SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION
Illinois State University

COM 275 Selected Topics in Communication - Social Media and Data Insights
Spring 2026 Course Syllabus

Class Meetings: Tues/Thurs 2:00 – 3:15 PM State Farm Hall of Business 135
Instructor: Dr. Fan ("Ellie") Yang
Office: Fell Hall 460
Office Hours: Mon/Wed 11:00 – 1:00 pm or By Appointment
To make an appointment, go to
https://calendly.com/fyang8-ilstu/30min
E-mail: fyang8@ilstu.edu
Phone: (309) 438-3671

Course Description:
This course focuses on the study and application of social media tools and theories when they are applied to the development of a social media strategy in the media and/or creative organizations. Social media strategies are not focused on spurring economic transactions as advertising and marketing do but, rather, inspiring cooperation, building relationships, and ensuring reputation though the use of carefully planned, and subsequently evaluated, strategies and tactics. **Students will become proficient in the application and use of social media evidence to generate insight into communication strategy-making.**

Textbook and Supplementary Materials:

(1) Handouts and articles are assigned by the instructor on a weekly basis. You can download the reading materials from the class CANVAS page.

(2) A personal laptop or desktop computer running Windows 10 or MacOSX. If this poses a financial difficulty, please contact Dr. Yang immediately to find an alternative arrangement.

(3) Broadband internet connection.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the importance of research in developing social media strategic plans for an organization
- Describe the fundamentals of social media methods and analytics.
- Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of various social media analytics.
- Identify and use tools to measure social media engagement.
- Analyze and evaluate various features of social media for enabling engagement and information sharing.
- Identify potential ethical issues that can arise while conducting social media research

To achieve the learning outcomes, you will learn the basic concepts from the reading materials and lecture slides, then demonstrate comprehension of the concepts by participating in in-class research activities, 2) taking quizzes, and 3) completing research projects.

Instructional Methods:

This class is typically scheduled and designed as an in-person class. Some of the materials and assignments are delivered electronically. Additionally, I will share materials, including readings, assignments, feedback, and more through our course site. Check regularly for updates! If you have questions about the materials or an assignment, please post your question to the Questions and Answers discussion forum on CANVAS. If your question is about your work or does not pertain the course generally, please email me directly (fyang8@ilstu.edu).

This course centers around the basic understanding of the advertising field. We will complete multiple projects that include analysis, planning, development, and more. To successfully complete this course, students will do the following:
• Read assigned articles.
• Watch additional media.
• Participate in discussion topics.
• Participate in assigned group projects.
• Complete quizzes and exams.
• Complete project reports and reflections.

Learning Assessments:
Assessment of students' learning against the course's objectives shall be done through a combination of learning assessments. Details about them can be found on CANVAS in the first module of core documents for managing the class. Learning assessments fall into the following two categories:

Individual Assignments: To help develop the skills needed for social media insight, there will be a variety of individual activities and 'practice' assignments in class that focus on a narrow set of social media research knowledge.	
Assignment Type	**Basic Description**
Quiz & Online Discussion	There will be three quizzes and two online discussions on readings and course content on CANVAS. Discussion assignments are designed so we can ask questions, consider possibilities, and develop a better understanding of course concepts.
Midterm Exam	The midterm exam will take place in class during the 8th or 9th week of a semester. The aim is to reflect upon the knowledge we have covered in the first half the semester. The exam usually takes 60 minutes to complete, consisting of multiple choice and essay questions.
Final Exam	The final exam will take place in class during 16th or 17th week of a semester. The aim is to reflect upon the knowledge we have covered in the second half the semester. The exam usually takes 60 minutes to complete, consisting of multiple choice and essay questions.

