

## Digital Culture(s)

### Course Description

This Digital Cultures course aims to give you a critical and practical approach to the web. In the process you will (1) explore, (2) code and (3) decode digital life. The course, along with the online resources available for you in the Moodle platform, will allow you to decode some of the major issues of our digital society by exploring its history, sociology, political science and the sociology of science and techniques. It will also involve conducting some practical exercises. These two drivers will allow us to implement the principal outcome of the course which is to produce a "digital exploration", this is conducting an investigation into a specific topic that you have defined and reporting your results digitally.

### Assessment criteria

#### 1. Participation (up to 1 point)

- You are expected to proactively engage during the course and to participate regularly to enrich the group discussions. The quality of your listening and your attention will also be taken into account.
- You can also participate "digitally" by sending articles, reflections, etc. to other students in the class in the class discussion groups (emails, google doc, etc.)
- In teams, you will present to your colleagues one of the resources proposed for each session (videos from Moodle, articles)

#### 2. Reflection note - individual (30%) – Deadline 11/10

For the 6th session, you will write a one-page reflection note of a scientific article, a book or an element of the course. This is to identify a fact, a concept or a theory that will be a useful driver for your digital exploration (more information below). In the note you provide a brief description of its content, explain the allusions and influences, highlight the relevant aspects, put it into context with other resources and events and expose your critical opinion.

The material to explore shall be chosen with the help of the teacher. It will be an article, extract or concept relevant to your exploration. The document will be sent to the teacher during session 6, but the topic of your grade and the choice of the support article will be proposed by the student and discussed with your teacher during session n ° 3 (per group exploration). It should be two pages maximum (800 words)

#### 3. Digital exploration (70%) – Deadline 08/11

- In groups of 3 or 4, you will conduct an investigation on a practice, a service, a company, etc. which represents a pressing issue: socially, economically or environmentally and it is related with digital uses, markets or environments. It can be a digital company, a new digital innovation practice in a company, or community. The access to research field is to be considered.

- The outcome of the research needs to be done in a digital format, either website, video, podcast, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram or any other digital support. Fonio, a SciencesPo tool will also be available. The storytelling of the support chosen is to be considered, the project should be readable for the audience to get the message you are willing to transmit.
- The project should be supported by a bibliographic and web research work, including presentation of the problem, methods (from the summary note– see below) and results obtained.
- This is an opportunity to show creativity, critical approach, team work, demonstration of your learning of the course and quality of the oral presentation.
- The criteria being evaluated are: Collective work, Subject approach, Methodology, Design of Delivery, Depth of Exploration

For the 4th session, each group will prepare a brief summary note of their digital exploration. **Deadline 27/09**  
These pages should include:

- The presentation of the subject chosen. What are the facts? Why is it important?
- Definition of the problem or issue you will investigate. The possible hypotheses or findings expected.
- The method or methods to be implemented to gather the information and the fieldwork projected: interviews, online survey, experimental protocols, online ethnography, participatory action research, exploring communities, a hybrid of methods... (at least two interviews to actors related to the topic will be demanded)
- The format and support expected.
- A bibliography proposal (part of it will be use for the reflection note)

## Workload and deadline summary

- The main focus of the workload will be on the project will need to be done collectively. The individual reflection notes and the brief summary are meant to be part of this work.
- For each session students will be required to watch videos or read articles. A bibliography for further reading will also be available. Sometimes you will be requested to download a program, which is meant to help you with the practical aspects of the course and assist you with the final project. Thank you for coming to class with a laptop (not tablet) charged, on which you will have previously configured the campus WIFI and installed the software requested for the course when required.
- A Google Drive will be available with the material of the group a “noticeboard” and a FAQ section.

## Deadlines summary

To do	Group / Individual	Deliverable	Deadline
Group constitution	Group	List of members	Wednesday 1/09
Summary of digital exploration	Group	3 pages explanation	Monday 27/09
Reflection note	Individual	2 pages note	Monday 11/10
Digital exploration	Group	Online	Monday 08/11

## Session 1 – Introduction and presentation of the program (Monday 30/08)

### Breakdown of the session

- General presentation of the course.
- Brief roundtable presentation around the theme of digital culture
- Modules, objectives and assessment.
- Examples of digital explorations
- Discussion of possible topics around the general theme of selected press articles and posts.  
Teams organization (3-4 students per group)

## Session 2 – The science of innovations: Internet History and the web (Monday 13/09)

During this session we will plunge into the history of Internet and the web, aiming to understand what lies behind those omnipresent words. We will explore how it works and more importantly how its history and evolution has been impregnated by its social context, from the military research to the hippie philosophy; their communities and their ideologies (peace, love and ARPA). The web and the hyperlink enabled some of the dreams of collective intelligence. However, although some of those dreams materialized through bottom-up innovation and free software; others like the flourishing early web economy, crashed against the limits of an immature market during a dot-com bubble.

