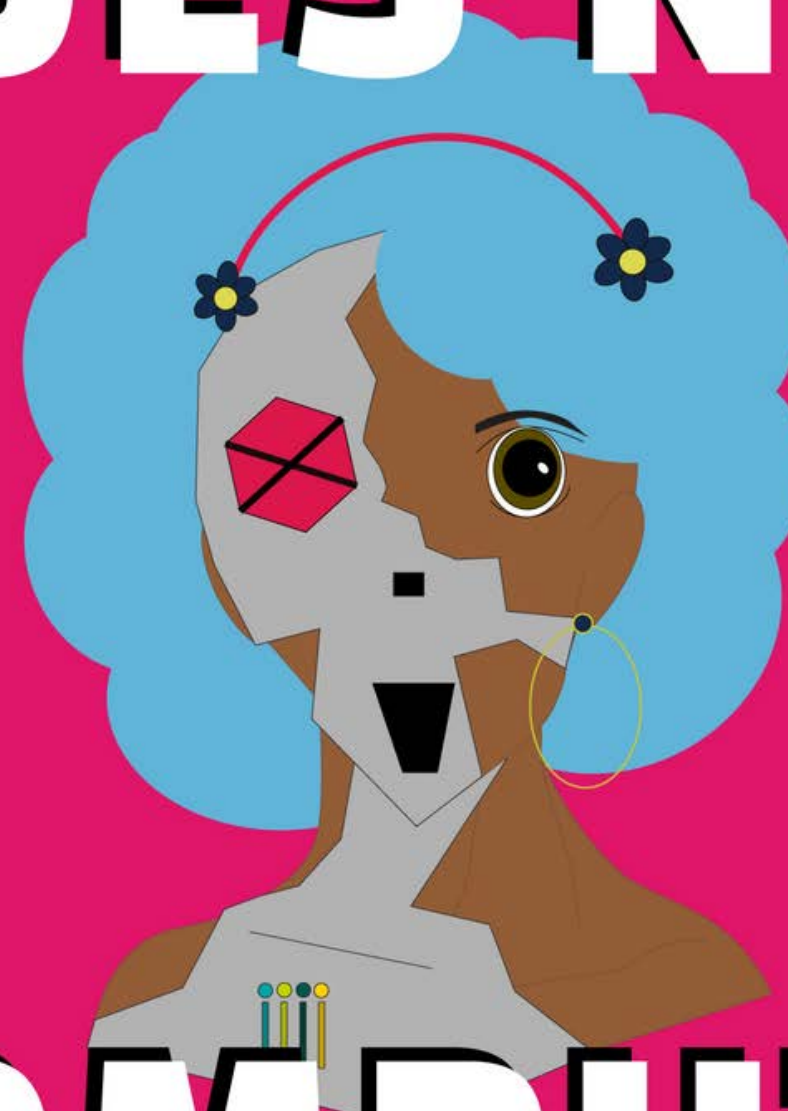# SYLLABUS INTEGRATION GUIDE

DOES NOT COMPUTE PODCAST

Technology — even when "sufficiently advanced" — isn't magic. Algorithms aren't spells cast by programmers. When we imbue tech with mystical powers, we lose sight of the human factors, from economics to culture and politics, that shape how it's actually designed and used.

Does Not Compute is a podcast about technology, people, and power brought to you by the Center for Information, Technology, & Public Life (CITAP) at UNC-Chapel Hill. At CITAP, we study technology as it's tangled up in our lives and societies. On Does Not Compute, we pried into the black boxes and got to know the people behind the code to understand technology platforms in context. Together, we explored how old inequities get reinvented on new platforms, how unexpected communities unite for good (and harm), and how media manipulators play on our identities and emotions to spread lies. To fix our relationship to technology, we must first understand what's broken.

DOES NOT COMPUTE PODCAST

A syllabus integration guide

What follows is a guide to incorporating the the podcast into your teaching, focused on two main themes within the first season:

1. **How identity influences belief:** Three episodes focus on how intersectional identities underlie how we process information—and the world at large.
2. **The affordances of platforms:** Three episodes cover how technologies and platforms influence our online experiences and the information we seek, find, and process.

