SOCIAL MEDIA FOR JOURNALISTS

Instructor: Laura Oliver
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Contact Hours: 40

London, UK

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social Media has changed the way that both journalists - and audiences - find and share news and information. How are these changes affecting journalistic practice? And what are the social media skills that journalists and digital consumers need today?

This class will explore the social media strategies of major UK-based news media outlets and journalists, as well as international and independent news brands. The class will experiment with different social platforms and discover how you can use them effectively as a journalist.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Strong social media skills are highly sought after by employers. But use of these platforms in your personal life doesn't necessarily translate into effective use in a professional, journalistic setting.

This course will address that by improving your knowledge of how major social networks are used by audiences, journalists and news publishers. Questions that we will explore include:

- What is the role of social media in the way that audiences find, consume, and share news?
- What are the implications of this for news organizations, brands and journalists?
- What are the characteristics of different social platforms?
- What does this mean for journalism and storytelling?
- How are different social networks used by news organizations to tell stories?
- What does that mean for the role of journalists in 2025 and beyond?
- What can journalists do to navigate misinformation on social networks?
- How can journalists source and verify stories from social media content?
- How are journalists and newsrooms responding to all these challenges? What can you do about it?

At the end of this course, you will have a firm grasp of these crucial issues, as well as the ability to tell your own stories through social media. In short, this course will address the question: What social media skills and knowledge do I need as a journalist and online storyteller in 2024?

LEARNING OUTCOMES
By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Understand and describe some of the major trends in social media usage.
2. Explain characteristics of major social platforms; including best practices for them e.g. established networks like Facebook, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp and Reddit.
3. Know where to look for relevant industry information/data/analysis about social media.
4. Create compelling journalistic social media content on different social networks.
5. Critique your own ideas/output – and those of your peers – on social media topics.
6. Recognize the implications of your digital – and social – footprint. And how to manage it.
7. Display a distinctive, professional LinkedIn profile to the outside world.
8. Get hands-on experience with a variety of new tools and digital apps.
9. Meet and question leading industry professionals from the UK and understand how the skills learned on this course could be applied in a newsroom or commercial setting.
10. Develop an understanding of verification skills, including OSINT techniques, for sourcing and verifying user-generated/eyewitness content on social media.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY
This course will blend lectures and discussions, conversations with guest speakers, practical exercises, and your own reading and research. Given how fast the social media landscape changes - and the sheer breadth of this space – each student will play a key role in helping their peers to develop their own knowledge of this rapidly evolving environment.

Learning methods will include:
- Discussing key market data and trends and their implications.
- Researching and analyzing emerging issues and players.
- Presenting your own research and social media output to your class peers and instructor.
- Producing high-quality journalistic work (written and visual using social media apps).
- Practical workshops involving new tools and processes, including verification best practice and audience strategy work.

COURSE MATERIALS
We'll be using Canvas to coordinate materials and assessments for this course. A page of pre-course reading materials will be published in due course.

GUEST SPEAKERS
Using our extensive UK media network, as part of this class you will talk to, and hear from, leading journalists and communication professionals in the UK.

Previous speakers (2018, 2019, 2021 and 2023) in this class have come from some of the leading news and media organizations around the world, including: BBC News, Conde Nast, NBC, The Drum, The Economist, First Draft, Google, The Guardian, journalism.co.uk, digital marketing agency Metia, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Oxford University), So You Want To Be A Journalist, Story Futures, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, and What's New In Publishing.

COURSEWORK
For each assignment, you'll be given a detailed brief on Canvas and in class. Assignments will be a mixture of graded work (A-F) and Complete/Incomplete. Graded work is indicated below via *

Activity	Tasks	% of Grade	Points
Writing, research + presentation skills	1. Pitch: your social media newsrooms 2. Guest speaker briefings x 4 3. Guest speaker reflections x 4 4. Research and presentation: how different social media platforms work for journalism/newsrooms - best practice tips 5. Analysis: your social media newsroom's best post*	10% 5% 5% 10% 10%	20 10 10 20 20
Production	6. First social media newsroom assignment - related to Scavenger Hunt 7. Social media newsroom content plan* 8. Social media newsroom audience strategy* 9. Misinformation content series	5% 15% 15% 5%	10 30 30 10
Other	10. Roll call 11. Scavenger hunt participation 12. Updated LinkedIn profile 13. End of course reflection	10% 5% 2.5% 2.5%	20 10 5 5
Total		100%	200

Some of you will present on newsrooms and some on platforms (50 points each). Similarly, some of you will be tasked with our What's Trending presentations and some with guest speaker briefings (5 points each).