### Breakdown of the session

- Presentation of the videos 2 and 3 by Team 1 (10 minutes).
- Presentation of the videos 4 and 5 by Team 2 (10 minutes).
- Collective discussion on the history of internet and on how politics and society have impacted the developing of new technologies.
- Presentation on the web and language codes.
- The naked code: observing, exploring and modifying HTML.
- Work in teams about the topic chosen. Thinking and debating in teams about the sociotechnical history related to the topic you might chose. What tensions might be at the roots of the question? How society is impacting or being impacted by it?

**To prepare the session.** Please make sure you have an updated version of Chrome or Safari browser and watch the videos 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the session from Moodle [The ARPA and the decentralized network](#), [Co-operation and Hackers](#) and [The hippie contribution to the formation of digital culture](#) and [Network and first online communities](#).

## Session 3 – Decode > Explorations and research methodology (Monday 20/09)

During this session we will work on shaping the topics for the explorations and reflect on the different digital scoring instrument and valuation tools embedded in our everyday life. From likes or followers to evaluation tools, surveys and the quantified self. Reflecting on what do they respond: trust, accountability needs, standardization, other? What might be happening in the off-line world that is not recorded by digital devices and how it is affected by those particular measures?

### Breakdown of the session

- Presentation of the article '*Counting Clicks: Quantification and Variation in Web Journalism in the United States and France*' by Team 3 (10 minutes)
- Presentation on the topic "the digital metrics society"
- Collective discussion on the different digital measuring instruments, scoring and valuation tools embedded in our everyday life.
- Exploring the code: presentation of Fonio tool and research resources for the realisation of the digital exploration.
- Team work on the projects. Working on the bibliography and proposed readings for the reflection note. 1 minute presentation by teams of the chosen subject.

**To prepare the session.** Watch the Youtube video of the Ryoji Ikeda artistic work "Data-verse" during the Venice Biennale 2019 <https://youtu.be/S-vSFDZGfF4> (11') and his introduction for the 2021 London exhibition at the Vinyl Factory <https://youtu.be/BmEz0nTI4qw> (2'). Read the article Christin, Angèle. 2018. '*Counting Clicks: Quantification and Variation in Web Journalism in the United States and France*'. *American Journal of Sociology* 123 (5): 1382–1415. <https://doi.org/10.1086/696137>. Download Zotero <https://www.zotero.org/> and the connector for your browser <https://www.zotero.org/download/connectors>

## Session 4 – Code > digital research methods (Monday 27/09)

During this session we will explore several tools that can help you to conduct the digital exploration. The final selection of resources will be determined by the project needs, time availability and the different levels of familiarity that students might have with tools in each group.

### Breakdown of the session

- Presentation of the subject summary and research methods by each team (3 minutes per group).
- Presentation of different online scraping, exploring and visualization tools. Practical exercises.
- Work in teams to on the project. Specific digital exploring tools can be recommended for each case to work with during the class.

**To prepare the session.** Prepare the 3-page summary of the digital exploration. Please make sure you bring a computer.

## **Session 5 – The public digital space (Monday 04/10)**

After having observed the development path of inventions from its creator's point of view in the 2<sup>nd</sup> section with the history of internet, we will now walk into the user's journey. We will approach the user as an individual that crafts its online identity; but also, as an individual that is part of a society being impacted by digital transformations. We will learn codes to decrypt the media, news and social media landscape, analyzing our role as content producers, consumers. Finally, we will look at the social mobilizations emerging from the digital public space and the counter action of gatekeepers, censorship and surveillance.

### **Breakdown of the session**

- Presentation of the article 'Meme Factory Cultures and Content Pivoting in Singapore and Malaysia during COVID-19' by Team 4 (10 min).
- Presentation on the public digital space, the strategic self and the evolution of the gatekeepers.
- Collective discussion on digital mobilization Arab spring, Occupy Wal street, Gamestop...
- Teams work. Thinking and debating in teams of how the topic chosen is impacting the social space, what social transformations it is driving. What have been or might be the impacts. What are the mechanisms being implemented and which strategies are being utilized by the public to interact (or counter act) with the digital scoring and measuring instruments?