If you're interested in using *Does Not Compute* in your teaching, we've provided links to relevant materials, much by the scholars who appear on the podcast.

A LOT OF THE TIME, WHEN WE TALK ABOUT DISINFORMATION, IT'S LIKE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT GARBAGE—NOT WHAT'S IN THE GARBAGE, OR WHO MADE THE GARBAGE, OR WHY THE GARBAGE SPREADS, JUST THAT THERE IS GARBAGE AND WE HAVE TO GET RID OF IT. THAT'S A MISTAKE.
—ALICE MARWICK, EPISODE 3

MODULE 1: HOW IDENTITY INFLUENCES BELIEF

These three episodes focus on the multiple intersections of identity and how they underlie the ways we process information and the world at large.

These episodes help problematize the assumptions of neutrality in tech platforms, the origins and present-day status of systems of identity-based discrimination, and comparative experiences of online life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What do conspiracy theories and racism have in common?
- Who's behind white supremacist disinformation? What are their motivations?
- Why is white supremacist content so sticky, and how does it keep getting pushed into the mainstream?
- What are the different ways that diasporic information networks both spread and provide opportunities to push back on mis- and disinformation? How does platform design influence these aspects?

EPISODE 2: CONSPIRACY & RACISM

Host: Deen Freelon

What do conspiracy theories and racism have in common? More than you might think. Deen Freelon discusses how white supremacy is a highly successful disinformation campaign. A willingness to believe terrible and false things about people of other races opens a door to believing falsehoods about science, medicine, politics, and other topics.

Even when Black communities and right-wing political groups express similar distrust of official government sources and embrace conspiracies, they do so via very different paths. We talk about conspiracies, racism, and recognizing when the government actually is out to get you.

YOU VALUE WHITE SUPREMACY SO MUCH THAT YOU'RE WILLING TO PUT YOUR OWN HEALTH ON THE LINE JUST TO UPHOLD IT.
—DEEN FREELON

MODULE 1:
HOW IDENTITY INFLUENCES BELIEF

EPISODE 3: TALKING ABOUT GARBAGE

Host: Alice Marwick

A lot of the time, when we talk about disinformation, it's like we're talking about garbage—not what's in the garbage, or who made the garbage, or why the garbage spreads, just that there is garbage and we have to get rid of it. That's a mistake.

Host Alice Marwick explores the relationship between disinformation, extremism, and media manipulation. Who's behind white supremacist disinformation? What are their motivations? Why is this content so sticky, and how does it keep getting pushed into the mainstream?

WHEN FOLKS ARE TALKING ABOUT PROBLEMS ONLINE, THEY'RE LOOKING AT THE SUNLIGHT ZONE OF THE OCEAN WHERE EVERYTHING IS REALLY VISIBLE...

IF YOU LOOK AT THE LAYERS OF THE OCEAN, THE FURTHER DOWN YOU GO, THE MURKIER THINGS BECOME.
—WHITNEY PHILLIPS

MODULE 1:
HOW IDENTITY INFLUENCES BELIEF

EPISODE 5: ACROSS OCEANS, TABLES, & PLATFORMS

Host: Rachel Kuo

Online, information and disinformation cross huge physical distances easily. Applications like WeChat and YouTube keep Asian American communities more connected to far-flung friends and family than ever. By comparison, bridging the dinner table and its language and generational differences can prove much more daunting.

Host Rachel Kuo explores how disinformation circulates in Asian American communities, from the workings of 'auntie information networks' to the role of history in shaping how communities access and evaluate information.

THERE IS SO MUCH IN TERMS OF THE WAYS THAT INFORMATION IS CIRCULATING ON THESE DIGITAL PLATFORMS THAT IS REALLY CIRCULATED BY OUR AUNTIES, OUR ELDERS.
—RACHEL KUO

MODULE 1:
HOW IDENTITY INFLUENCES BELIEF

RESOURCES

VIDEOS

- Daniel Jolley. (2018, November 11). *Psychology of Conspiracy Theories with Dr Daniel Jolley* [Video]. YouTube.

News and Commentary

- Acosta-Ramos, R., & Mason, J. (2020, December 16). *Failure to understand Black and Latinx communities will result in a critical misunderstanding of the impact of disinformation.* First Draft News.
- Mason, J. (2021, February 18). *The Nation of Islam and anti-vaccine rhetoric.* First Draft News.
- Rao, M. (2021, May 25). *When misinformation comes for the family WhatsApp.* Rest of World.
- Fang, J. (2021, May 26). *Social media sites popular with Asian Americans have a big misinformation problem.* Prism.

RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS & NETWORKS

- Xīn Shēng | 心声 Project (formerly the WeChat Project)
- Viet Fact Check
- Equality Labs

ARTICLES & WHITEPAPERS

- Siddiqi, A., et al. (2019). Growing sense of social status threat and concomitant deaths of despair among whites. *SSM – Population Health, 9*(Article 100449).
- Jolley, D., et al. (2019). Exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories promotes prejudice which spreads across groups. *British Journal of Psychology, 111*(1), 17-35.
- Douglas, K., et al. (2019). Understanding Conspiracy Theories. *Political Psychology, 40*(Suppl. 1), 3-35.
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- Phillips, W. (2018, May 22). *The Oxygen of Amplification: Better Practices for Reporting on Extremists, Antagonists, and Manipulators.* Data & Society.
- Daniels, J. (2009). Cloaked websites: propaganda, cyber-racism and epistemology in the digital era. *New Media & Society, 11*(5), 659–683.

- Aouragh, M., & Chakravartty, P. *Infrastructures of Empire: Towards a Critical Geopolitics of Media and Information Studies*. Media, Culture & Society, 38(4), 559–575.
- Feng, Y., & Tseng-Putterman, M. *"Scattered Like Sand" WeChat Warriors in the Trial of Peter Liang*. Amerasia Journal, 45(2), 238-252.

BOOKS

- Phillips, W., & Milner, R. (2021). *You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape*. MIT Press.
- Phillips, W. (2015). *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*. MIT Press.
- Daniels, J. (2021). *Nice White Ladies: The Truth about White Supremacy, Our Role in It, and How We Can Help Dismantle It*. Seal Press.

MODULE 1:
HOW IDENTITY INFLUENCES BELIEF

MODULE 2: THE AFFORDANCES OF PLATFORMS

These three episodes cover the ways in which the technologies and technology platforms influence our experience of being online and the information we seek, find, and process.

Incorporate these into your class to provide a critical balance to prescriptivist and engineering-focused accounts of search and platform functionality, user experience design, and the function and dysfunction of our public discourse.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
- Is it true that different people get personalized results for the same searches?
- What are data voids, and what do they mean for how we assess information we find online?
- What role do companies like Google have in the formation of ideologically-driven parallel internets?
- How do platforms impact and manipulate our emotions - and how do we manipulate them, ourselves?
- What role to platforms play as "efficiency machines" in our social contexts?

EPISODE 4: WHAT YOU THINK IS WHAT YOU FIND

Host: Francesca Tripodi

Are you a savvy searcher? Many of us would probably answer "yes", but there's a lot more to your search engine than meets the eye. Is it true that different people get personalized results for the same searches? What are data voids, and what do they mean for how we assess information we find online? What role do companies like Google have in the formation of ideologically-driven parallel internets?

Host Francesca Tripodi discusses the ins and outs of how search engine algorithms work (and how they don't), how they can be gamed, and how our own biases shape our returns before the keywords hit the search bar.

