

Online Communication & Personal Relationships

CA 345 (3 credits)

Fall 2018

Mondays & Wednesdays, 4:00 – 5:15 pm

VILAS 4028

Instructor:

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, and by appointment

Course Overview

In recent decades, communication technology has become an essential tool for the management of personal relationships. People use online communication platforms (e.g., online dating, social network sites, mobile phones, discussion forums) to find romantic partners, maintain friendships, collaborate, or seek social support. This survey course will introduce students to the emerging body of scholarship on how, and to what effects, people use these technologies to manage personal relationships. Every week, we will examine a technological platform (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, online dating, online discussion forums) and discuss how relationship dynamics are shaped by this platform. For instance, how do people form impressions of others when communicating through purely textual media? In what ways do social network sites improve and hurt romantic relationships? How much do people lie in online dating profiles? Does the use of avatars in video games affect players' sense of identity?

We will approach these questions using a quantitative social science perspective. This means that we will read original research studies that (1) test and/or refine theories of social behavior in computer-mediated environments; and (2) use experiments, surveys, and content analyses as their methodologies. You are not required to have any prior knowledge on either theories or methods in the social sciences. An important objective of this course is to teach you how to think like a social scientist and to apply this knowledge to online relationships.

Specific Learning Objectives

- Identify features of technology that affect people's ability to express themselves and to manage relationships
- Understand how people adapt to technology and use it for social purposes
- Become knowledgeable of the latest research findings in the area of online relationships
- Become conversant with the main theories and models in the field of computer-mediated communication
- Get a basic grasp of the scientific method and of theory development in the social sciences
- Learn how to read empirical articles in the social sciences

Required Readings

There is no textbook for this class. All readings are available on Canvas (<http://canvas.wisc.edu>).

Course Organization

Lectures

Twice a week, I will deliver a lecture on important theories, concepts, and research findings in the field of computer-mediated communication. The purpose of lectures is to clarify and supplement the readings, not to replace them. Please complete all assigned readings prior to lecture and be prepared to discuss them!

Each of my lectures will be accompanied by PowerPoint slides. To help you follow along and study for exams, I will post my slides on Canvas prior to each lecture. Please feel free to download them on your computer or bring print-outs to class.

Office Hours

If you didn't have the opportunity to address your questions in lecture, or if you are experiencing issues that require one-on-one help, you are invited to come to office hours. It is best to seek assistance before exams and assignments, and generally as soon as you feel that you are struggling. You are welcome to attend my office hours. I am happy to help.

Graded Work

Grade Breakdown

2 exams: 2 x 30% each = 60%

3 papers: 3 x 10% each = 30%

5 "in the news/in pop culture" assignments: 5 x 1% = 5%

Participation: 5%

Extra-credit: 3%

Exams. Two non-cumulative exams will be administered during lecture time (on Wednesday). Each exam will consist of a combination of multiple-choice, true/false, and short-answer questions, and will be based on both lectures and readings. On the Monday before each exam, I will organize an in-class review session. You will be invited to submit questions you would like addressed during the review.

Make-up exams will not be offered, except in cases of an unforeseen emergency. Appropriate documentation will be required to confirm the circumstances of the emergency. Please check the timing of the exams in the beginning of the semester. If you have a conflict that cannot be resolved, please take this class a different semester.

Paper assignments. You will be required to complete 3 short papers in this class, each 2 pages long. Each paper assignment will ask you to engage in an online activity (for instance, lurk on an online social support group, or create a dating profile), describe it, and then connect it with theories and concepts covered in class.

I will assign a total of 5 papers throughout the semester (see schedule below). You get to choose which 3 of these you would like to submit. The paper assignments will be announced at the end of lecture on Wednesday and will be due exactly one week after they have been announced, on the following Wednesday at 11:59 pm. Your grader will return the graded papers in 1-2 weeks.

“In pop culture” assignments. This assignment will require you to find a news article, video (e.g., movie clip), or another pop culture artifact that illustrates the concepts covered in class. You are required to post this artifact along with a one-paragraph explanation of how it connects to course content. You are required to submit a total of 5 of these assignments on topics of your choosing. This assignment is due by 11:59 pm on the Sunday **before** the class to which your artifact refers.

This assignment is graded as **“pass/fail.”** As is the case with article reports, you will not be able to make up a “fail” grade by submitting a substitute artifact. The grader will only grade the first 5 artifacts you submit.

Participation/Attendance. You are required to participate actively and thoughtfully in lecture. This involves asking and answering questions, volunteering your opinions, and generally engaging with your classmates and instructors. To earn full participation credits, you should speak up at least several times in lecture.

