

**City University of Hong Kong
Course Syllabus**

**offered by School of Creative Media
with effect from Semester A 2024/25**

Part I Course Overview

Course Title: Social Media Criticism: Technology, Aesthetics, and Culture

Course Code: SM5334

Course Duration: One semester

Credit Units: 3

Level: P5

Medium of Instruction: English

Medium of Assessment: English

Prerequisites:
(Course Code and Title) Nil

Precursors:
(Course Code and Title) Nil

Equivalent Courses:
(Course Code and Title) Nil

Exclusive Courses:
(Course Code and Title) Nil

Part II Course Details

1. Abstract

The ubiquity of social media has already consolidated in every aspect of contemporary everyday life, and most recently, social media has become synonymous with the different mediums of audio-visual mediums (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitch, Niconico and Bilibili) as opposed to the declining predominantly text-based mediums such as Twitter/X. In this course, students will be encouraged to overcome the binary of pessimistic/optimistic views on social media and study the emergence and evolution of audiovisual-based social media from the perspectives of technology (e.g. interface design, algorithm curation, and infrastructure of data streaming), aesthetics (this is not simply from the perspective of contemporary art but also the broader debates on the contemporary internet-native notions of aesthetics), culture (e.g. cultural analytics and communities of practice). The course does not presuppose that social media platforms represent a radical rupture from previous media; by contrast, it situates the study of audio-visual social media in a broader media history and theoretical lineage in studying music, television and cinema as well as their criticisms. As a course that builds upon the notion of medium-specificity, it also encourages student experimentation with the aforementioned technicalities of audio-visual social media platforms and practice medium-specific criticism. In a semester-long guided student project, the course's knowledge production is not in the traditional form of written essays, but through producing essayistic audio-visual works that formulate a critique of works and sub(cultures) on social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok (and beyond) within their own conventions of screen ecologies, socio-technics (e.g. editing conventions), and readymade materials—YouTube criticism is practised within the medium of YouTube, utilising both theoretical knowledge and practical know-how.

2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

(CILOs state what the student is expected to be able to do at the end of the course according to a given standard of performance.)

No.	CILOs	Weighting (if applicable)	Discovery-enriched curriculum related learning outcomes (please tick where appropriate)		
			A1	A2	A3
1.	Account for the medium-specificity of audio-visual-dominant social media platforms across the digital media landscape today and also learn the connection to a broader media history		✓	✓	
2.	Describe the influence of social media on our contemporary perceptions of technology, aesthetics, and culture		✓	✓	
3.	Explain diverse media theories related to social media and link them in explaining emergent socioeconomic, aesthetic, and cultural phenomena			✓	✓
4.	Build their social media criticism within the medium of audio-visual social media through both theoretical and practical/technical knowledge			✓	✓
5.	Learn new skills in techniques and technologies of audio-visual production embedded in the media ecology of social media		✓	✓	✓
6.	Turn the findings and insights of research into an elaborate audio-visual creative/artistic work		✓	✓	✓
		100%			

- A1: *Attitude*
Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.
- A2: *Ability*
Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.
- A3: *Accomplishments*
Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

3. Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

(LTAs designed to facilitate students' achievement of the CILOs.)

LTA	Brief Description	CILO No.						Hours/week (if applicable)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Lectures	-Lectures on relevant media theories and media criticism as well as broader academic debates on social media	✓	✓	✓	✓			
In-class discussions	-Reading relevant theories and critical analysis to find theoretical Gaps and identify connections with societal issues/debates	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Seminars/ Workshops	-Seminars on a wide range of research methods and theory-driven approaches to understanding the technology, aesthetics, and culture of social media -Students present their step-by-step progress of formulating an individual media criticism project: from the inception of an idea around a specific topic, to a plan or a script of executing the audio-visual work, to concrete issues encountered in the making of the work.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Individual/ Group project	-Semester-long media criticism project with an audio-visual creative or artistic work				✓	✓	✓	

4. Assessment Tasks/Activities (ATs)

(ATs are designed to assess how well the students achieve the CILOs.)

Assessment Tasks/Activities	CILO No.						Weighting	Remarks
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Continuous Assessment: 100%								
-Participation in in-class discussion	✓	✓	✓	✓			10 %	
-Written reactions to readings	✓	✓	✓	✓			20 %	
-In-class presentations proposing a plan or a script for the individual or group media criticism project				✓	✓	✓	20 %	
- Semester-long individual or group media criticism project with an audio-visual creative or artistic work				✓	✓	✓	50 %	
Examination: 0% (duration: , if applicable)								
							100%	

5. Assessment Rubrics

(Grading of student achievements is based on student performance in assessment tasks/activities with the following rubrics.)

