

VIEN-PS 214-01 (2026 SUMMER)
CYBERPSYCHOLOGY
IES Abroad Vienna

DESCRIPTION: Could you imagine life without the Internet? Few decades ago, there were no smartphones, no computers, and no social networking sites. Now the Internet has reached virtually every corner of the lives of many people, especially among youths and young adults, bringing about tremendous changes in the way we live. This course is an invitation to take a closer look at scientific theories and findings in cyberpsychology. Cyberpsychology is a new field of research based on, adding to and extending other psychological disciplines such as social psychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology. It tries to explain how the Internet is influencing all our lives and how these dynamics might influence our future world, in the fields of work and study, leisure and play, identity, and relating to others in relationships and groups. How is it affecting the way you and other people think, feel, perceive and define themselves and communicate with others? What are the opportunities and threats it brings to our lives and how can we learn to deal with them in a way that benefits us and our society? It will include practically relating the psychological theories to your own online behavior, observing, reflecting, and discussing your findings in class.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: At least one introductory psychology course (preferably social psychology) or an especially strong interest in psychology. To benefit from this course, students need to understand the logic of experimental research as well as basic psychological concepts and processes (e.g., conditioning).

The following video tutorials on psychological research methods are highly recommended:

Psychological Research: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFV71QPvX2I> (11 min)

Real and Illusory Correlations, Scatterplots, and Causation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-IOZy6u1js> (12 min)

The Third Variable Problem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvHyuJBeCyk> (8 min)

The Experimental Method: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MG Tkf5eghQ> (8min)

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

- Lectures
- Student presentations
- Practical exercises
- Discussions in class
- Online discussions in the Moodle forum

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Class participation – 10 %
- Online discussion points – 10 %
- Midterm exam – 25 %
- In-class presentation – 25 %
- Final exam – 30 %

Grading rubrics can be found on Moodle.

Class participation

Students are expected to read and think about the readings assigned for each week in advance to participate in the discussion.

Online discussion points



After most classes, your homework is a short exercise related to the assigned readings. This must be submitted electronically to the Moodle discussion forum and is due before the next class meeting. It will typically include a short written assignment (200 to 300 words), including practical exercises helping students reflect on their own behavior, experience, and observations in the virtual realm of the Internet, and thus get a better personal understanding of the theories and phenomena described in the literature. Students will be graded based on showing their capacity to connect the theories to their own lives and experiences in the digital world, as well as with their own well-grounded opinions, providing a fruitful basis for discussion in class as well as on the Moodle online forum.

In-class presentation

Students are expected to do an oral presentation, either alone (15 minutes) or in a group of two (20-25min), on a topic of their choice. Presentation slides should be uploaded beforehand to the respective Moodle folder (no need to bring a laptop). You could present a popular claim or an academic debate on the influences of digital media (e.g., sexting, gaming, sharenting, fitspiration) on individual well-being, on relationships, and/or on societal norms. Present evidence from different perspectives. Cite at least five academic papers, of which most should be published after 2014. Theoretical frameworks can come from older literature.

Midterm and final exams

The midterm and final exams will be predominantly based on the lecture slides but also on the readings, student presentations, and all material covered and discussed in class. Exams will be written in person and will consist of a combination of the following types of questions: short answer, short essay, multiple-choice, and true-false.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Articulate the main theoretical concepts of Cyberpsychology
- Define the ways being online influences how people feel, think, behave, and interact with others
- Compare the opportunities and risks of private and professional activities in the evolving realm of virtual worlds
- Describe health-related challenges and deviant behavior on the Internet
- Critically evaluate and self-reflect on their own online behavior
- Develop a well-sustained position about their choice of participation in the various opportunities the Internet provides (e.g. social networking sites, blogging, MOOCs, working online) and be able to support it

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

IES Abroad Vienna requires attendance at all class sessions. Attendance will be taken in every class. Students must attend at least 60% of their class sessions to qualify for a passing grade, regardless of whether their absences have been excused or not. Students are highly encouraged to communicate absences as soon as possible to their professors and for excused absences using the processes described in the absence policy. Please refer to the IES Abroad Vienna Absence Policy for a more precise overview of all attendance policies at IES Abroad Vienna and of possible grade penalties.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

At IES Abroad Vienna, we hold ourselves to the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty undermines the principles of trust and fairness essential to a thriving learning community. As such, plagiarism and cheating are considered serious violations of our code of conduct, and students found engaging in such activities will face swift and severe consequences, ranging from a failing grade on an assignment to an academic review and possible expulsion from the program.