While formal attendance will not be taken in lecture, it is imperative that you attend lecture regularly if you are to do well in this course. This course will cover complex theories and research procedures, and you are unlikely to grasp them by simply completing the readings, without additional explanations and examples from me. Additionally, I frequently lecture about issues that are not covered in the readings. You are well advised to attend every single lecture.

During all interactions with your peers and the instructor and grader, you are expected to act respectfully and politely. Please listen actively and seek to understand others’ perspectives, particularly when they are different from yours. Please offer constructive criticism, and aim your criticism at specific arguments, not at the person making those arguments. Derogatory comments regarding race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability are not acceptable.

Extra-credit. Students may earn up to 3 percentage points of extra credit in this course, by participating in research. A half of research participation corresponds to 0.5% point added to your final score in the class. A detailed student guide to accessing studies via SONA is posted on the course website. The SONA site, which will be available for student log in starting September 18th, is <http://wisc-commarts.sona-systems.com>. Address all questions to Alanna Peebles, the SONA Administrator, at apeebles@wisc.edu.

Please note that the majority of research studies offered through SONA are not conducted by the teaching team of this course. Hence, we cannot guarantee that there will be enough

studies available for each student. If you want to receive your extra-credit, be sure to monitor the SONA website regularly and sign up for studies as soon as they become available.

Late Assignments

For all written work in this course (i.e., papers, “in the news/in pop culture” assignments), you are given a choice of submitting only a subset of all possible assignments. Given this flexibility, late assignments will not be accepted. If you cannot submit an assignment in time, choose another assignment to submit. This will require you to plan your time carefully. We recommend that you allow yourself leeway for unexpected circumstances (e.g., illness, accidents) by completing assignments early, when you have the time and have no conflicts. Simply planning on submitting the last possible assignments in this course (e.g., the last three assigned papers) is not recommended.

Grade Contestations

A grader will be grading all of your work. You are entitled to detailed, thoughtful and constructive feedback. If you believe the feedback you have received is inadequate, or there has been a mistake in grading, you must first contact the grader and try to resolve the problem. If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome, you may make a direct appeal to me. You must do so within 2 weeks from the date you received your grade. Your appeal must be written and must make a compelling case as to a higher or lower grade than the one assigned by the grader.

Grading Scale

All assignments and exams will be graded on a scale from 1 to 100. The following score to letter grade conversion will be used:

A	93 – 100%
AB	88 – 92.5%
B	83 – 87.5%
BC	78 – 82.5%
C	70 – 77.5%
D	60 – 69.5%
F	< 59.5%

(Additional) Course Policies

McBurney Students

If you are a McBurney student, you must identify yourself to me in the beginning of the semester and present your McBurney visa. I will gladly accommodate your needs. It will be your responsibility to contact me prior to every exam to make the necessary arrangements.

Incompletes

Incompletes will not be offered in this class. The only exception will be made if circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness, accident) prevent you from taking the last exam. To qualify for such an incomplete, you must (1) have completed all coursework except the last exam; (2) be in

good academic standing in this class (C average or above); and (3) provide appropriate documentation for your unforeseen circumstances.

Email

The grader and I are committed to giving you personalized attention and helping you with whatever issues arise in this class. However, since this is a large class, we request that you only email us with issues that require short answers (e.g., setting up an appointment). We will get back to you within 2 business days. All other inquiries should be addressed during office hours, or immediately before/after class. All questions relating to class material should be asked in lecture or during office hours.

Cell phones & Laptops

Out of consideration for your classmates, please turn off your cell phones at the beginning of class. Cell phone use during class will result in your dismissal from that class. You may use laptops only for class-related work. Please keep in mind that laptops can constitute an important source of distraction. Since a great deal of learning occurs by paying attention and participating in class, extraneous laptop use during class can impede your learning, hurt your grade, or force you to spend more of your free time catching up.

Academic integrity

You are required to abide by University of Wisconsin's code of academic integrity (<http://students.wisc.edu/doso/students>). While you are encouraged to collaborate with your peers and to draw upon relevant literature, any work that you submit for academic credit must be your own, written entirely in your own words (unless clearly marked as quotations and properly attributed to sources). You must at all cost avoid copying peers' work or cheating on exams. All cases of plagiarism will result in an automatic F in the assignment/exam and will be officially reported to the Dean of Students. There will be no warnings, no second chances, and no opportunities to rewrite.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sep 5): Welcome & Introduction

Topics: Course description; how to read an empirical article; technological determinism vs. social shaping of technology; technological features & affordances

No readings this week

Week 2 (Sep 10 & 12): Frameworks for understanding relationships online

Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in: Computer-mediated communication and relationships. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.) *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3rd ed., pp. 529-563). Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage.