Many of the smaller assignments fall into the latter category but be sure to complete them all. It's a quick (and relatively easy) way to rack up a baseline of points for the class. By the same token, failing to do them will make it very hard to pass this class…

GENERATIVE AI

Students may use GenAI tools in this course only with explicit instructor permission for certain tasks or on certain assignments. I will clearly indicate when you can use GenAI and provide clear guidelines for which GenAI tools are allowed and in what ways you can use them. I will also indicate how you will document your use of GenAI. If I believe you've handed in work created whole or in part by GenAI tools, I may submit a report of suspected academic misconduct to the GEO London office. They will work with your home institution's Office of Student Conduct to make a determination of responsibility and any resultant sanctions.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act.

Course Schedule and Assignments
This schedule is a draft and is subject to amendment. Items in red are not yet confirmed.

Week	Activities
1 (23-29 June)	**Thursday (1pm-6pm)** ● Introduction to the class ● Presentation: trends in social media journalism ● Exercise: How you use social media ● Discussion: your social media newsroom - a project for this module ● Introduce guest speaker briefing documents ● TBC guest speaker **Homework** ● Presentations - your ideas for a social-first newsroom ● Guest speaker reflections

2 (30 June-6 July)	**Tuesday (1pm-6pm)** ● Pitch to your class: your social first newsroom ideas ● Social Media Scavenger Hunt. You'll be going out and about in your newsroom groups, getting hands-on with a variety of social media apps and London. **Homework:** ● First social media newsroom assignment - related to Scavenger Hunt ● Guest Speaker briefing prep **Thursday (9:30am-12.00noon)** ● Review Scavenger Hunt assignment ● Guest speaker briefing ● Intro to best practice for journalists on social platforms **Homework** ● Research to present: how different social media platforms work for journalism/newsrooms - best practice tips

3 (7-13 July)	**Monday 1pm-6pm** ● Finding and verifying social media stories - a workshop on misinformation and verification ● TBC guest speaker **Homework** ● Guest speaker briefing ● Create a content series for your newsroom's audience on misinformation ● Guest speaker reflections **Friday 1pm-6pm** ● Present: best practice tips from social media platforms research ● How to tell stories on social media - a workshop on content and distribution ● TBC guest speaker **Homework** ● Guest speaker briefing ● Develop your social media newsroom's content plan ● Guest speaker reflections

4 (14-20 July)	**Monday (All day)** ● TBC - visit to Conde Nast ● Guest speaker briefing ● Presentation + exercise: journalist creators? ● LinkedIn for journalists workshop pt1 **Homework** ● End of term reflection - quiz ● Guest speaker reflection ● Update your LinkedIn profile
5 (21-27 July)	**Wednesday (1pm-6pm)** ● End of term evaluation + recap ● LinkedIn for journalists workshop pt2 ● Present your social newsroom's content plan + feedback ● Workshop: engagement and measuring success **Homework** ● Finalise social media newsroom content plan ● Add success metrics to your strategy doc ● Final analysis - short essay reviewing on element of your social media newsroom's content

INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY

Laura Oliver is a freelance journalist based in the UK. As a freelancer, she writes, reports and edits for a range of UK and international publications and has been published by The Guardian, Al Jazeera, EuroNews, NPR and more. She was recently one of four reporters covering the UK's COVID-19 inquiry for OpenDemocracy and regularly reports on media and journalism for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and the Global Investigative Journalism Network.

She also works as a freelance editorial consultant, assisting clients with editorial, audience development and social media strategy. In this role, she has worked with BBC News, Conde Nast, the Financial Times, Katadata, Belarus in Focus and International Media Support. She is a visiting lecturer at City University, London, and has delivered training courses for newsrooms, including the BBC, and through partners such as the Thomson Reuters Foundation and Press Association.

In 2020, she co-founded the Society of Freelance Journalists, an international community that offers peer support to freelancers working in journalism and media.

Before becoming a freelancer, Laura was head of social and community for the Guardian's UK newsroom, where she led a pioneering team of digital journalists in audience engagement work. During her six years at the Guardian, she introduced new practices for social media storytelling, handling and verification of eye witness media, building online communities around journalism and live reporting with crowdsourced information.

In 2019, she spent nine months as acting head of audience for Conde Nast International, where she worked on the organization's growth strategy, with a particular focus on user needs in Vogue's 11 core markets and social media strategy for GQ.

She lives in Brighton with her husband and outside of journalism spends her time enjoying live music, supporting Arsenal FC, attending yoga classes and trying to complete a collection of short stories. She recently graduated with a high distinction from Birkbeck's MA Creative Writing course.