USE OF AI:

Artificial Intelligence may be utilized as a supplementary tool to enhance learning, research, and productivity in this course. Students are encouraged to use AI responsibly for brainstorming, summarizing concepts, and improving their understanding of course material. However, AI-generated content must not replace original thinking, critical analysis, or academic integrity. Students are fully responsible for the content they submit. This includes verifying the accuracy of information, ensuring proper citation of sources, and upholding ethical academic standards. AI-generated content may contain errors, biases, or fabricated information (often referred to as "hallucinations"). Students must critically evaluate AI outputs, fact-check claims, and

consult reliable sources to ensure accuracy. Submitting incorrect or misleading AI-generated content without verification may be considered academic misconduct. If in doubt, students should seek guidance from the instructor.

CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments & Reading
Session 1 May 25	Introduction to Cyberpsychology What is Cyberpsychology? How can we try to understand and describe the ways people feel, think, behave and interact online? After a short look at the history of humans on the Internet and the definition of Cyberpsychology, we will discuss Suler's eight-dimensional model of the cyberpsychology architecture to analyze how people define themselves as individuals and in groups, interact with others, communicate, use their senses and perceive time in the virtual realm, as well as deal with the question what is "real" and in which ways perceptions of reality change (or don't change) the way we live.	Readings: Kirwan, Gráinne. "Introduction to cyberpsychology" in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 1, p. 3-13. Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 1 "Cyberpsychology Architecture", p. 21-53.
Session 2 May 27	Identity and Self in the Digital World What do we reveal or hide about ourselves online? Why do some people create an idealized version of their identities on the Internet and which hidden or negative aspects of themselves might slip out? Why do some people choose to stay anonymous or invisible on the Internet? What makes people susceptible or resistant to the Disinhibition Effect? In week 2 we will discuss questions like these and learn about concepts that help us understand the way people define and see themselves in the digital world, such as the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects Theory, Impression Management, the Equalization Hypothesis and the Disinhibition Effect.	Readings: Connolly, Irene. "Self and identity in cyberspace" in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 4, p. 45-54. Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 3 "The Dynamic Digital Psyche", p. 68-94 & Chapter 4 "The Disinhibited Self", p. 95-111. Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Ramirez Jr, A., Burgoon, J. K., & Peña, J. (2015). Chapter 1: Interpersonal and hyperpersonal dimensions of computer-mediated communication. <u>The Handbook of the Psychology of Communication Technology</u>, p. 1-22.
Session 3 June 01	Communication in the Virtual World How do we communicate in the digital world? How do people express themselves online, using ever-changing forms of words, pictures,	Readings: Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 7

	emoticons and other forms of communication? We will look at the ways people communicate with each other in the digital world and how different forms of communication shape our relationships, our language and our thinking.	“Text talk”, p. 158-193, and Chapter 8 “Image talk”, p. 194-224. Kirwan, Gráinne. “Computer Mediated Communication and online media” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 3, p. 31-43.
Session 4 June 03	Groups in the Digital Realm How do people behave in groups and what specifics of group-related social behavior are there when people meet online? What can we learn from current research about how to build a successful online community? What strengthens group boundary online? We will discuss questions like these and learn about phenomena such as groupthink, collective identities and social loafing on the Internet.	Readings: Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 10 “One of Use – Groups and Communities”, p. 254-280. Hurley, Olivia. “The dynamics of groups online” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 8, p. 98-108. Barton, Hannah. “Persuasion and compliance in cyberspace” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 9, p. 111-123.
Session 5 June 08 cancelled Make up class for this session will be on June 19	Education, Work and the Internet + Remote psychological counseling and therapy How will the Internet influence our future professional lives? The Internet is increasingly shaping and changing the ways people live, study and work. We will discuss innovations such as MOOCs (massive open online courses) and their impact on the future of education as well as the online workplace and its implications for the future of work. During this class we will also discuss the potential benefits and risks of remote (online) psychological counselling and therapy.	Readings: Flood, Cliona. “The online workplace” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 14, p. 181-192. Palmer, Marion. “The Internet as an educational space” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 15, p. 194-206. Greaney, John. “Attention and distraction online” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 7, p. 86-97.
June 10 – June 15	MIDTERM EXAM	
Session 6 June 15	Problems of Excessive Internet Use Which effects can the Internet have on people’s health? This week we will look at challenges such as information overload, excessive gaming and	Readings: Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 11 “Change and Excess”, p. 281-308, and Chapter 12 “Addicted or Devoted”, p. 309-326.