Applicable to students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter

Assessment Task	Criterion	Excellent (A+, A, A-)	Good (B+, B, B-)	Fair (C+, C, C-)	Marginal (D)	Failure (F)
1. Participation in In-Class Discussion	This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre-class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to his/her peer members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate class discussion and comment on other points • In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials • Interpret others' views with an open mind and ready to negotiate • Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and synthesis with informed views • Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class discussion and comment on other points • Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials • Interpret opinions effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attentive in-class participation, listening with comprehension, but only infrequently contributing • Adequate pre-class preparation but little familiarity with peer reports and other materials • Fair ability in interpreting opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmotivated to participate in class discussion or comment on other people's views • Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials • Poor ability in interpreting opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwilling to participate in class discussion and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher • No pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials • Minimal ability in interpreting opinions

2. Written Reaction to Readings	This assessment will grade on rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment. The threshold of ‘discovery’ lies in a student’s ability to negotiate a position that is informed, defensible, and standing on personal insight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich content, excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources • Rigorous organization, coherent structure, systematic composition • Precision in argument, well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing literature • Readiness to respond to peer opinion and other views initiated in class discussion • Discussion shed light on new dimensions of the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerable content, good ability to integrate various resources based on demand • Reasonable organization with balanced structure and composition • Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly differentiated issues, ability to interpret opinions independently • Sufficient responses to peer comments to sustain a discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources • Fair organization with adequate structure and composition • Relevant points made to the subject matter in question • Ability to respond to other statements and engage in class discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak content, limited use of resources • Poor organization, structure and composition • Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions • Ability to respond to other comments in simple terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources • No organization, structure or/and composition • Irrelevant points to the subject matter, no ability to interpret opinions • Fail to respond to other comments
3. Individual or Group Presentation – proposing a work of social media criticism	This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation as well as the feasibility of the proposed project. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation identifying a specific topic that they are interested in. Students should also show a feasible plan for an audio-visual creative or artistic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich, informative content, excellent grasp of the material with in-depth and extensive knowledge of the subject matter • Rigorous organization, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate content with firm grasp of the material that informs the audience on a subject matter • Reasonable organization, balanced structure and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate content with comprehensive grasp of the material demonstrating basic knowledge of the subject matter • Fair organization, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak content, loose grasp of the general ideas with some knowledge of the subject matter • Poor organization, structure and composition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate content, fail to identify the general ideas with knowledge of the subject matter • No organization, structure or/and composition

		<p>coherent structure, and systematic exposition with a strong sense of narrative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior presentation skills: distinct pronunciation, fluent expression and appropriate diction, exact time-management • Critical analysis with insightful comments opening up new issues, or suggesting the ability to theorize 	<p>composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good verbal communication: comprehensible pronunciation, fluent expression and diction, fair time-management 	<p>weak structure and composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair presentation skills: acceptable pronunciation, expression and diction, fair time-management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, poor time-management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, minimal time-management
<p>4. Media criticism in the form of an individual or group audio-visual creative or artistic work</p>	<p>Students should demonstrate ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up argument and analysis in the form of an individual or group audio-visual creative or artistic work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent grasp of materials, ability to explain key concepts, assumptions, and debates, demonstrating sound knowledge of the field • Rich content, exceptional ability to integrate various resources into primary and secondary levels based on demand; • Design and conduct research which is firmly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm grasp of materials, ability to explain key concepts and assumptions • Adequate content, strong ability to integrate various resources into primary and secondary levels based on demand • Design and conduct research which is built on thorough knowledge of existing theoretical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive grasp of materials, able to explain key concepts • Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources into primary and secondary levels based on demand • Design and conduct research which is built on knowledge of theoretical frameworks • Appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose grasp of materials, cannot explain key concepts • Weak content, with primary and secondary levels • Design and conduct research which is appropriate for the research objective • Marginal judgments about existing research • Poor ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor grasp of materials • Inadequate content, without primary and secondary levels • Fail to design and conduct research which is appropriate for the research objective • Fail to make reasonable judgments about existing research • Fail to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and

		<p>built on thorough knowledge of existing theoretical frameworks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluative judgments about existing research and demonstrate application of strong critical thinking skills • Strong ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools • Strong organization of research findings with effective organization and procedural clarity at the same time demonstrating the importance of the process • Insightful suggestion of how the research findings may lead to future research 	<p>frameworks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate judgments about existing research and demonstrate application of critical thinking skills • Ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools 	<p>judgments about existing research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools 	<p>theories and analytical tools</p>	<p>analytical tools</p>
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Applicable to students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024

Assessment Task	Criterion	Excellent (A+, A, A-)	Good (B+, B)	Marginal (B-, C+, C)	Failure (F)
1. Participation in In-Class Discussion	This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the seminar sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre-class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to their peer members.	Excellent participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions.	Good participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions.	Marginal participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions.	Lack of participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions.
2. Written Reaction to Readings	This assessment will grade on rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment. The threshold of 'discovery' lies in a student's ability to negotiate a position that is informed, defensible, and standing on personal insight.	Excellent rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.	Good rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.	Marginal rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.	Lack of rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.
3. Individual or Group Presentation – proposing a work of social media criticism	This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation as well as the feasibility of the proposed project. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation identifying a specific topic that they are interested in. Students should also show a feasible plan for an audio-visual creative or artistic work.	Excellent rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.	Good rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.	Marginal rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.	Lack of rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment.

