

Essay Assignment #2: The Internet in Everyday Life**Due: Wednesday, 9 December – at the start of class (18:45).****Length: 3 - 4 page Analytical Essay plus Addendum**

According to the Internet World Statistics for 2014 Q2, the Internet has reached 45% of the world's population (over 3.2 billion of the more than seven billion people on the planet). In Europe, over 70% of the population has access to the Internet. For citizens in the European Union, that figure rises to 81%. (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>)

This assignment asks you to conduct *original qualitative research* among internet users as a means of testing claims about the impact and meaning of the Internet in the everyday lives of citizens.

To fulfill this assignment, you will need to complete each of the following steps:

ESSAY:

- 1) Choose ONE interactive **Web** site to investigate. This means a site that allows – and encourages -- users to post or upload as well as read material on it. An appropriate site might be a chat room, forum, message board, blog, wiki, political/advocacy site, gaming site, social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, dating site, etc.), or video streaming community site (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, etc.).
- 2) Choose **THREE** individuals to interview who use the site you've chosen. At least one of these individuals must be a media "producer" (e.g. active in posting original materials on-line. This person does NOT need to be the creator of the site!!!). Try to choose three individuals who differ from you as much as possible in terms of key demographic variables, such as age (either younger and/or older), education, gender, occupation (e.g. not students), etc.
- 3) Prepare for and conduct the interviews. You may conduct the interviews either face-to-face, by telephone, Skype, or on-line. If you choose to conduct face-to-face, telephone, Skype interviews, please ask permission to record them so that you will have a complete record of the interview content. (See below for suggested interview questions.)
- 4) Analyze the data you have gathered, identifying key ideas and assessing them according to the scholarship read in class. NOTE: it is important to conduct these interviews without a pre-conceived argument in mind. Listen to and reflect upon what the individuals you interviewed have to say about their experiences on-line. *Then* review the course readings and look for connections between ideas expressed in your interviews and arguments presented by media scholars.
- 5) **Write an analytical essay** in which you offer a clear and compelling argument, grounded in media scholarship/theory, concerning the impact and meaning of life on-line. *Your argument may either support OR challenge ideas presented by media scholars.* Offer evidence to support your argument drawn from the three interviews you conducted as well as from at least TWO of the following authors: Lewis, Ang, Kirby, Wessels, Boyd, Vaidhyanathan, or Rudder.
- 6) Add a "Works Cited" list to your essay.

COVER PAGE and ADDENDUM:

- 1) Attach a **COVER PAGE** to your essay that:
 - identifies your 3 informants (by first name or pseudonym, age, gender, and occupation)
 - offers a **one-paragraph description** of the site you've chosen. Your description should include the major features/components of the site as well as how users interact with the site and with each other on the site.
- 2) Attach, as an **ADDENDUM**, *at least one page* of your interview notes or an interview transcript.

Basic topic areas for interview questions:

- a) How long (e.g. how many years) has the person used the site? Does s/he consider him/herself an early adopter? late adopter? etc.?
- b) How did s/he first discover the site?
- c) How often does s/he access it (e.g. multiple times a day? weekly? etc.)? Has that frequency changed over time?

- d) Who does s/he interact with on that site? (Who are the individuals, groups, organizations found within that site?)
- e) How does s/he use the site? Has this use changed over time?
- f) What are his/her main reasons for using the site?
- g) Are the interactions within this site meaningful to him/her? How so?
- h) Do these interactions differ from face-to-face or other forms of mediated communication? If so, in what ways? How significant are these differences?

RESOURCES for CONDUCTING SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS:

This video offers useful tips for conducting interviews. <http://vimeo.com/1269848>

For interview guidelines, please consult the following web resources. (These cover very concrete tips and are geared towards people conducting the sort of interviews you are being asked to complete.)

<http://www.portigal.com/blog/seventeen-types-of-interviewing-questions/>

<http://www.uxmatters.com/mt/archives/2011/01/developing-your-interviewing-skills-part-i-preparing-for-an-interview.php>

<http://www.uxmatters.com/mt/archives/2011/02/developing-your-interview-skills-part-ii-during-the-interview.php>

Please note that as qualitative researchers, your task is to probe more deeply than would researchers working within an empirical tradition which is more apt to rely on survey responses. You need to move beyond a statistical portrait of Internet use. In conducting interviews with individuals who are active on line, your aim is to delve more deeply into the role the Internet plays in their everyday lives and the meaning(s) that on-line interactions possess for them.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELEVANT COURSE READINGS FOR ESSAY 2:

Ang, Ien. "The Nature of the Audience." *Questioning the Media: A Critical Introduction*. John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, eds. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1990.

boyd, danah. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New Haven: Yale U.P., 2014.

Kirby, Alan. "The Digimodernist Text." *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2009. 50-72.

_____. "Digimodernism and Web 2.0." *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2009. 101-123.

Lewis, Justin. "Are You Receiving Me?" *Understanding Television*. Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel, eds. London: Routledge, 1990.

Vaidhyanathan, Siva. "The Googlization of Us: Universal Surveillance and Infrastructural Imperialism." in *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*. Berkeley: U. of California P., 2011: 82-114.

Wessels, Bridgette. "Culture, Everyday Life and the Internet." *Understanding the Internet: A Socio-Cultural Perspective*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. 124-142.

_____. "Exclusion, Inclusion and the Internet." *Understanding the Internet: A Socio-Cultural Perspective*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. 103-123.