**To prepare the session.** Read the article Abidin, Crystal. 2020. 'Meme Factory Cultures and Content Pivoting in Singapore and Malaysia during COVID-19'. Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review, July. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-031>.

*Facultative reading* Digital contact tracing apps: do they actually work? A review of early evidence <https://algorithmwatch.org/en/analysis-digital-contact-tracing-apps-2021/> and the pingdemic <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/57926014>

## **Session 6 – The platform economy - (Monday 11/10)**

During this session we will explore the digital economy. Markets, users and companies interact to provide services and assure their growth, they implement practices aiming for scaling gains and benefiting from positive externalities. We will dig into their business models and analyse how internet monopolies have transformed workforce and collective trust through ratings and suggestion algorithms.

### **Breakdown of the session**

- Presentation on the article ‘The Politics of Platforms’ by Team 5 (10 minutes)
- Presentation on the platform economy, scoring and digital labor
- Collective discussion on digital advertising and ratings
- Team work on projects: Thinking and debating in teams the business models related to the topic you are investigating. Which are the financial sources and the economic ties linked to the subject? How can they evolve and which diversions might need to be taken to ensure the economic viability of the concept?

**To prepare the session.** Reading the article Gillespie, Tarleton. 2010. ‘The Politics of “Platforms”’. *New Media & Society* 12 (3): 347–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738>. Finishing the one-page reflective note.

Facultative podcast: “Does Advertising Actually Work?” (Part 2: Digital) (Ep. 441)  
<https://freakonomics.com/podcast/advertising-part-2/>

Facultative reading “The Internet’s Original Sin,” *The Atlantic*, August 14, 2014: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/08/advertising-is-the-internets-original-sin/376041/>

## Session 7 – Big Data and Algorithms (Monday 18/10)

During this session we will try to decrypt the algorithms to understand some principles and use reading keys to inspect their biases, flaws and possibilities. We will dig into the different technologies surrounding us and dare to finally open the black box of algorithms

### Breakdown of the session

- Presentation of the video “ 2 and 3 by Team 6 (10 minutes).
- Presentation on Artificial intelligence and the competing technologies.
- Collective discussion on digital surveillance and the ethics of algorithms.
- Team work on projects: what is the role of big data on your topic. What are the risks or follow up aspects to be observed? This time will also be the time for us to discuss questions on the project before the final presentation.

**To prepare the session:** Watch the videos two and three videos of the Moodle from session 6 Big Data and Algorithms: “[Popularity and Authority](#)” and “[Reputation and prediction](#)” and read the article *Robotaxis: have Google and Amazon backed the wrong technology?* <https://www.ft.com/content/46ff4fe4-0ae6-4f68-902c-3fd14d294d72> (PDF available in GDrive)

## Session 8 – Projects presentation (Monday 25/10)

For this final session, the teams will present their projects. This will be the time for the groups to discover what their colleagues have done and also give some feedback on the work as well as comment the difficulties and discoveries experienced throughout the process.

Each team will have 10 minutes for the presentations.

Discussion and comment on the sessions

Feedback and debrief on the course.

**To prepare the session:** Prepare the presentation

**To validate the course:** The final version of the work must be sent by mail on Monday November 8<sup>th</sup>

## General Resources

- Cardon, Dominique. 2019. *Culture numérique*. Hors collection. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Baym (Nancy K.), *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, London, Polity, 2015.
- Beuscart (Jean-Samuel), Dagiral (Éric), Parasie (Sylvain), *Sociologie d'internet, Paris*, Armand Colin, 2016.
- Mau, Steffen. 2019. *The Metric Society: On the Quantification of the Social*. Cambridge, UK : Medford, MA: Polity Press.
- Gillespie, Tarleton. 2018. *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327186182\\_Custodians\\_of\\_the\\_internet\\_Platforms\\_content\\_moderation\\_and\\_the\\_hidden\\_decisions\\_that\\_shape\\_social\\_media](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327186182_Custodians_of_the_internet_Platforms_content_moderation_and_the_hidden_decisions_that_shape_social_media)
- Ethical Guidelines 3.0. Association of Internet Researchers <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>
- A TedTalk in You tube “Andrew Blum: What is the Internet, really?”,  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XE\\_FPEFpHt4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XE_FPEFpHt4)