



香港中文大學  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Department of English  
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Shatin, NT, Hong Kong

## ENGE 3960 Digital Literacy as Social Practice

**First Term** September to December 2020

**Tuesdays**

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Consultations FKH325 by appointment

Recognizing how technology has dramatically revolutionized the way we work, communicate and interact with one another, this course examines how new and continually evolving digital literacies have become critical for learners to participate agentively in the new social order. As they move fluidly across online and offline spaces, how they negotiate their linguistic and semiotic resources shape the extent to which they are able to construct their identities, acquire knowledge, and expand their social networks. Drawing on New Literacy Studies, this course demonstrates how digital literacy is not a neutral, technical competence, and that diverse digital practices develop within broader social, political, and economic contexts. The design and algorithmic processes of various digital tools and platforms serve various ideological purposes, shaping new forms of inequality and social fragmentation. To respond to these issues, this course discusses how learners need to learn both functional and critical digital literacies to navigate and transform an increasingly technologized world.

### Key Topics

- technology and the disruption of industries
- social media and the construction of identities and networks
- production and consumption of information online
- sociotechnical structures and algorithmic processes
- contexts and cultures-of-use
- surveillance and issues of privacy
- digital equity and social fragmentation
- race, gender and social class online
- functional and critical digital literacies

### Learning Outcome

By the end of the course, students will have been able to:

- understand how technology has reshaped social, political, and economic contexts
- explore how social media constructs new modes of inclusion and exclusion
- develop strategies for identifying legitimate knowledge and forms of disinformation online

- examine the ideologies embedded in the design of digital tools and platforms and their cultures-of-use
- recognize how digital literacies range from the functional to the critical

### Format of Class Meetings

Lectures: 2 hours / week

Tutorials: 1 hour / week

### Learning activities

Apart from the presentation and discussion of course content, lectures will involve interactive tasks where you will engage with various digital platforms. Tutorials will involve answering discussion questions and evaluating the designs of these platforms. To perform these activities, you are expected to bring either a laptop, mobile phone, or tablet to class. You may be required to download some apps before class.

Lecture	Tutorial	Online discussion	Reading + Technology use	Preparing assessment tasks
In class	In class	Out class	Out class	Out class
2 hrs	1 hr	1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs
M	M	O	O	O

M = Mandatory O = Optional (but highly recommended)

**eLearning:** We will be using **Zoom** and **Blackboard** in this course to facilitate online discussions, share course resources (PDFs, videos, website links, etc.), make announcements, and submit course assignments.

### Required Readings

*All the readings are available through online access at the CUHK Library or open access journals.*

Bucher, T. (2018). Introduction: Programmed sociality. In *If...then: Algorithmic power and politics*, (p. 1-18). New York: Oxford University Press.

Dash, A. (2018). 12 things everyone should understand about tech. *Humane Tech*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/humane-tech/12-things-everyone-should-understand-about-tech-d158f5a26411>

Jones, R. (2016). Digital literacies. In E. Hinkle (ed.) *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*, (p. 286 – 298). New York: Routledge.

Lam, E. & Smirnov, N. (2017). Identity in mediated contexts of transnationalism and mobility. In S. Thorne & S. May (eds.) *Language, Education and Technology, Encyclopedia of Language and Education, vol. 9*, (p. 105-118). Switzerland: Springer.

- Lazer, D. et al. (2018). The science of fake news. *Science*, 359(6380), 1094-1096. Retrieved from <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6380/1094>
- Nadler, A., Crain, M. & Donovan, J. (2018). Weaponizing the digital influence machine: The political perils of online ad tech. *Data & Society*. Retrieved from <https://datasociety.net/output/weaponizing-the-digital-influence-machine/>
- Pangrazio, L. (2016). Reconceptualising critical digital literacy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37(2), 163-174.
- Pitcan, M., Marwick, A. & Boyd, D. (2018). Performing a vanilla self: Respectability politics, social class, and the digital world. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 23, 163-179.
- Postigo, H. (2016). The socio-technical architecture of digital labor: Converting play into YouTube money. *New Media & Society*, 18(2), 332-349.
- Warschauer, M. (2009). Digital literacy studies: Progress and prospects. In M. Baynham & M. Prinsloo (eds.), *The future of literacy studies*, (p. 123 -140). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

### Assessment

Requirement	Weight
Class and Online Participation	10%
Social Media Analysis	30%
Culture-of-use Analysis	30%
Critical Digital Literacy Project	30%

*Late submissions will be penalized.*

**Class and online participation.** Participation involves contributing to class discussions, exercises, and activities, in the classroom or on Zoom, in active and constructive ways. This also includes online forums in Blackboard, where you will be expected to share your own resources (e.g. links to online articles you have read on your own) and your thoughts about assigned readings.

*For each of the following tasks, you will be required to submit an **outline** that will be due **two weeks** before the task deadline. More detailed instructions for each task will be provided in class.*

**TASK 1 (Paper): Social media analysis.** (1000 - 1200 words). Choose two or three of the social media apps you use most frequently. Compare and contrast the way you

represent yourself on these platforms, the way you interact with others, and the linguistic and semiotic choices you make. What accounts for these differences? Your paper will be marked based on how you are able to generate insight regarding your social media practices by applying the ideas or theories from the reading assignments and class discussions, and by drawing on data from your own online interactions (e.g. your posts).

