The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

UG Course Syllabus

Art and Digital Culture (Fall 2026)

HUMA 1673

Name: Dr. Steve MA

Email: hmhma@ust.hk

Office Hours: Fridays 14:30-16:30, Room 3332 (by appointment)

Course Description

This course explores the key concepts, histories and practices of digital culture, offering students a comprehensive introduction to the ways digital technologies shape society, media, and artistic expression. Through lectures and tutorials, students will examine the origins and evolution of the internet, digital media and online communities, as well as the development of digital arts, publishing, photography, cinema, music and video games. The course combines theoretical reading with case studies, including the study of internet memes, digital relationships and the collective memories of popular music in Asia. By the end of the course, students will have a deeper understanding of how digital culture operates, its impact on society and its ongoing transformations across multiple media forms.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Develop a critical knowledge of art and related technologies in the digital age, including an understanding of the impact of AI on art creation and interpretation.
2. Cultivate specialized knowledge of art forms.
3. Engage with disciplines outside their majors, exploring the intersection of art with technology.
4. Develop competencies and digital literacies that provide a foundation for future careers

Assessment and Grading

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Group Presentation	ILO 1, 3, 4	Students will analyze and present critical knowledge of digital art and technology. This task fosters collaboration, communication, and digital literacy for future careers.
Written Assignment	ILO 1, 2, 4	Students must research and critically analyze key concepts and specialized art forms. This develops strong research and writing competencies.

Attendance	ILO 3	Allows students to engage in diverse, interdisciplinary discussions from outside their major.

Final Grade Descriptors

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates an exceptional and insightful understanding of art and related technologies in the digital age. A student at this level shows a profound grasp of how technological developments shape artistic creation and interpretation (ILO1) and possesses a sophisticated and specialized knowledge of diverse art forms (ILO2). They engage critically and creatively with disciplines beyond their major, offering original and well-supported reflections on the intersections between art and technology (ILO3). Their work demonstrates advanced digital literacy, strong analytical ability, and professional-level competence in applying theoretical and technical knowledge to complex or novel contexts (ILO4).
B	Good Performance	Shows a strong understanding of art and technology in the digital age. The student clearly understands how technological change influences artistic practices and meanings (ILO1) and demonstrates solid knowledge of various art forms (ILO2). They engage with interdisciplinary ideas confidently and connect art with technology in thoughtful ways (ILO3). Their digital literacy and analytical skills are well developed, and they can apply their learning effectively in academic or professional contexts (ILO4).
C	Satisfactory Performance	Demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of art and technology in the digital age. The student can describe basic concepts of how technology relates to art (ILO1) and shows general familiarity with some art forms (ILO2). They make some effort to engage with perspectives from other disciplines, though analysis and interpretation may lack depth or precision (ILO3). Their digital literacy is functional but somewhat limited (ILO4). Work at this level is generally accurate but may include minor errors or incomplete reasoning.
D	Marginal Pass	Shows a limited or partial understanding of the course content. The student demonstrates only a basic awareness of the relationship between art and technology (ILO1) and has minimal or fragmented knowledge of art forms (ILO2). Engagement with ideas outside their major is weak or inconsistent (ILO3). Digital and analytical competencies are underdeveloped, and their work often contains inaccuracies, unclear arguments, or lack of critical insight (ILO4).
F	Fail	Fails to demonstrate an adequate understanding of the subject. The student shows little or no awareness of how technology relates to art (ILO1) and lacks fundamental knowledge of art forms (ILO2). There is no meaningful engagement with interdisciplinary perspectives or digital literacies (ILO3 & ILO4). Work at this level is inaccurate, incomplete, or irrelevant, showing major misunderstanding of core ideas and course objectives.

The following assignments will count toward your final grade and be included in the assessment:

Group Presentation (35%)

Students need to form groups of 4-5 people; each group needs to give one group presentation. The topic of the group presentation can be any topic of digital culture or digital art. Each group's presentation should not exceed 20 minutes. Please register your group members and the order of presentations using the link below. The registration deadline is September 15.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PukcA0E_vj2Dw0GLu9-JSf4e0Bjyv8yGaV6pABpMZTQ/edit?usp=sharing

Grading criteria for Group Presentation:

Criterion	**Developing**	**Accomplished**	**Exemplary**
Completeness 50%	Introduces multiple digital culture topics, or introduces an offensive topic, or fails to explain the basic history, context, and background of the topic, or is seriously under/over the 20-minute limit.	Smoothly introduces one digital culture topic and helps classmates understand its basic context.	Fully explains the history of a digital culture topic, important events, its connections with other cultures and communities in society, and gives critical reflections.
Academic Quality 25%	Contains factual errors about the digital culture topic, or entirely copies other author's article/lecture.	Able to cite references to support arguments.	Able to correctly apply methodologies from cultural studies, or critically evaluate previous research on the digital culture topic, or discuss the cultural phenomenon from social and interdisciplinary perspectives.
Collaboration 25%	The group did not collaborate well	The group completed the group presentation through cooperation	The group members actively helped each other and showed good division of work