WE HAVE TO REALIZE, IT'S LIKE SEARCH ENGINES AREN'T THERE FOR INTELLECTUAL DISCOVERY OR QUESTIONING, OR EXISTENTIAL BELIEFS. THEY'RE LITERALLY PROGRAMMED TO BEST MATCH THE KEYWORDS WE PUT INTO THEM.
—FRANCESCA TRIPODI

MODULE 2:
THE AFFORDANCES OF PLATFORMS

EPISODE 6: ADMIT IT, YOU LOVE BEING ANGRY

Host: Shannon McGregor

Disinformation is social—it's designed for sharing, to draw bright lines between "us" and some other "them." To do that, disinformation campaigns mess with our emotions. Disinformation narratives can convert feelings of anxiety, fear, and powerlessness into bright, actionable anger, or sow doubt and uncertainty in the face of optimism.

Host Shannon McGregor digs deep into all the feels and how to channel good anger in the face of these manipulations.

ANGER CAN FEEL GOOD AND IT CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL. IT CAN ALSO RUN AMOK, BUT IN EITHER CASE IT'S EXHAUSTING. THAT'S PART OF THE POINT. IF WE'RE ALL ARGUING AND WE'RE ALL EXHAUSTED AND WE GET TO THE POINT WHERE WE'RE FEELING HOPELESS, THEN THE STATUS QUO REMAINS.
—SHANNON MCGREGOR

MODULE 2:
THE AFFORDANCES OF PLATFORMS

EPISODE: WHAT DOES TECH OWE DEMOCRACY?

Host: Daniel Kreiss

Tech platforms didn't create our political divides. They aren't blameless, either.

In this episode, host Daniel Kreiss sits down with Katie Harbath and Tressie McMillan Cottom to understand the role of "efficiency machines" in social contexts and imagine the guardrails we need for tech platforms to become stewards of a healthy democracy—because public life is far easier to destroy than rebuild.

EVEN THOUGH PLATFORMS MIGHT NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CRISIS WE ARE NOW IN, THEY ARE ABSOLUTELY RESPONSIBLE FOR CREATING CERTAIN INCENTIVES FOR POLITICAL ACTORS TO DO AND SAY THINGS THAT MIGHT WEAKEN DEMOCRACY IN THE LONG TERM.
—DANIEL KREISS

MODULE 2:
THE AFFORDANCES OF PLATFORMS

RESOURCES

PODCASTS

- *There Are No Girls On The Internet*. (2021). Season 2: DISINFORMED. Hosted by Bridget Todd.
- *The Improvement Association*. (2021). The New York Times.

VIDEOS

- *Senate Hearing on Social Media Algorithms*. (2021, April 27). C-SPAN.

RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS

- UltraViolet

ARTICLES & WHITE PAPERS

- Tripodi, F. (2018, May 16). *Searching for Alternative Facts: Analyzing Scriptural Inference in Conservative News Practices*. Data & Society.
- Hargittai, E., & Young, H. (2012). Searching for a "Plan B": Young Adults' Strategies for Finding Information about Emergency Contraception Online. *Policy & Internet, 4*(2), 1-23.

- Golebiewski, M., and boyd, d. (2019, October 29). *Data Voids: Where Missing Data Can Easily Be Exploited*. Data & Society.
- Donovan, J., and boyd, d. (2019). Stop the Presses? Moving From Strategic Silence to Strategic Amplification in a Networked Media Ecosystem. *American Behavioral Scientist, 65*(2), 333-350.
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- Edelman. (2021). *Edelman Trust Barometer 2021*.
- Ray, R., et al. (2016). Ferguson and the death of Michael Brown on Twitter: #BlackLivesMatter, #TCOT, and the evolution of collective identities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(4), 559-575.
- Brown, M., et al. (2017). #SayHerName: a case study of intersectional social media activism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 40*(11), 1831-1846.

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- Mercieca, J. (2020). *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump*. Texas A&M University Press.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2018). *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. The New Press.
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- Mason, L. (2018). *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. University of Chicago Press.
- Oliver, J.E., & Wood, T.J. (2018). *Enchanted America: How Intuition and Reason Divide Our Politics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wells, I.B. (1899). *Lynch Law in Georgia* [Pamphlet]. Library of Congress.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press.

MODULE 2:
THE AFFORDANCES OF PLATFORMS