	mobile phone separation anxiety as well as discuss at which point of Internet use passion and devotion transforms into addiction, possibly leading to health-related, social and other problems for the individual as well as for society as a whole.	Van Rooij et al. (2018). A weak scientific basis for gaming disorder: Let us err on the side of caution. <i>Journal of Behavioral Addictions</i> 7(1), p.1-9. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6035022/pdf/jba-07-19.pdf Matthes, J., Karsay, K., Schmuck, D., & Stevic, A. (2020). "Too much to handle": Impact of mobile social networking sites on information overload, depressive symptoms, and well-being. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>, 105, 106217. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2019.106217 Flood, Cliona. "Abnormal cyberpsychology and cybertherapy" in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 12, p. 153-164.
Session 7 June 17	Generative AI: Psychological consequences of use & AI-mediated communication and online therapy How does the use of generative AI affect our critical thinking skills? Are we becoming better or worse thinkers with generative AI? Is it possible to communicate via AI-mediated tools or conduct counseling and psychotherapy online and what are the chances and challenges of that? We will look at the ways communication is changing with the rise of AI tools as well as the challenges and opportunities this poses for the users.	Readings: Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 15 "Electric Therapeutics", p. 380-416. Mieczkowski, H., & Hancock, J. (2022). Examining Agency, Expertise, and Roles of AI Systems in AI-Mediated Communication. <i>CSCW '23, October 13–18, 2023, Minneapolis, MN</i> Hancock, J. T., Naaman, M., & Levy, K. (2020). AI-mediated communication: Definition, research agenda, and ethical considerations. <i>Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication</i>, 25(1), 89-100. Sundar, S. S. (2020). Rise of machine agency: A framework for studying the psychology of human–AI interaction (HAI). <i>Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication</i>, 25(1), 74-88.
Session 8 June 22	Relating, Friendship and Love in the Digital Realm Why do people choose to communicate with some people online but not with others? How do they perceive other people? The ways people relate to each other in the digital world will be analyzed and discussed, speaking about topics such as interpersonal perceptions, transference, taking on a new identity, black hole experiences and online dating. Furthermore, we will discuss the concept of what is perceived as "real" in the	Readings: Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 6 "Other than you think: Interpersonal Perceptions", p. 127-157. Fox Hamilton, Nicola. "Love and relationships online" in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 6, p. 71-83. Thomas, M. F., Binder, A., Stevic, A., & Matthes, J. (2023). 99+ matches but a spark ain't one: Adverse psychological

	digital world and how this influences the way people interact with each other online.	effects of excessive swiping on dating apps. Telematics and Informatics, 78, 101949. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2023.101949
Session 9 June 24	Deviant Behavior on the Internet Which forms of deviant behavior are there on the Internet, where does this come from, how can we understand them psychologically and what helps people stay safe on the Internet? There are mild as well as more severe forms of deviant behavior on the Internet, ranging from a misunderstanding of the rules and challenges of this medium to outright criminal conduct. This week we will discuss phenomena such as trolling, stereotyping, hate speech, cyberstalking or online identity theft.	Readings: Suler, John (2016): <u>Psychology of the Digital Age – Humans become electric</u>. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 13 “The Digital Deviant”, p. 327-352. Barton, Hannah. “The dark side of the Internet” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 5, p. 58-69. Döring, N. (2014). Consensual sexting among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer sexting? <i>Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace</i>, 8(1), Article 9. https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-1-9 Recommended readings: Connolly, Irene. “Young people and the Internet” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter 17, p. 224-234. Kirwan, Gráinne. “Privacy and trust online” in: Connolly, I. et al (2016): <u>An Introduction to Cyberpsychology</u>. Routledge, Chapter, Chapter 10, p. 124-136.
June 29 – July 3	FINAL EXAM	

COURSE CONTENT NOTE:

We will be discussing psychological phenomena on the Internet that may be disturbing or that evoke unpleasant memories (especially when we discuss phenomena such as cyberbullying, trolling, and cyberstalking). If you suspect that specific material is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have before the subject comes up in class. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to course material with the class, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our classwork. If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion, you may always do so without academic penalty. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Amichai-Hamburger, Yair (2013): The Social Net: Understanding Our Online Behaviour. Oxford University Press.
- Carr, Nicholas (2011): The Shallows – What the Internet is doing to our brains. Norton & Company.
- Crystal, David (2011): Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide. Routledge.
- Krotoski, Aleks (2013): Untangling the Web: What the Internet is Doing to You. Faber & Faber.
- Rosen, Larry et al. (2012): iDisorder: Understanding our Obsession with Technology and Overcoming its Hold on Us. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schneier, Bruce (2015): Data and Goliath: The Hidden Battles to Collect Your Data and Control your World. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Turkle, Sherry (2012): Alone Together – Why we expect more from technology and less from each other. Basic Books.
- Whitty, Monica and Adrian Carr (2006): Cyberspace Romance: The Psychology of Online Relationships. Palgrave Macmillan.



- Whitty, Monica and Adam Joinson (2009): Truth, Lies and Trust on the Internet. Routledge.