**TASK 2 (Blog): Cultures-of-use analysis.** (1000 – 1200 words) Drawing on data from We Are Social’s (2019) Hong Kong Report, identify two or three digital practices that are unique to Hong Kong. Create a publicly available blog that discusses how you think these cultures-of-use evolved, and how they are linked to specific material, economic, historical, or cultural realities. What are the social implications of these cultures-of-use? Invite people to respond to your blog. Your paper will be marked on how you are able to use ideas or constructs from the readings, class discussions, and existing research / data to generate insight regarding how certain technologies are used in Hong Kong.

**TASK 3 (Project): Critical digital literacy.** Identify an aspect of critical digital literacy you think fellow CUHK students should learn about. Choose one specific social media platform (e.g. Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, etc.), create and publish a series of original posts regarding this topic, and get other people to respond to these posts for two weeks. After this period, write a one-page report that provides the links to the posts and summarizes the strengths and areas for improvement of your social media strategies. Your project will be assessed based on the extent to which your posts reflected ideas and theories from the reading assignments and class discussions, how creatively and concisely you expressed them, and how well you were able to use social media strategies to engage with an intended audience.

## Schedule

Session	Topic	Content	Readings	Requirement Due
S1	What is this course about and what will we learn?	Introduction to the course and syllabus  Digital literacy: definition and dimensions	Jones, 2016	
S2	How is digital literacy a social practice?	An ideological model of digital literacy	Warschauer, 2009	
S3		Digital technology as a tool and as an industry	Dash, 2018	
S4	How are digital literacies evolving?	The performance of identities	Lam & Smirnov, 2017	<i>Task 1 Outline</i>
S5		The programming of sociality	Bucher, 2018	
S6		The production and consumption of knowledge	Lazer et al., 2018	<b>Task 1. Social</b>

				<b>Media Analysis</b>
S7		The new work order	Postigo, 2016	
S8		Film viewing and online discussion		<i>Task 2 Outline</i>
S9		Politics and civic engagement	Nadler et al. 2018	
S10		Race, class, and gender online	Pitcan, Marwick, & Boyd, 2018	<b>Task 2. Cultures-of-use Analysis</b>
S11	How can we develop more empowering digital literacies?	Critical digital literacy	Pangrazio, 2016	<i>Task 3 Outline</i>
S12		Course synthesis		<b>Task 3: Critical Digital Literacy Project</b>

### **Grade Descriptors**

**Grade A / Excellent / 4.0:** Outstanding performance on ALL learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would surpass the normal expectations at this level and typical of standards that may be common at higher levels of study. The 'A' is reserved for truly excellent work that exceeds the level expected for the majority of students and are expected to be achieved only by a small minority

**Grade A- / Very Good / 3.7:** Generally outstanding performance on ALMOST ALL learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would fully fulfill the normal expectations at this level and occasionally reaches standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

**Grade B+ / Good (Plus) / 3.3:** HIGH performance on all learning outcomes, OR HIGH performance on some learning outcomes which compensates WELL for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance. Demonstrates the ability to apply WELL the principles or skills learned in the course in a comprehensive manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level WELL.

**Grade B / Good / 3.0:** SUBSTANTIAL performance on all learning outcomes, OR SUBSTANTIAL performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance. Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a MORE

COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

**Grade B- / Good (Minus) / 2.7:** GOOD performance on all learning outcomes, OR GOOD performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance. Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

**Grade C+ / Adequate (Plus) / 2.3:** VERY ADEQUATE performance on the majority of learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a SOMEWHAT SUSTAINED manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

**Grade C / Adequate / 2.0:** ADEQUATE performance on the majority of learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to partially apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

**Grade C- / Adequate (Minus) / 1.7:** SOMEWHAT ADEQUATE performance on A NUMBER OF learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to SOMEWHAT apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the BARE basic requirement at this level.

**Grade D+ / Pass (Plus) / 1.3:** BARELY SATISFACTORY performance on A FEW learning outcomes. Addresses the task inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in some areas while responding minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

**Grade D / Pass / 1.0:** ALMOST BARELY SATISFACTORY performance on VERY FEW learning outcomes. Addresses the task inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in very few areas while responding very minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

**Grade F / Failure / 0.0:** Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements. Fails to address the task and likely does not understand what the task requires. In other words, the work completely misses the point.

### **Course Feedback and Evaluation**

At the end of the course, you will be asked to complete Course Evaluations for both the lectures and tutorials. This information is highly valued and is used to revise teaching methods, tasks, and content. During the term, you are also strongly encouraged to provide feedback on the course via email or meetings with the professor or tutors. Midway through the term, you will also be asked to provide feedback via a brief questionnaire on the course content, teaching methods, and tasks in order to determine if adjustments need to be made for the remainder of the term.

## Academic honesty

Each student is responsible for his or her conduct as it affects the university community. Academic dishonesty, in whatever form, is ultimately destructive of the values of the CUHK and is unfair and discouraging to the majority of students who pursue their studies honestly. Scholarly integrity is required of all members of the university. Details regarding CUHK policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations can be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. With each assignment, students will be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. Text-based assignments will need to be submitted to Veriguide, and the statement in the form of the receipt will be issued by the system.

### STATEMENT

I declare that the assignment here submitted is original except for source material explicitly acknowledged. I also acknowledge that I am aware of University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and of the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations, as contained in the website <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

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Signature

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Date

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Name

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Student ID

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Course code

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Course title