Turner, L. H., & West, R. (2011). Theories of relational communication. In K. M. Galvin (Ed.), *Making connections: Reading in relational communication* (pp. 30-45). New York: Oxford University Press. *** Only review Uncertainty Reduction theory, Social Penetration theory, and Social Exchange theory.

Week 3 (Sep 17 & 19): Text-based media (email, text, IM)

PAPER ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE

Topics: Emotional communication, Deception

Hancock, J. T., Landrigan, C., & Silver, C. (2007). Expressing emotion in text-based communication. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human factors in computing systems (pp. 929-932). ACM Press.

Van Swol, L. M., Braun, M. T., & Kolb, M. R. (2015). Deception, detection, demeanor, and truth bias in face-to-face and computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research*, 42(8), 1116-1142.

Week 4 (Sep 24 & 26): Mobile media

Topics: Friendship development, maintenance

Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2007). Online communication and adolescent well-being: Testing the stimulation versus the displacement hypothesis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1169-1182.

Yang, C. C., Brown, B. B., & Braun, M. T. (2014). From Facebook to cell calls: Layers of electronic intimacy in college students' interpersonal relationships. *New Media & Society*, 16(1), 5-23.

Week 5 (Oct 1 & 3): Facebook part 1

Topic: Social capital, Narcissism

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*, 12, 1143-1168.

Choi, M., Panek, E. T., Nardis, Y., & Toma, C. L. (2015). When social media isn’t social: Friends’ responsiveness to narcissists on Facebook. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 77, 209-214.

Week 6 (Oct 8 & 10): Facebook part 2

PAPER ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE

Topic: Romantic relationships

Toma, C. L., & Choi, M. (2015). The couple who Facebooks together, stays together: Facebook self-presentation and relationship longevity among college-aged dating couples. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18, 367-372.

Marshall, T. C. (2012). Facebook surveillance of former romantic partners: Associations with postbreakup recovery and personal growth. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(10), 521-526.

Week 7 (Oct 15 & 17): Other SNSs (i.e., Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)

Topics: Effects of using SNSs

Bayer, J. B., Ellison, N. B., Schoenebeck, S. Y., & Falk, E. B. (2016). Sharing the small moments: Ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(7), 956-977.

Lup, K., Trub, L., & Rosenthal, L. (2015). Instagram# instasad?: exploring associations among instagram use, depressive symptoms, negative social comparison, and strangers followed. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18(5), 247-252.

Week 8 (Oct 22 & 24): Review & MIDTERM EXAM

Week 9 (Oct 29 & 31): Online dating part 1

PAPER ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE

Topic: Impression management

Toma, C. L., Hancock, J. T., & Ellison, N. B. (2008). Separating fact from fiction: An examination of deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(8), 1023-1036.

Ellison, N. B., Hancock, J. T., & Toma, C. L. (2012). Profile as promise: A framework for conceptualizing veracity in online dating self-presentations. *New Media & Society*, 14(1), 45-62.

Week 10 (Nov 5 & 7): Online dating part 2

Topic: Partner choice, success of online dating

D'Angelo, J. D., & Toma, C. L. (2017). There are plenty of fish in the sea: The effects of choice overload and reversibility on online daters' satisfaction with selected partners. *Media Psychology*, 1-27.

Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., Gonzaga, G. C., Ogburn, E. L., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2013). Marital satisfaction and break-ups differ across on-line and off-line meeting venues. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110, 10135-10140.

Week 11 (Nov 12 & 14): Discussion board/Online community

Topic: Social support

Tanis, M. (2008). What makes the internet a place to seek social support. In E. A. Konjin, S. Utz, M. Tanis, & S. B. Barnes (Eds.), *Mediated interpersonal communication* (290-308). New York: Routledge.

Week 12 (Nov 19): Online game

*No class on Nov 21, Thanksgiving Recess, **PAPER ASSIGNMENT #4 DUE**

Topic: Identity shift

Yee, N., Bailenson, J. N., & Ducheneaut, N. (2009). The Proteus effect: Implications of transformed digital self-representation on online and offline behavior. *Communication Research*, 36(2), 285-312.

Week 13 (Nov 26 & 28): Media ecology

Topic: Media selection in relationship contexts

O'sullivan, B. (2000). What you don't know won't hurt me: Impression management functions of communication channels in relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 26(3), 403-431.

Choi, M., & Toma, C. L. (2014). Social sharing through interpersonal media: Patterns and effects on emotional well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36, 530-541.

Week 14 (Dec 3 & 5): Virtual agents & Robots

Topic: Collaboration, Rapport

Mutlu, B. (2014). From tele-presence to tele-mobility: Exploring the space for robotic communication products. HCIC, 1-3.

+ To be determined.

Week 15 (Dec 10 & 12): Review & FINAL EXAM

PAPER ASSIGNMENT #5 DUE