	Attendance is required. Meeting the credit hour standard, the course is scheduled to have two 75-minute classroom lectures. You are expected to attend all class sessions and fully responsible for learning all the lecture materials. Another part of your participation score will be based on your performance in answering questions and group discussion during the lecture time.
Attendance & In-Class Participation	

Group Assignments: You will have the opportunity to apply what you learn in class and develop a proposal of social media strategies for a selected organization throughout the course. In a group of 4~6, you will select an organization from a list of clients designated by the instructor and conduct primary and secondary research to evaluate its social media presence and suggest future strategies. You overall grade of group assignment will be a combination of five separate assignments. Details for each unit is detailed below.

Assignment Type	Basic Description
1. Situation Analysis – Secondary research	The assignment requires the team to apply the concepts, techniques and tools learned from the secondary research for the selected organization and produces a clear snapshot of the strength and weakness of its current social media strategies. The report should also include insight about goals of improving social media performance of your client.
2. Audience Analysis	This assignment requires the team to identify the online audience profile of your client based on the market segmentation criteria. You are required to illustrate at least three criterial to define your target audience.
3. Platform and Content	This assignment requires the team to investigate, analyze and report the social media presence of the selected client. Observations from three social media channels will be conducted. The team will also collect the number of followers, the average number of posts, the average number of engagements per platform and evaluate the content performance across platforms.
4. Final Report	This assignment is to summarize the previous work in a professional research report about the social media performance of your client and provide strategies for improving its social media presence in the future.
5. Peer Evaluation	The peer evaluation will be an evaluation of your contribution and performance on the group project by the rest of the members of your group. At the end of the final exam, each group member will fill out an evaluation of all other group members, excepting themselves.

Course Grading Policy:
There is no curve for grading. Rather, grading is based on a point-system in which you work toward 300 total points. They are distributed as follows:

Components	Number of Points	Percentage
Three Quizzes & Online Discussion	50	20.0

Attendance & Participation	30	10.0
Client Project (Five Units)	100	30.0
Midterm Exam	100	20.0
Final Exam	100	20.0
Total	330	100.0

We encourage you to keep track of your performance based on this point allocation system. This allows you to be aware of your grades throughout the semester and adjust your study strategies if you're dissatisfied with it. The following breakdowns are used to assign letter grades to your performance in this course:

A = 90.00% and greater

B = 80.00% – 89.99%

C = 70.00% – 79.99%

D = 60.00% – 69.99%

F = less than 60.00%

Extra Credit:

Additional extra-credit opportunities for research project participation may be announced during the semester. There may be the occasional extra credit pop quiz in class. These cannot be made up if you are not present unless you have an excused absence. You can participate in a maximum of three additional extra credit opportunities worth 1 point per opportunity.

Throughout the semester, the instructor will also announce non-research opportunities for extra credit, which may include attending a colloquium, reading a recent article or research paper, or attending an on-campus event and writing a summary of the connection of the event to course content. The instructor will make these opportunities and specific details available as they arise. You are also encouraged to browse SoC Research Announcement Board (https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/) for research participation and keep the participation evidence (e.g., email confirmation from the research investigator) by the end of the semester. The Research Announcement Board is updated as research studies are opened/closed, and it is your responsibility to access the Board and be aware of available opportunities. The extra credit points will be added to your final grade and may not necessarily appear in the gradebook immediately upon your completion of the opportunity.

Special Needs:
Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit Student Access and Accommodation Service online at http://studentaccess.illinoisstate.edu/faculty_staff/academic/.

Course Schedule:

Note: Course schedule is subject to change with instructor notification and students will be responsible for abiding by these changes. All reading materials can be accessed on CANVAS. You are highly encouraged to check weekly schedule on CANVAS under the tab "assignment" for the assignment due date.