Notes:

1. For the convenience of the Q&A section, please send your group presentation materials at **least two days** in advance to the instructor **via email**.
2. If you cannot register for the group presentation before the deadline, the instructor will randomly assign you to a group and give you a time slot.
3. To ensure fairness, groups that actively choose earlier presentation dates (Week 3 and Week 4) **will receive bonus points**, until all slots are filled.

4. With the unanimous agreement of group members, not everyone is required to stand on stage for the final presentation. Members can also contribute by preparing materials, creating slides, and other tasks.
5. To avoid disputes, any changes to the presentation time or group members must be communicated by email to the instructor or TA. In particular, if you have concerns about the workload of your group members, please also contact us by email rather than telling us directly in class.
6. You will receive your group presentation grade before the end of the semester.
7. If you need to confirm whether a topic is suitable for presentation, please consult the instructor or TA by email.
8. Any application for special circumstances should be submitted by email with official proof recognized by the university. Thank you.

Examples of topics:

You can find some good examples of group presentation topics on the slides from the first class. We encourage you to use them as inspiration to choose your own topic, and it is best if the topic can relate to your life or your field of study.

Written Assignment (40%)

*Each student must submit an essay **by December 10**, introducing a topic in digital culture or digital art that was not covered in your previous group presentation. The essay should not exceed 600 words.*

*Please submit your assignments **by email, not via Canvas**. My email is hmhma@ust.hk. There is no need to submit a hard copy.*

Grading criteria for the Written Assignment:

Criterion	**Developing**	**Accomplished**	**Exemplary**
Academic Quality 50%	Uses non-academic language or format, or violates the university's academic integrity and ethics policy, or unfairly and inappropriately uses AI tools, or chooses an inappropriate/offensive topic	Able to write in any recognized academic format (APA, Chicago, etc.) with basic citations and references	Fully adheres to academic formatting without errors, and correctly applies theories from cultural studies or an interdisciplinary research perspective
Knowledge and Skills 25%	Unable to clearly describe cultural or artistic phenomena, or contains obvious factual or common knowledge errors	Able to describe cultural and artistic phenomena, and further discuss them using knowledge learned in class	Demonstrates accumulated knowledge in the field of culture and art, and discusses it in relation to social, cultural, or disciplinary contexts

Innovation 25%	No original viewpoint	Shows thoughts and insights on the topic	Critically engages with the topic and connects it to other academic research in the field

Notes:

1. Submissions after the deadline will not be accepted.
2. Essays should not be significantly shorter than 600 words; otherwise, points will be deducted. Footnotes and references are not counted in the 600-word limit.
3. According to the university's guidelines on generative AI use, you may use generative AI in this assignment, but only for the purpose of stimulating creativity. Any use of generative AI must be clearly marked or explained, including which AI tool was used and which parts of the writing were assisted by the AI tool.
   https://cei.hkust.edu.hk/en-hk/system/files?file=hkust_policy_principles_for_genai_for_tl_student_version.pdf&check_logged_in=1
4. For fairness, in accordance with university requirements, you must maintain academic integrity and comply with the university's Academic Honor Code. Violations will be handled by the Academic Registry.
   https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/academic-honor-code-and-academic-integrity
5. If you are not sure about your final essay topic, you may schedule an office hour or contact the instructor or TA by email.

Examples of topics:

You can find some good examples of final essay topics on the slides from the first class. We encourage you to use them as inspiration to choose your own topic, and it is best if the topic can relate to your life or your field of study.

Attendance (25%)

Your participation in class is very important, and we encourage you to take part in every class.

Attendance:

1. You need to attend every class **marked as Lecture** (please check the Course Outline and Schedule section in the syllabus). Your attendance will only be counted if you sign the attendance sheet. If you stayed for more than 80% of the class but forgot to sign, please register with the instructor or TA after class.
2. Missing one Lecture will result in a 6% deduction from your Attendance grade.
3. During the Add & Drop week, we will not take attendance.

Class participation:

1. We encourage participation in class, but because there are 80 students and only one TA, it is not realistic to record everyone's comments during lectures. Therefore, we encourage you to share your opinion more in tutorial sessions. Before asking a question or making a comment, please **state your**

name and student number so the TA can record it. Any comments without name and student number will not be recorded.
2. All sessions **marked as tutorial** will take attendance, but tutorials are not mandatory. Attendance at tutorials will be seen as active participation, which will improve your Attendance grade.
3. Offensive or inappropriate comments in class may affect your grade.

