הפקולטה לניהול
ע"ש קולר
אוניברסיטת תל אביב

Coller School of Management
Tel Aviv University

The Leon Recanati Graduate School of Business Administration

1242-3283– User Engagement in Online Environments

(Prerequisite: N/A Preclusion: N/A)

First Semester – 2023/24

Section	Day	Hour	Classroom	Exam date	Lecturer	Email	Telephone
01	Sunday* (First module)	15:45-18:30	TBA	N/A	Dr. Lior Zalmanson	lzalmanson@tauex.tau.ac.il	

Teaching Assistant (TA): Shani Evenstein - shani.even@gmail.com

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Units

1 course unit = 4 ECTS units

The ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) is a framework defined by the European Commission to allow for unified recognition of student academic achievements from different countries.

Course Description and Course Objectives

Welcome to our comprehensive course on user engagement in virtual environments! In this course, we delve into the intricate world of engagement, which refers to the multifaceted concept of user participation and involvement on websites. In today's landscape, where online communities have become more pervasive than ever, websites often integrate community and social components, such as friendships, talkbacks, feedback loops, and talk pages, to enrich the overall user experience. These elements not only enhance usability and satisfaction but also extend user interaction time.

Our course is structured to provide you with a profound understanding of user engagement, covering a wide array of critical aspects. We will explore the various dimensions and types of user engagement, ranging from interactive participation to profound involvement. By doing so, you'll gain insights into how engagement can be classified and how it can impact user behavior and website outcomes.

To establish a strong foundation, we'll begin by examining the pivotal role of trust and cognitive load as precursors to engagement. You'll discover how trust influences users' willingness to engage and how the cognitive load associated with interactions can shape the depth of engagement.

Delving deeper, we will uncover the psychological underpinnings that drive participation and commitment within the online sphere. This exploration will provide you with valuable insights into the factors that foster a sense of belonging and loyalty in virtual communities.

Understanding the metrics that gauge engagement is paramount in our course. We'll equip you with the knowledge to decipher these metrics effectively while being mindful of their limitations. Moreover, we will emphasize the significance of designing platforms that empower users, allowing them to engage seamlessly and meaningfully.

As we navigate the intricacies of engagement, we can't ignore the darker side of online interactions. We'll delve into the realms of trolls, flaming, and incivility, shedding light on the challenges they pose and the complex issue of content moderation within communities.

The course also addresses the unique challenges faced by volunteer communities and online group leaders. You'll gain insights into the dynamics of these groups, their motivations, and the hurdles they encounter while fostering engagement.

In an era of advancing technology, AI-mediated communication plays a pivotal role. We'll explore how AI, including generative AI, is harnessed to enhance engagement, making interactions more personalized and meaningful.

Furthermore, the course unravels the concept of online identities. You'll dive into the intricate world of how individuals construct and project their identities in virtual spaces, and how these online personas impact their engagement experiences.

In sum, our course offers a comprehensive exploration of engagement in virtual environments. By merging insights from technology management and user experience, we aim to equip you with the knowledge and skills to effectively plan, design, and measure engagement strategies. Whether you're a designer, a community manager, or simply intrigued by the dynamics of online participation, this course promises to be an enlightening journey into the heart of user engagement.

Course Materials

The primary resources for this course consist of comprehensive slide decks that encompass essential concepts, theories, and practical applications relevant to the subject matter. Additionally, the course will draw upon a dynamic reading list provided at the end of the syllabus. Unlike traditional courses, there is no singular textbook for this topic due to its fluid and ever-evolving nature.

Policy on Cell Phones, Other Devices, etc.

In order to create an effective learning environment and foster respectful interactions, the use of cell phones and other electronic devices, such as laptops and tablets, will be limited during class sessions. Please silence all devices upon entering the classroom to minimize disruptions. While in class, the use of devices for note-taking and educational purposes is encouraged, but activities unrelated to the course material, such as texting, browsing social media, or watching videos, are not permitted. If you need to use a device for an urgent matter, please step outside the classroom to do so discreetly.

Student Groups

Students will need to form groups of 3-4 (specifics depending on overall enrollment) to work on the final project. I will communicate more details on group formation during the first class (on October 15, 2023).

Evaluation (Composition of Grade)

Percentage	Assignment	Type	Due Date
20%	**Class attendance and contribution to class exercises**	Individual	All sessions
20%	**Personal Engagement Insights Storyboard**	Individual	You get to choose! Submit anytime from November 1st up to Dec 6th
60%	**Class Project submitted in three parts**	Group	Submission 1: Full report: Dec 6, 2023

The different grade components are described in detail below.

Course Assignments

Class Attendance and Active Participation in Class Exercises

Attendance is a fundamental pillar for achieving success in this class and will be closely observed throughout the semester. In every session, we will engage in collaborative in-class exercises, typically lasting 10-15 minutes, where your active involvement is not only encouraged but also vital for your academic progress. These exercises will include in-class submissions and presentations, and it's important to note that absence from these activities can have a negative impact not only on your own learning journey but also on the collective experience of your fellow students. Your active presence and participation are not only expected but highly valued in this learning environment.

Personal Engagement Insights Storyboard Assignment

As part of this course, every student will have the opportunity to create a captivating and insightful presentation storyboard focusing on the onboarding/offboarding processes of a selected website. You can choose to create this storyboard using either a 10-slide PowerPoint presentation (PPTx) or through dynamic animations (Don't worry, I will give examples and further explanations in class).