<p>4. Media criticism in the form of an individual or group audio-visual creative or artistic work</p>	<p>Students should demonstrate ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up argument and analysis in the form of an audio-visual creative or artistic work.</p>	<p>Excellent ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up analysis, and create an audio-visual form criticism</p>	<p>Good ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up analysis, and create an audio-visual form criticism</p>	<p>Marginal ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up analysis, and create an audio-visual form criticism</p>	<p>Lack of ability to apply knowledge and skills to undertake independent research, build up analysis, and create an audio-visual form criticism</p>
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Part III Other Information (more details can be provided separately in the teaching plan)

1. Keyword Syllabus

(An indication of the key topics of the course.)

Social media; Media Criticism; Media Studies; Aesthetic Theory; Philosophy of Media; Digital Sociology; Digital Anthropology; Cultural Analytics; Online Video; Video Theory; Content Curation.

2. Reading List

2.1 Compulsory Readings

(Compulsory readings can include books, book chapters, or journal/magazine articles. There are also collections of e-books, e-journals available from the CityU Library.)

1.	Abidin, C. (forthcoming, 2022). <i>TikTok and Youth Cultures</i> . Emerald Publishing.
2.	Azuma, H. (2001), <i>Otaku: Japan's Database Animals</i> , Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
3.	Burgess, J. & Green, J. (2009). <i>YouTube: online video and participatory culture</i> . Malden, MA: Polity Press.
4.	Bucer, T. (2017). The algorithmic imaginary: Exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms. <i>Information Communication and Society</i> , 20(1), 30–44.
5.	Ernst, W. (2013). <i>Digital Memory and the Archive</i> . Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
6.	Galloway, A. (2012). <i>The Interface Effect</i> . Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
7.	Fyfe, Greer & Ross, Miriam (2015), <i>How-to Video Essays</i> , https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/resources/how-to-guides/how-to-video-essays-by-greer-fyfe-and-miriam-ross/
8.	Juhasz, A. (2011), <i>Learning from YouTube</i> , Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/index.php
9.	Karppi, T. (2018). <i>Disconnect: Facebook's affective bonds</i> . University of Minnesota Press.
10.	Keathley, Mittel, & Grant (2019), <i>The Videographic Essay: Practice and Pedagogy</i> , http://videographicessay.org/works/videographic-essay/index
11.	Li, J. (2017). <i>The Interface Affect of a Contact Zone: Danmaku on Video-Streaming Platforms</i> . <i>Asiascape: Digital Asia</i> , 4, 233–256.
12.	Liu, K. Z. (2020). From invisible to visible: Kwai and the hierarchical cultural order of China's cyberspace. <i>Global Media and China</i> , 5(1), 69–85.
13.	Manovich, Lev (2020), <i>Cultural Analytics</i> , Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
14.	Neves, Joshua & Sarkar, Bhaskar. (2017). <i>Asian Video Cultures</i> , Durham: Duke University Press.
15.	Paasonen, S. (2021). <i>Dependent, Distracted, Bored: Affective Formations in Networked Media</i> . MIT Press.
16.	Pettman, D. (2015). <i>Infinite Distraction</i> . Polity.
17.	Snickars, P. & Vonderau, P. (2009), <i>The YouTube Reader</i> . New York: Columbia University Press.
18.	Zhang, G. (2021), "Richang: An Affect-Inflected Ethnography of Chinese Livestreams", <i>Asiascape: Digital Asia</i> , 8:1-2, pp.15–42.

2.2 Additional Readings

(Additional references for students to learn to expand their knowledge about the subject.)

1.	Flusser, V. (2011). <i>Into the Universe of Technical Images</i> . Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
2.	Kember, S. and Zylinska, J. (2012). <i>Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process</i> . Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
3.	Kittler, F. (1997). There is No Software. in <i>Literature, Media, Information Systems</i> , J. Johnston (ed.), New York, NY: Routledge, pp.147-155.

4.	Shaviro, S. (2010), <i>Post Cinematic Affect</i> , Winchester, UK: O-Books.
5.	Treske, A. (2015). <i>Video Theory: Online Video Aesthetics or the Afterlife of Video</i> . Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript.