information Control Regime (Mar. 5)

Early in the Internet's history, many predicted the technology would hamstring authoritarian regimes. China's information control regime defies these expectations, showing how censorship and surveillance of social media can be combined with profitable IT innovation. It also gives us a glimpse of what the combination of "Big Data" and "Big Brother" might look like in an environment largely absent of the type of safeguards that protect citizens against abuse of state power.

● Required Readings

- Ahmed, S., & Weber, S. (2018). China's long game in techno-nationalism. *First Monday*, 23(5). Retrieved from <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/8085/7209>
- Lam, Tong. 2022. "The People's Algorithms: Social Credits and the Rise of China's Big (Br)Other." In *The New Politics of Numbers: Utopia, Evidence and Democracy*, edited by Andrea Mennicken and Robert Salais, 71–95. Executive Politics and Governance. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78201-6_3.

● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- RESET, "A Great Leap Forward," (Chapter 3, middle section).
- [CBC Spark 465](#): Open / Closed
- Video: "Social Credit: China's Digital Dystopia In The Making" documentary (27:12), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evBzPwCdeHI>
- Cheung, Anne S. Y., and Yongxi Chen. 2022. "From Datafication to Data State: Making Sense of China's Social Credit System and Its Implications." *Law & Social Inquiry* 47 (4): 1137–71. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2021.56>.
- Engelmann, Severin, Mo Chen, Lorenz Dang, and Jens Grossklags. 2021. "Blacklists and Redlists in the Chinese Social Credit System: Diversity, Flexibility, and Comprehensiveness." In *Proceedings of the 2021 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society*, 78–88. AIES '21. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3461702.3462535>.
- Ding, Xiaodong, and Dale Yuhao Zhong. 2021. "Rethinking China's Social Credit System: A Long Road to Establishing Trust in Chinese Society." *Journal of Contemporary China* 30 (130): 630–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1852738>.

9. Superpower Policing (Mar. 12)

One of the unexpected outcomes of the “information revolution” and the development of social media has been the way it has quickly transformed the practice of law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies now have access to an astonishing array of surveillance platforms, services, and data feeds that even a decade ago was the stuff of science fiction. These new technical capabilities are contributing to a “great leap forward” in policing practices, but largely without accompanying legal safeguards to prevent the abuse of power. Absent the latter, these changes threaten to deepen and amplify existing prejudices and biases around local law enforcement practices -- particularly, forms of racialized policing.

● Required Readings

- Konikoff, Daniel, and Akwasi Owusu-Bempah. 2019. “Big Data and Criminal Justice – What Canadians Need to Know.” Broadbent Institute.
https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/big_data.
- Ugwudike, Pamela. 2023. “Chapter 14: Algorithms, Policing, and Race: Insights from Decolonial and Critical Algorithm Studies.” In *The Routledge International Handbook on Decolonizing Justice*, edited by Chris Cunneen, Antje Deckert, Amanda Porter, Juan Tauri, and Robert Webb. Taylor & Francis.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003176619>.
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● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- CBC Massey Lecture 4: [A Great Leap Forward ... For the Abuse of Power](#).
- [CBC Spark Episode 485](#): Oh, Algorithms!
- [CBC Spark Episode 480](#): Tech, surveillance and racism
- [CBC Spark Special Episode](#): Tech and Policing
- Podcast by Brave New Planet Episode 5: “[What Algorithms Say About You](#)” (1:14:50)
- TED Radio Hour on NPR by Joy Buolamwini: [How Do Biased Algorithms Damage Marginalized Communities?](#)(8:35)
- Bryan Carney, “You Have Zero Privacy,” Says an Internal RCMP Presentation. Inside the Force’s Web Spying Program,” The Tyee, 16 November 2020, retrieved from
<https://thetyee.ca/News/2020/11/16/You-Have-Zero-Privacy-RCMP-Web-Spying/>.
- Purves, Duncan. 2022. “Fairness in Algorithmic Policing.” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 8 (4): 741–61.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2021.39>.
- Ugwudike, Pamela. 2022. “AI Audits for Assessing Design Logics and Building Ethical Systems: The Case of Predictive Policing Algorithms.” *AI and Ethics* 2 (1): 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-021-00117-5>.

10. COVID-19 and the “New Normal” (Mar. 26)

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a sudden and far-reaching shift in societies around the world, including widespread “work-from-home” routines and an expansion of biomedical surveillance technologies. While much debate has focused on “contact tracing applications,” the latter are merely one example of a far-reaching and growing reliance on a vast array of biomedical surveillance and other digital technologies that are embedding themselves into our daily lives. As we embrace digital technologies as “lifelines” -- in some cases, out of necessity -- we are also embracing all of their biases and shortcomings.

Required Readings

- Eck, Kristine, and Sophia Hatz. 2020. “State Surveillance and the COVID-19 Crisis.” *Journal of Human Rights* 19 (5): 603–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2020.1816163>.
- Ronald J. Deibert, “The pandemic has made us even more dependent on a highly invasive technological ecosystem,” *The Globe and Mail*, (November 21, 2020),
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-pandemic-has-made-us-even-more-dependent-on-a-highly-invasive/>

Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- [CBC Spark Episode 476](#): The Pandemic and Internet Health
- LawBytes Podcast Episode 63 by Michael Geist: [Ontario Privacy Commissioner Patricia Kosseim on the COVID Alert App](#) (40:09)
- Poetranto, Irene, and Justin Lau. 2020. “COVID-19 and Its Impact on Marginalised Communities in Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines.” *DATACTIVE* (blog). July 14, 2020.
<https://data-activism.net/2020/07/bigdatasur-covid-covid-19-and-its-impact-on-marginalised-communities-in-singapore-south-korea-indonesia-and-the-philippines>
- Parsons, Christopher. (2020). “Contact tracing must not compound historical discrimination,” *Policy Options*, April 2020. Available at:
<https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/april-2020/contact-tracing-must-not-compound-historical-discrimination/>.
- Chiozza, Giacomo, and Jeffrey King. 2022. “The State of Human Rights in a (Post) COVID-19 World.” *Journal of Human Rights* 21 (3): 246–62.
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- Liu, Jun, and Hui Zhao. 2021. “Privacy Lost: Appropriating Surveillance Technology in China’s Fight against COVID-19.” *Business Horizons*, 64 (6): 743–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.07.004>.

- Tréguer, Félix. 2021. “The Virus of Surveillance: How the Covid-19 Pandemic Is Fuelling Technologies of Control.” *Political Anthropological Research on International Social Sciences (PARISS)* 2 (1): 16–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/25903276-bja10018>.

11. Burning Data: Ecological Impacts of Digital Electronics (Mar. 19)

Our consumption of social media and digital technologies feels clean, weightless and virtual. But it is far from it. Social media and our entire communications ecosystem cast a very large ecological footprint, from mining and manufacturing to energy consumption and waste. This digital ecological footprint is easily overlooked, or even concealed deliberately by the tech platforms.

● Required Readings

- Ensmenger, N. (2018). The environmental history of computing. *Technology and Culture*, 59(4), S7–S33. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2018.0148>
- Dhar, Payal. 2020. “The Carbon Impact of Artificial Intelligence.” *Nature Machine Intelligence* 2 (8): 423–25. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-020-0219-9>.

● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- CBC Massey Lecture 5: [Burning Data](#).
- RESET: Chapter 4, “Burning Data.”
- Video by France24: “[Indonesia's tin miners who slave away for the world's computer and phone giants](#)” (17:45)
- Video by Amnesty International: “[This is what we die for: Child labour in the DRC cobalt mines](#)” (8:02)
- Audio by Deutsche Welle: “[Is there such a thing as 'clean cobalt'?](#)” (29:55)
- Crawford, K., & Joler, V. (2018, September 7). Anatomy of an AI system: The Amazon Echo as an anatomical map of human labor, data and planetary resources. Retrieved from <https://anatomyof.ai/>.
- Pitron, Guillaume. 2021. “No Such Place as the Cloud.” *Le Monde Diplomatique*. November 1, 2021. <https://mondediplo.com/2021/11/09digital-waste>.
- Stokel-Walker, Chris. 2023. “TechScape: Turns out There’s Another Problem with AI – Its Environmental Toll.” *The Guardian*, August 1, 2023, sec. Technology. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/aug/01/techscape-environment-co-st-ai-artificial-intelligence>.
- “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: A guide to circular economies of digital devices (A preview),” Association for Progressive Communications, 16 November 2020, <https://www.apc.org/en/node/37022>.
- Cows, Josh, Andreas Tsamados, Mariarosaria Taddeo, and Luciano Floridi. 2023. “The AI Gambit: Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Combat Climate

Change—Opportunities, Challenges, and Recommendations.” *AI & SOCIETY* 38 (1): 283–307. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-021-01294-x>.

- Brevini, Benedetta. 2020. “Black Boxes, Not Green: Mythologizing Artificial Intelligence and Omitting the Environment.” *Big Data & Society* 7 (2): 2053951720935141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720935141>.

12. What to Do? (Apr. 2)

While the negative implications of social media and related technologies is now widely appreciated and acknowledged, there is less of a clear consensus about what to do about them. In this final week, we survey various proposals to reform or regulate social media and our entire communications ecosystem, and discuss the most promising of them. We also start to chart a viable path forward for how to implement them.

● Required Readings

- Andrew Marantz, “Why Facebook Can’t Fix Itself,” *The New Yorker*, 19 October 2019, Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/19/why-facebook-cant-fix-itself>
- Gregory, Sam. 2019. “Cameras Everywhere Revisited: How Digital Technologies and Social Media Aid and Inhibit Human Rights Documentation and Advocacy.” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 11 (2): 373–92. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huz022>.

● Recommended Readings and Other Materials

- RESET, Chapter Five, “Retreat, Reform, Restraint,”
- CBC Massey Lecture #6: [Retreat, Reform, Restraint](#).
- Douek, E. (2020). The Rise of Content Cartels. Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia, Retrieved from <https://knightcolumbia.org/content/the-rise-of-content-cartels>
- Pomerantsev, P. (2019). The Death of the Neutral Public Sphere. *The American Interest*. Retrieved from <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/09/18/the-death-of-the-neutral-public-sphere/>
- Benesch, Susan. 2020. “But Facebook’s Not a Country: How to Interpret Human Rights Law for Social Media Companies.” *Yale Journal on Regulation Bulletin* 38: 86–111.
- Land, Molly K., and Jay D. Aronson. 2020. “Human Rights and Technology: New Challenges for Justice and Accountability.” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 16 (September): 223–40. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3690635>.

- Zalnieriute, Monika, and Stefania Milan. 2019. "Internet Architecture and Human Rights: Beyond the Human Rights Gap." *Policy & Internet* 11 (1): 6–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.200>.
- Napoli, Philip M. 2019. "User Data as Public Resource: Implications for Social Media Regulation." *Policy & Internet* 11 (4): 439–59.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.216>.