

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT I: LOCATE YOURSELF | MIDTERM PROJECT

Designed for: Introduction to Digital Media | Fall 2014

Due: Wednesday, 10/22, at midnight, on NYU Classes (submit a link to your project).

One of the goals of our class is to interrogate the claim that the user is in charge of the web in our current era of digital media. Over the last few weeks, we have read and discussed various layers of digital media that support or disrupt this claim of user sovereignty.

In order to deepen your understanding of the various layers and infrastructures that make up digital media, your goal for this midterm is to develop a cohesive picture of your location within the micro and macro structures of digital media.

In sketching this picture, you should address your position within and in relation to a digital media company/app of your choice (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, Pinterest, even Google or Netflix etc). Move from the micro to the macro level along the following nodes. You can use different companies/sites/apps for different questions.

Do not consider these prompts as straightforward questions that you tick off and answer. Rather, take them as prompts for an analysis; depending on which companies you choose, certain facets will become more or less important. Also consider connections that stretch across these nodes and questions.

Prompts & Questions

The micro-level:

Identity and Community

- How do your online and offline lives relate? How do you use real names vs pseudonyms online?
 - Consider not just how you see these relationships, but how the company imagines them (“About” sections and ads can be relevant here) and how Terms of Service enable or disable these connections and possibilities
 - Do you have a certain [amount of privilege](#) when it comes to deciding how you connect your online and offline lives (or whether to use your real name for online activities)?
 - Have you encountered what danah boyd calls “collapsed contexts”? How do you engage with them?
- Feel free to discuss other issues related to identity and community that you find relevant in this context

Privacy and Control

- Consider the types of privacy settings this company/site/app offers and how you use them; consider who owns/controls the content you contribute to this site
- Consider how companies track and monetize your personal information: How have

you become aware of this?

The macro-level:

Consider the apps/sites/companies you have discussed in the micro-level section. What infrastructure facilitates your engagement with them? Once again, you may pick different companies to answer each question.

Data Centers and Undersea Cables

- Where do these companies store their data? How is the data transported to you? What issues arise in relationship to structural inequalities, secrecy, the environment, and jurisdiction?

Regulation

- How would changes in net neutrality ultimately effect you? How would an end of net neutrality effect your access to the web? Begin with a general overview of what is at stake in the net neutrality debate.
- Have the company/companies you have been discussing taken a stance regarding net neutrality or other current regulatory issues? If not, how would you evaluate the impact of changes in net neutrality on this/these companies?

Integration of Course Content

As you move through these issues, you need to relate your personal situation to the larger problems and questions sketched out in the readings from Weeks 1-6.

For example, when discussing your use of your real name and/or a pseudonym, explain the controversy surrounding this issue, then move on to discussing your personal situation. In other words, you should demonstrate that you know the major arguments and debates in the readings from Weeks 1-6 and can apply them to your personal situation.

Format:

Your analysis should consist of written words and visual media:

Photos, screenshots, video. Ideally, the visual media items you include will do more than simply illustrate your analysis.

You need to submit your analysis in a creative format:

Use Prezi, Storify, or another web-based format that allows you to combine words and visual media (see a Prezi Example [here](#) and a Storify example [here](#)). **A traditional essay with integrated images is not acceptable for this assignment.** Make sure that you back up your work-in-progress. Choosing this creative format allows you to develop your hands-on digital skills.

For advice on how to create a Prezi with strong design, see this [blog post](#). For advice on how to use Storify effectively, see [here](#) (note that the audience is journalists--some suggestions about

verifying your sources may not apply to you) and [here](#).

Most of the images and video must be produced by you:

You cannot include any visual material that you haven't taken and edited yourself. You may use photos or videos you have taken before this exam, e.g. photos from your Facebook/Instagram/YouTube/Twitter etc. accounts. You should feel free to redact personal information such as (user)names and blur faces.

You can use other people's photos for place like data centers or other infrastructure that you cannot personally visit. Of course you can virtually visit faraway places on Google maps.

Keep in mind that...

If you need to host photos or videos for your project, I can set up a Flickr account for our class.

There is no specific minimum or maximum word count

Although you should write more than 1,000 words and less than 5,000. You should write as much you need to comprehensively address the prompts.

There is no specific minimum or maximum number of visual media items

Keep in mind that quantity \neq quality. More words or images don't automatically translate into a higher grade. Really think about how images can visualize your arguments and can contribute important information.

Remember that factual claims need to be backed up by a source

You may find some relevant sources among the articles on digital media that I have bookmarked over the years. My bookmarks are [here](#), and you can browse different topics via the tags. Also browse posts on our Tumblr.

Grading Criteria:

- Quality of your analysis in terms of creativity, complexity, and competence
- Integration of visual media and overall design of the analysis
- Grasp of and familiarity with course content
- Quality of writing