Dates	Lecture	Readings	Assignments	Description
Week 1 **Jan 12 - 16**	Course overview and the role and importance of social media research	Course syllabus (on CANVAS)	Group bonding	Introduce the significance and implications of social media research to inform media professions
Week 2 **Jan 19 - 23**	Creating value with social media analytics	Lin, C. A., & Atkin, D. J. (2022). Social media theories. In The Emerald Handbook of Computer-Mediated Communication and Social Media (pp. 21-36). Emerald Publishing Limited. (on CANVAS)		Introduce assorted value from social media related research.
Week 3 **Jan 26 - 30**	Who is the target audience on social media & Excel workshop 1	See CANVAS for readings	Quiz 1	Introduce how to portray the target audience of social media strategies. Host a workshop on Thursday about using Excel for business analytics.
Week 4 **Feb 2 - 6**	Networks on social media & Excel workshop 2	Chang Bi, N., & Zhang, R. (2022). Electronic word-of-mouth and social media. In The Emerald handbook of computer-mediated communication and social media (pp. 37-50). Emerald	Group Assignment 1	Introduce network foundation and approach for social media analysis.

		Publishing Limited. (on CANVAS)		
Week 5 **Feb 9 - 13**	Social media planning & Social media data collection approaches	See CANVAS for required readings	Quiz 2	Introduce the concept and application of social media planning. A variety of social media data collection approaches will be introduced.
Week 6 **Feb 16 - 20**	Integrated marketing plan on social media & Cision workshop	See CANVAS for required readings		Introduce social media marketing. Demonstrate social media tools for data collection using Cision.
Week 7 **Feb 23 - 27**	Social influencers & Group meeting	Watkins, B. (2022). An examination of the influencer–brand relationship: Implications and future directions for influencer marketing. In The Emerald Handbook of Computer-Mediated Communication and Social Media (pp. 287-303). Emerald Publishing Limited. (on CANVAS)	Online Discussion 1	Introduce social media influencer role in communication strategy-making. The Thursday class is for group meeting.
Week 8 **Mar 2 - 6**	Midterm exam review: Tuesday Midterm exam: Thursday			

Week 9 **Mar 9 - 13**	No Class. Spring Break.			
Week 10 **Mar 16 - 20**	Social psychology of social media strategies	CANVAS for required readings	Group Assignment 2	Introduce social psychological theories for social media strategy-making. Demonstrate their functions for planning and evaluating campaign effort.
Week 11 **Mar 23 - 27**	Fun statistics – Descriptive results	CANVAS for required readings		Introduce descriptive statistics such as mean, mode, median, standard deviation, correlation matrix in data-driven social media research.
Week 12 **Mar 30 – Apr 3**	Practice week & documentary day	CANVAS for required readings	Group Assignment 3	This week will assign students case studies in class to practice the collecting, analyzing and generating data reports. The Thursday class will be watching a documentary regarding platform business.
Week 13 **Apr 6 – 10**	Content analysis in social media insight	CANVAS for required readings		Focus on content analysis to inform social media management. AI-assisted methods and analytics are introduced.
Week 14 **Apr 13 – 17**	Ethical issues and crisis in social media analytics	McCollough, C. J., Wallace, A. A., & Luttrell, R. (2022). Artificial intelligence: The dark side, ethics, and implications. In The emerald handbook of computer-mediated communication and social media	Quiz 3 & Online Discussion 2	Discuss ethical issues and dilemma of research insight for social media analytics. Introduce the pearls and pitfalls of social media data.

		(pp. 671-684). Emerald Publishing Limited. (on CANVAS)		
Week 15 **Apr 20 – 24**	Guest Speaker (TBD)	See CANVAS for required readings	Group Assignment 4	
Week 16 **Apr 27 – May 1**	Final exam review: Tuesday Workout day: Thursday		Group Assignment 5 - Peer Evaluation	
Week 17 **May 4 – 8**	Final Exam			

Due Dates:

Class assignments are due according to the assignment due date. Late work when accepted will receive a 20% grade reduction for each day after the deadline. Late group reports do not receive the same full feedback as on-time papers. No emailed assignments will be accepted. If you'd like to discuss your assignments with the instructor, please make an appointment. No assignments are accepted after the final exam.