# Lecture 1

## Social media are…
• Two-way computer-mediated communication
• Oriented towards the exchange of interpersonal meaning
• Relational self-representation
• Rich and multimodal
• On a spectrum between synchronous and asynchronous
• Not just Western
• "…social media enable anyone to develop and display their creativity, to empathize with others and to find connection, communication and communion" (Miekle 2016, p. ix)
• But they "are also surveillance systems through which users become complicit in their own commercial exploitation" (p. ix)
• So when we talk about social media, we refer to the fusion of personal and public use. And to specific —
    • technological affordances (platforms perspective)
    • business models & corporate practices (practice perspective)
    • Personal & public expression (communication perspective)

## Defining social media
• "…social media are networked database platforms that combine public with personal communication" (Miekle 2016, p. 6, emphasis mine)
• Social Network Sites (SNSs) "are web-based platforms on which members can create personal profiles, articulate friendship connections, and socially interact" (Phua & Jin & Kim, 2017, p.115, emphasis mine)

Platform (SM technologies):
• Mapping a platform's affordances.
• How do these constrain/enable practices & communication?

Practices (What people do with SM):
• What kinds of social activities are involved in generating memes?
• What role do memes play in social life?

Communication (How people mean with SM):
• What kinds of resources are involved in creating image macros?
• What kinds of functions does these texts have?

## What is an 'affordance'?
• Term derives from James Gibson's (1979) theory of perception
    • affordance = all 'action possibilities' latent in the environment

• Popularised by Donald Norman (1988) in relation to the design of everyday objects.
• 'perceived affordance' (Norman, 1990:9) - refers to an attribute of an object that allows people to know how to use it:
  • door handle 'affords' pulling
  • icon 'affords' clicking on (or tapping)
  • scrollbars 'afford' dragging up or down
• Can you think of some of the common affordances of social media platforms?

**Perception or meaning-making?**
• Affordances can be a confusing term used inconsistently by scholars (even within the one paper!)
• "Twitter affords different things to an end-user than to a developer, advertiser or researcher" (Bucher & Helmond, 2017: 246)
  • Do these affordances reside in the minds of the social media users /designers / advertisers? In the features of a platform? In the interaction between the two?
• 'modal affordance' (Kress, 2010) à what it is possible to express with the resources of a communicative mode
  • not a matter of 'perception' but of the way meanings are made with particular semiotic resources à social semiotic perspective
  • these meanings are developed materially, culturally, socially and historically

**Affordances are social and contextual?**
• "Social media platforms and their underlying logic of 'connectivity' (Van Dijck, 2013) also require a view on affordances that moves beyond the boundaries of the platform and takes the larger environment in which the platform operates into account." (Bucher & Helmond, 2017: 247)

• Need a 'platform sensitive' (Bucher & Helmond, 2017: 247) approach to affordances • How are digital platforms environments that are different to the natural environments conceived by Gibson in his theory of affordances? • How is a hammer different to a social media app? • "the digital environment does not merely offer something to its users, users' needs and individual likings and behaviours increasingly play a generative role in producing those very offerings in the first place" (p.248)

• What is the difference in between the following:

• "affordances cannot simply be understood in terms of good or bad design" (Bucher & Helmond, 2017:245)
• A difference in meaning?
• These icons are meaning-making resources not just technical artefacts


## Social semiotic functions and affordance
• Functions of :
    • bookmarking (the save fave)
    • presence-signaling (the wave fave)
    • exiting an interaction (the farewell fave)
"From the perspective of end-users, the favorite feature does not simply afford bookmarking a tweet, it also affords different types of sociality and communicative actions, e.g., favoriting as a form of communication to maintain relations, to show agreement, or to indicate the end of a conversation (cf. Meier et al., 2014)." (p.245)

## Normatizing speech
Excessive sharing of nonsignificant content:
    "Yeah, and a friend of mine, she has ten status updates a day […] and then you get a pretty sad image of her, since her life is like eat, go out with the dog, watch TV, sleep, then Facebook, "in a relationship," "not in a relationship," "I hate men.""

Profile tuning
    "I think it's a bit ridiculous when you see that some people are kind of living for their status updates. You can see that they have thought carefully about how to get as many comments as possible [laughs]."

Over-friending
    "It's interesting that there are some who have 500 friends, of whom they know 50. I have a lot of these kinds of friends: you don't want to ignore them when they send a friend request, so you just accept it and put them in a group that you strictly limit. It's a bit of a problem on Facebook when some people increase their friend count just to get as many as possible.