UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA
(20 credits – 8x2 hrs)
Module Coordinator: Brian D. Loader

AIM
To critically explore the principal conceptual debates and socio-cultural approaches to understanding the latest generation of new media communications technologies described as social media.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
• To identify and critically analyse the key characteristics of contemporary new media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Second Life, often collectively described as social media, social web or Web 2.0, within the context of debates about broader sets of socio-cultural transformations;
• To analyse recent case studies and examples to understand how social media are permeating a range of social institutions and practices;
• To provide an understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political factors shaping the design of social media and their diffusion in society;
• To appreciate the ambiguous nature of the social media as both tools for surveillance and artefacts for social expression.

ORGANIZATION
This module will be taught through a weekly two hour workshop, online activities and interaction through Yorkshare virtual learning environment.

ASSESSMENT
Mode: A 4,500 - 5000 word essay on a list to be provided during the module.

DESCRIPTION
The rapid and widespread adoption of social media such as the iPhone, Google, Wikipedia, YouTube and Facebook has been a significant feature of many contemporary societies. Social media applications, which enable millions of individuals worldwide to socially network, blog, share video and photo images, collaboratively filter content, tag and annotate or participate in multi-player games, are increasingly becoming routine activities for many people. There can be little doubt that the consequences of the emergence and diffusion of this latest generation of media technologies are both fascinating and profound. Social media through its networking structures and individualising processes shapes the potential for new forms of communication practices that have the capacity to transform the cultures of business, politics and the social world.

This module aims to stimulate the student to engage in a critical understanding of the emergence and potential impacts of social media. A distinctive approach is followed throughout the course that contends that our subject should be explored within the context of wider socio-cultural developments in late modernity.

INDICATIVE READING
Halavais, A (2009) Search Engine Society
Keen, A. (2007) The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting our Economy