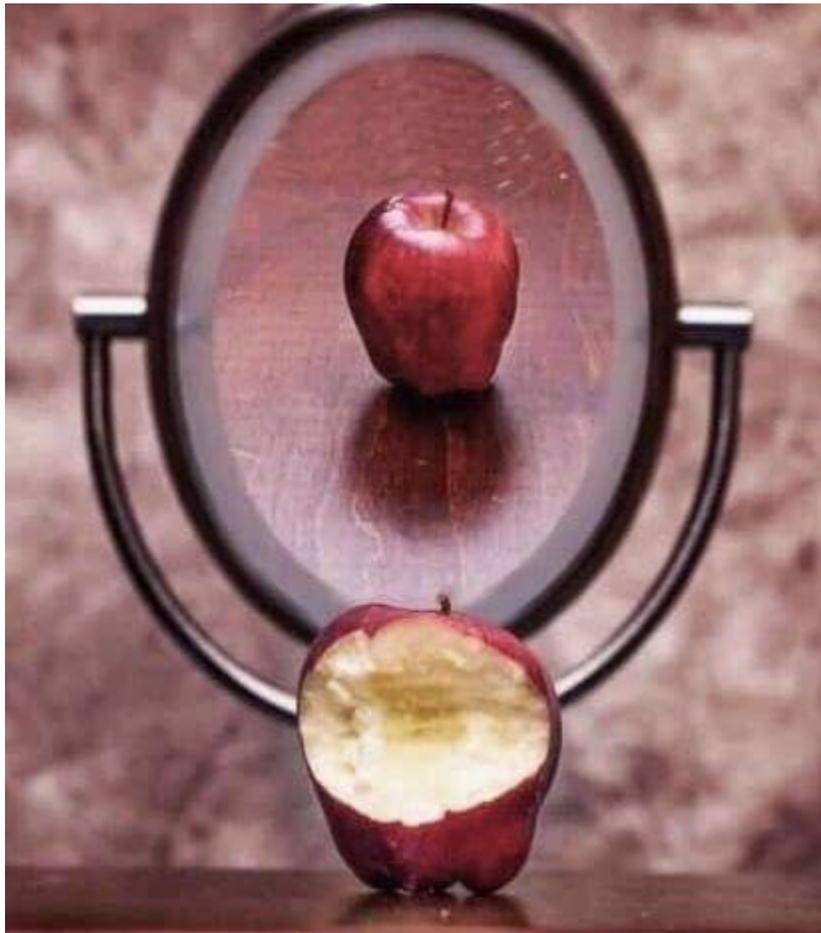


# Identity, Branding and Authenticity in the Age of Social Media

**Taught By:**

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What does it mean to be seen, and how do we shape how we're perceived— by others, by ourselves, and by the digital systems that mediate our lives? This program explores the complex interplay between identity, perception, and branding, asking how we perform and present ourselves across platforms and spaces—whether consciously or not. From social media profiles to professional bios, from everyday self-expression to curated public personas, we're constantly engaged in acts of design.

Together, we'll examine how branding functions not only as a business strategy but as a deeply personal and cultural process—one tied to questions of authenticity, power, aesthetics, and audience. We'll consider how branding shapes and is shaped by our lived experiences and social roles, and how it plays out across personal, professional, real, and imagined contexts.

There will be opportunities for creative exploration of course themes, but no specific design or media skills are required. Students will study a brand or media format of their choosing as a form of research around the mid-point of the quarter. The quarter will culminate in a student-originated brand guide on a more personal topic of interest.

This program will meet in person on Monday evenings from 5:30-7:50 and Thursday evenings from 5:30-9:30 with some asynchronous online coursework like recorded lectures and virtual discussions to be completed between class sessions.

**Anticipated Credit Equivalencies:**

4 - Brand Design; 4 - Critical Media Studies

**Spring Registration:**

Course Reference Numbers (8): 30112

**Draft Learning Goals:**

- Gain skills and confidence speaking and writing about media, and communicating and presenting through visual materials
- Develop an ability to construct a narrative (and recognize character development) in brand design
- Articulate a comprehensive working definition of branding
- Reflect on meaningful connections between self (identity), brand, form and content, and media
- Develop an ability to manage and negotiate form and content, making intentional choices about details in design and media work
- Build research skills and media literacy through research and analysis of existing branding and media work

## Tentative Schedule

The following schedule is subject to change. It includes four larger assignments or projects. Students will also be expected to complete a brief weekly assignment in preparation for seminar discussion during Thursday classes.

Week	In-Class	Asynchronous/Lab
1	IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION Introduce assignment: Personal Brand Narrative	No media lab week 1
2	AUTHENTICITY and TRUST Introduce Assignment: Brand or Media Case Study Personal Brand Narrative due	Lab: Media Literacy Group A
3	SOCIAL MEDIA	Lab: Media Literacy Group B
4	PERSONAL vs. POLITICAL Brand or Media Case Study due Introduce Assignment: Brand Brief	Lab: Graphics Group A
5	CHECK-INS	Lab: Graphics Group B
6	MEDIA TOOLS and CONCEPTS Brand Brief due Introduce Assignment: Multi-media Project	Lab: Audio Group A
7	DESIGN TOOLS and CONCEPTS	Lab: Audio Group B
8	SHIFTING IDENTITIES	Lab: Video Group A and B
9	Project Development Time	No lab week 9
10	MULTI-MEDIA BRAND ASSIGNMENT POSTER SESSIONS, DEBRIEF	

## Possible Readings:

All readings are available online or through the library. No textbook purchases are required.

- [“Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture”](#), by Sarah Banet-Weiser
- [“Brand Bible : The Complete Guide to Building, Designing, and Sustaining Brands”](#), by Debbie Millman
- Naomi Klein, Doppelganger Conversation, *On The Media*, <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/naomi-kleins-journey-mirror-world-on-the-media?tab=transcript>
- Duck and McMahan, Communication in Everyday Life, “Identities, Perceptions and Communication” (.pdf forthcoming)
- “Tudum! The story behind the iconic Netflix sound” *20k Hz*, <https://www.20k.org/episodes/netflix>
- Bishop, Sophie. *Influencer Creep*. “Making Soup, Eating Dino Nuggets: Authenticity within Influencer Cultures”. UC Press. 2025 (pdf forthcoming)
- Stephen West, “Heidegger and Authenticity” <https://www.philosophizethis.org/podcast/heidegger-authenticity>
- “I and Thou: The Theology of Martin Buber” Hadar Podcast <https://www.hadar.org/torah-tefillah/podcasts/i-and-thou-theology-martin-buber>
- “Finally” *This American Life*, [DAN HARMON APOLOGY STORY]. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/674/get-a-spine/act-one-7>