# Sociology of Digital Media

# Prof. Nicoletta Vittadini

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

The course aims to provide students with a general sociological understanding of the relationship between the digital media system and the contemporary social context. At the end of the course, students will have acquired the conceptual and methodological tools useful to understand the processes of innovation taking place in the field of communication and the relations these have with the broader processes of social change. The course has the threefold objective of offering students the interpretative and critical tools for understanding (1) the characteristics of the current platform system on which the communication, circulation and production of knowledge within contemporary society is based and its development towards Web 4.0 and Artificial Intelligence (2) the emergence of social media, algorithmic media in society and their influence on social relations and culture, and, finally to (3) provide methodological tools for analysing the interpretation and use of digital media, also considering the use of data.

The first section (1) will analyse the platform society with its economic and cultural characteristics.

The second section (2) will illustrate the history of social media. (c) contemporary algorithmic media will be described. The role these forms of media play in the articulation of relational, consumption and construction of culture-building processes will be explored. Special emphasis will be placed on the issue of influence, as well as on potentially problematic matters such as fake news also in relation to companies.

The final section (3) will provide some basic methodological tools for the analysis of communicative strategy through digital media and social media in particular.

**Knowledge and understanding**. Through the analysis of cases and considered reading of scientific texts, the course will enable students to: interiorise the theoretical and methodological references of the sociological approach to the study of digital media; demonstrate a basic understanding of research applied to infrastructures and digital practices within the current social context.

**Ability to apply knowledge and understanding**. Students will learn to: analyse and question how new digital technologies fit into a broader historical trajectory; to connect and integrate knowledge with that offered by other disciplines, such as marketing; to evaluate in practical terms the usefulness of digital platforms.

**Independent judgement**. The study of this subject will enable students to: independently examine debates on digital media from a sociological perspective; critically assess the value and ethics aspects of how digital media is used.

**Communication skills.** Students will be asked to interact orally in the classroom through questions, exchanges with fellow students and writing short presentations. In addition, writing skills will be perfected through preparation for a written examination which requires summarising complex topics and fundamental sociological concepts.

**Learning ability**. Students’ learning ability will be stimulated by being asked to develop, update and explore their knowledge acquired in the classroom through individual work and study, autonomously and continuously. Students will also be asked to adopt a critical learning method capable of connecting theoretical skills and empirical analysis.

***COURSE CONTENT***

**1. Digital evolution of the media system**

1.1 Approach to the study of digital media

1.2 Platform society

1.5 Web 4.0 and AI

**2. Social media and algorithmic media**

2.1 The evolution of social media

2.3 Algorithmic media and new forms of content circulation

2.4 Social media influencers

2.6 Privacy and Fake news

**3. Methodological tools**

3.1 The evolution of web studies

3.2 Big Data and Deep Data

3.3 Analysis of communication strategy within social media

***READING LIST***

For attending students, the study material will be agreed upon in class with the lecturer. The lecturer will announce the detailed syllabus, the reading list and support material during the first lecture: all details will be available on Blackboard.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Traditional lectures in the classroom will be complemented by a series of classroom discussions and in-depth lectures. Group work will be produced and presented in the classroom and will be of value in the examination. Although attendance is not compulsory, it is recommended and implies active participation. A detailed programme including a calendar and all the teaching materials used during the course (the lecturer’s slides, reading, case studies, videos, etc.) will be available on the Blackboard platform.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

Students may choose between two different types of examination, depending on whether they decide to attend lectures regularly and take part in the group work and individual work during the course, or whether they decide not to attend.

The final examination will be written:

* For non-attending students the examination will consist of 11 closed questions and 3 open-ended questions.
* For attending students the examination will consist of 3 open-ended questions that will be counted with the coursework to form an average mark.

The final mark of the examination, out of thirty, will take into account the accuracy and relevance of the students’ answers, their ability to develop connections, the appropriateness of their language and the level of their personal contribution towards understanding topics of Sociology of Digital Media.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

There are no prerequisites for attending the course. However, it is hoped that interest and intellectual curiosity will fuel debates during lectures.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG or on the Faculty notice board.