Your task is to carefully annotate the chosen website's onboarding/offboarding process, employing the concepts and methodologies covered in the class. Your work will be assessed based on the quality of insights you provide and the depth of your analysis.

This assignment not only encourages your creative and analytical thinking but also offers you a chance to apply the knowledge gained in the course to real-world scenarios. It's an opportunity to showcase your understanding of the subject matter and your ability to communicate complex ideas effectively.

Class Project submitted in three parts – Each group will choose a complex, social, and interactive website and demonstrate the concepts in class through its analysis. The work will be partially based on website materials (demonstrating the existing state of the website) and partially on working on ideas to improve and solve the website's related issues.

Grading Policy

In the 2008/9 academic year the Faculty instituted a grading policy for all graduate level courses that aims to maintain a certain level of the final course grade. For this course the average is set at 83-87 grade average. Accordingly, this policy will be applied to this course's final grades.
Additional information regarding this policy can be found on the Faculty website.

Evaluation of the Course by Students

Following the completion of the course, students will participate in a survey to evaluate the instructor and the course – to provide feedback for the benefit of the students, the teachers and the University.

Course Site (Moodle)

The course site will be the primary tool to communicate messages and material to students. You should check the course site regularly for information on classes, reading materials, and assignments.

All reading materials will be available on the course website.

Tentative Course Outline and Details of Sessions*

Date	Topic(s)	Case Study	Required Reading & Suggested Reading	Deliverables
Oct 15	What is Engagement? Types and effects of user engagement Trust and cognitive load as precursors of engagement		Attfield et al. (2011) O'brien et al. (2018) Covey & Merill (2006) Sweller (2011)	
Oct 22	The psychological underpinnings of participation and commitment in online environments	Facebook (Please listen to Radiolab before class)	**Radiolab (2015)** Norton et al. (2012) Zalmanson et al. (2022)	
Oct 29	Understanding Metrics and their faults + User Empowering Design	Instagram (no reading)		First Part of Project
Nov 5	The challenges around forming communities on websites + utilizing volunteer communities and groups leaders	Reddit (Read before class)	**Newton (2023)**	
Nov 12	Bad Engagement? Trolls, flaming, incivility, misinformation, disinformation and issues around content moderation on websites	Twitter/X (no reading)	Gillespie (2020)	Submission of second part of project
Nov 19	AI Mediated Communication and the Use of Generative AI to increase engagement	Wikipedia (Read before class)	**Gertner (2023)**	
Nov 26	The future of engagement platforms - dilemmas around immersion and identity presentation + Course Summary	Meta/Oculus (no reading)	Van Dijck, J. (2013)	Final Submission: Dec 6th

Required Reading Details

1) Newton, Casey. (2023). "How Reddit set itself up for a fall" https://www.theverge.com/2023/6/13/23759130/reddit-protests-history-community-growth-moderation

2) Gertner, John. (2023). "Wikipedia's Moment of Truth" https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/18/magazine/wikipedia-ai-chatgpt.html?unlocked_article_code=qPvfCKg8wx1bngyVS1mnbUblAwlELLdCGuPWDVoqMtu6bcz0Zve_ZFvb6otoAinBbwyKWgNzWrykV5BeLW5HZDSz6yHp9UfatOFuSWVFNm52kZtZz0db484IGDVMymRCbIcNuA7e_VUaBpwRZE-L8nsdZCfWiK6GI0ACiSI_c8V7x5d3JGB0yXZwHmzabRzFHf1ncE_ZhbVH0Bc365Gk00wxMd5mNI8sAcoTxqTQ9KzeCu_xgEmqGFKC0-mIlenO0WpKxaXs-jRsuOQ9di5ctllqoh-qfBjb4DYRwY3SwBtmhCWs3TFSObp0f0Ls7HuldzKfU2zBoMWtVMn8_BHvlg&smid=url-share

3) Radiolab. (2015). "The Trust Engineers" https://radiolab.org/podcast/trust-engineers

Recommended Reading

1) Attfield, S., Kazai, G., Lalmas, M., & Piwowarski, B. (2011). Towards a science of user engagement (position paper). In WSDM workshop on user modelling for Web applications

2) Covey, S. M., & Merrill, R. R. (2006). *The speed of trust: The one thing that changes everything*. Simon and schuster.

3) Gillespie, T. (2020). Content moderation, AI, and the question of scale. *Big Data & Society*, *7*(2), 2053951720943234.

4) Norton, M. I., Mochon, D., & Ariely, D. (2012). The IKEA effect: When labor leads to love. *Journal of consumer psychology*, *22*(3), 453-460.

5) O'Brien, Heather L., Paul Cairns, and Mark Hall. "A practical approach to measuring user engagement with the refined user engagement scale (UES) and new UES short form." International Journal of Human-Computer Studies 112 (2018): 28-39.

6) Sweller, J. (2011). Cognitive load theory. In *Psychology of learning and motivation* (Vol. 55, pp. 37-76). Academic Press.

7) Van Dijck, J. (2013). 'You have one identity': Performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Media, culture & society*, *35*(2), 199-215.

8) Zalmanson, L., Oestreicher-Singer, G., & Ecker, Y. (2022). The role of Social Cues and trust in users' private Information Disclosure. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, *46*(2), 1109-1134.