

FMST 250
Fall 2019
Essay 4

DUE by no later than 12:00 pm (i.e., noon), Thursday, December 12. Submitted via Blackboard.

Assignment

Write a 5-page essay spurred by one of the prompt options below.

Mostly imagine your readers as your classmates. In the case of Option 1, imagine your reader as a student in another FMST intro class who has not yet read *Antisocial Media* but who is definitely interested in the topic and has some familiarity with media studies. For Option 4, there are some specific guidelines regarding your imagined audience (but it can still be helpful to think of your classmates, even within these specific guidelines).

Option 1: Write a critical review of *Antisocial Media*. What do I mean by that? In a critical review, you need to do two key things. 1. synopsize what you see as the key elements of the book—its argument(s), a sense of its organization and methods of analysis, its conclusions. You do this mostly in your own words, though you can quote from the book to draw attention to ideas or passages you think are particularly noteworthy (whether for good or bad reasons). *Important:* You do not need to touch on every aspect of the book (indeed, in five pages you can't!); you will need to select what you think it most important about it. 2. Develop your own critical, interpretive argument about the book.

“Critical” in this context does not mean “negative”/evaluative—rather, it means that you are engaging with, arguing with, elements of the book you find important. This can mean supporting the book’s position, usually through providing more examples or evidence of your own that lend further support to the book’s argument. But “critical” can also encompass pushing back against the book’s position, articulating reasons you find it unconvincing, whether in specific parts of its argument/analysis or more generally.

Your goal is to give your reader a good (clear, fair) sense of the book, but also to assess its meaning, so that if they pick up the book, they have some perspective on it. You can also think of your review as being a part of a conversation with the book’s author: If Vaidhyanathan were to read your review, what would you like him to discover about his work that might help him improve it in a future edition?

Option 2: Vaidhyanathan focuses on Facebook, and he develops a very critical perspective (though, as he notes, he continues to use the platform, as well as a whole host of other social media and digital tools).

Pick another social media platform that you are familiar with. Apply what you see as Vaidhyanathan’s key ideas/insights to analyzing that platform. Does it have features that you think address some of Vaidhyanathan’s concerns? Are there ways in which it creates effects similar problems to those he associates with Facebook? How do these features of your chosen platform work?

Option 3: At the start of the term, I suggested we think of “media” as meaning expressive/communicative forms that are (comparatively) durable, (easily) distributable, and (easily, “perfectly”) reproducible.

How do social media fit and/or complicate this definition? How are social media different from the other media forms—film/motion pictures, print, photography, sound recording—we have studied? Are there additional criteria/refinements that you think need to be added to the idea of media/medium so that it encompasses social media? Vaidhyanathan writes about Facebook as a “meta-medium” (25) and sees it more broadly as a component of “hypermedia” (163-66). What does he mean, and how can (or should) media studies take critical, analytic account of the “meta” and/or “hyper”?

Option 4: Write prospectus/proposal for a new social media platform that you think would address Vaidhyanathan’s concerns. Your proposal will take the form of a “pitch.” Your pitch could be to venture capital investors (if you are imagining your platform as one day making money) or it could be to philanthropist/non-profit supporters (something like the Mozilla Foundation perhaps): Why is this thing necessary? Why would it attract an audience/users? What features would it have; what would be unique about them; how would they avoid causing the difficulties Vaidhyanathan sees with Fb? How would your social media platform (and, importantly, what’s its name?) become and remain sustainable?

Guidance

Name your file this way: lastnamefirstinitial4 (e.g., knighta4).

File format: please use either pdf (simplest for me) or doc. Google docs, fabulous as they are for word processing, get messed up in transmission.

Add our Essay Grading Worksheet to the end of your document. It is attached to the end of this document. It is also available as both a pdf and a doc under assignments in our Bb site.

Title your essay. Aim to make your title an interesting, intriguing gesture toward your argument, toward your interpretive-analytic claim about social media.

Formatting and Length. Set your margins to 1 inch, using a ragged write margin (like I am using here). Use a conventional font (e.g., Times New Roman, Calibri) set at 11 or 12 points. No need for a coversheet, just put your name in the header. Your essay should be double-spaced throughout (don’t quadruple space between paragraphs) and should be about 5 pages long (a 4 3/4 or 6 1/4 or so is fine).

Citation. This essay is about *your* observations and the analysis and argument you build from them, so you need not cite anything beyond *Antisocial Media*, which you can just cite parenthetically, like I did in prompt Option 3 above. If you do refer to or make use of other materials, please make a footnote and provide bibliographic information for your source when you use it, whether you quote it directly or more generally draw from its ideas. You may use any mainstream citation/bibliography format

Purpose

This essay is meant to help you develop—and articulate—your knowledge of and ideas about social media as a form of “media.”

Evaluation

This essay will count as 25% of your final grade for our course.