Leave of absence:

1. According to university policy, any leave request must be supported by official documents, such as a medical certificate from a hospital or proof of attending an event or academic conference. Please send these documents by email to the instructor or TA. Showing the documents during class or office hours will not be valid.
2. If your leave affects your group presentation, it will also affect your own group presentation grade.
3. All leave requests must be submitted before you are absent. According to university policy, we cannot accept leave requests after you are already absent.

Office Hours :

1. To be fair to everyone, communication with the instructor or TA outside of class, such as meeting in Starbucks or during booked office hours, will not affect your grade.
2. However, we still welcome your questions at any time and will do our best to support your success.

Bonus Points (Up to 3 points)

1. To encourage comments or questions **in tutorials**, each participation recognized by the instructor or TA will earn 1 Bonus Point.
2. Each student can earn **a maximum of 3 Bonus Points**. After that, participation will still be recorded but will not receive Bonus Points.
3. Students assigned to give a group presentation or peer review in the tutorial cannot earn Bonus Points for their assignment.
4. Bonus Points will be added to the final grade and included in the conversion to the final letter grade.

Support and Assistance

- If you need any help, please contact the instructor or TA by email. We apologize that due to a busy schedule, the instructor or TA cannot guarantee an immediate reply to every email, but they will do their best to respond to each of your reasonable requests.
- To avoid your email being marked as spam, your email should at least include your name, your division/department, and the course you are enrolled in (HUMA 1673).
- Students with disabilities or special needs are encouraged to contact the instructor or TA to arrange appropriate accommodation.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via email within two weeks of submission.

Course AI Policy

** Please refer to the Written Assignment section.*

Course Outline and Schedule

** The course schedule may be adjusted according to actual needs.* ***The following academic books are provided as reference materials for this course and are not required reading.***

Week 1 1 Sep (Lecture) 3 Sep (Lecture)

What is Digital Culture?
Key Elements of Digital Culture

Week 2 8 Sep (Lecture) 10 Sep (Lecture)

The History of the Internet
What is Digital Media?

Week 3 15 Sep (Lecture) 17 Sep (Tutorial)

The Evolution of the Chinese Internet

- Guo, S. (2021). *The evolution of the Chinese internet: Creative visibility in the digital public*. Stanford University Press.

Week 4 22 Sep (Lecture) 24 Sep (Tutorial)

Memes in Digital Culture

- Shifman, L. (2014). Defining internet memes. In *Memes in digital culture* (pp. 37–54). The MIT Press.

Week 5 29 Sep (Lecture)

Digital Relationships

- Boyd, D. (2014). Identity: Why do teens seem strange online? In *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens* (pp. 29–53). Yale University Press.

Week 6 6 Oct (Lecture) 8 Oct (Tutorial)

Types of Digital Arts

- Paul, C. (2015). Introduction. In *Digital art* (3rd ed., pp. 7–26). Thames & Hudson.

Week 7 13 Oct (Lecture) 15 Oct (Tutorial)

History of Digital Photography

- Rubinstein, D., & Sluis, K. (2013). The digital image in photographic culture: Algorithmic photography and the crisis of representation. In M. Lister (Ed.), *The photographic image in digital culture* (2nd ed., pp. 22–40). Routledge.

Week 8 20 Oct (Lecture) 22 Oct (Tutorial)

History of Digital Movies

- Elsaesser, T. (2016). Digital cinema: Delivery, event, time. In *Film history as media archaeology: Tracking digital cinema* (pp. 231–252). Amsterdam University Press.

Week 9 27 Oct (Lecture) 29 Oct (Tutorial)

History of Digital Music

- Witt, S. (2015). *How music got free: What happens when an entire generation commits the same crime?* Viking

Week 10 3 Nov (Lecture) 5 Nov (Tutorial)

History of Video Games

- Mejeur, C. (2025). Definitions and misunderstandings in game studies: An interview with Espen Aarseth. In A. Karabinus, C. A. Kocurek, C. Mejeur, & E. Vossen (Eds.), *Historiographies of game studies: What it has been, what it could be* (pp. 121–145). punctum books.

Week 11 10 Nov (Lecture) 12 Nov (Tutorial)

History of VR/AR/MR

Week 12 17 Nov (Lecture) 19 Nov (Tutorial)

History of AI Art

Week 13 24 Nov (Tutorial) 26 Nov (Tutorial)

Only tutorials this week