2. Media, Technology and Society - Knowledge and Experience in the Ageof Automation and Information

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A note about this course

This course will explore the intersection between media and technology and its impact on knowledge and experience.

Media and technology surround us in our everyday life. They not only mediate our relationship with the external world but also shape our understanding of the self. Media has come a long way from just being a channel for information and expression to becoming the framework within which our creativity and imagination is tightly bound. The advent of the web has led to a number of paradoxes in which media acts both, as a liberator and an enslaver.

Another great liberator of the modern era was thought to be Technology. While we still wait for technology's great promise of solving all human problems, the list of problems caused by it is only increasing. What we have witnessed is a 'non-progress' of technology in key areas where we face the worst crises. While buzzwords like 'Artificial Intelligence', 'Block chain', 'Internet of Things', are widely circulated, we are yet to see the proof of their efficacy in solving real problems. In the meantime, we see great progress being made in the utilization of available technology in social engineering and control of the masses by the governments and businesses across the world.

Web 2.0 has changed the way we access knowledge. We are no more passive receivers of content but are also active producers. Wikipedia and YouTube are just an example of user created content. Through internet and the web, media and technology intersect with each other to produce a culture within which we operate for most part of our time.

The course will explore themes intersecting media, technology and society and try to grapple with some paradoxes, questions and dilemmas of modern life.

Course Title: Media, Technology and Society - Knowledge and Experience in the Age of Automation and Information

Course Schedule: Odd Semester (2020-21)

Course Duration: 60 hours

Course Objectives:

The objective of this course will be to

- develop an understanding of the role of media in everyday life and its impact on our understanding of the society and the self

- develop an understanding of the impact of modern technology on news gathering, news dissemination and creating public opinion

- develop an understanding of the business model at work behind the emergence of modern advertising

- explore the debates in technology about the nature and impact of 'AI', automation and machine learning on the society

- explore our engagement with the online spaces and its impact on our identity and self-expression

- explore the debate about data surveillance and its possible impact on freedom of expression

- explore the changing ways in which we access knowledge and the way in which the difference between producer and consumer of knowledge is slowly getting erased

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course the students must be able to display

- a conceptual understanding of media theory

- an understanding of the impact of modern technology on news media

- an understanding the working of business and technological models and their relationship with modern advertising

- an understanding of the debates in history of technology

- an ability to analyse the ways in which automation and 'AI' can affect economies and human capabilities

- an ability to understand the formation of identity in the virtual spaces by way of creating personal narratives of individual and collective engagement in virtual spaces

- an understanding of the various methods of social control utilized by the ruling regimes and the role that modern technology plays in assisting such regimes

- an understanding of the process of democratization of knowledge and the role that technology plays in it

- an understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge

- an ability to become a participant in knowledge creation in the online space

MODULES

1. **'Medium is the Message' – Understanding the role of media in everyday life**

   Time: 15 hours

   This famous phrase coined by Marshal McLuhan still resonates in the age of internet. From the era of the television to the era of the web, media has been its own message. It is the experience of a particular medium that shapes our perspective of the world more than the message received through that medium. In this module we shall explore the role of media in our everyday life by discussing our experience of various media and its impact on our understanding of society and the self.

   Readings & Viewings:

   - Extracts from **'Understanding Media'** by Marshal McLuhan
   - Extracts from **'Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media'** by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky
   - How WhatsApp has changed news in small-town India –The Caravan Magazine
   - Forget Newspapers or the Internet. Indian Women are Betting on One of the Oldest Forms of Mass Media (http://theladiesfinger.com/community-radio-women/)
   - Movie: **'Network'** by Sidney Lumet

2. **'The Attention Merchants' – Advertising and the war for attention**

   Time: 10 hours

   'Attention Merchants' is a term popularized by the writer Tim Wu through his book 'The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads' in which he not only charts the history of advertising but also unravels the workings of a gigantic business model that is toiling day-in and day-out to get our attention. In this module we shall explore the business model at work behind the emergence of modern advertising and its impact on our everyday life.

   Readings & Viewings:

   - Extracts from **'The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads'** by Tim Wu
   - Gillette's Ad Asks Men to Be Better. And Then Sets the Bar Really Low (http://theladiesfinger.com/gillettes-ad-asks-men-to-be-better-and-then-sets-the-bar-really-low/)
   - Movie: Thank You For Smoking (2005)

3. **The intelligence of 'Artificial Intelligence' – Automation and its aftermath**

   Time: 10 hours

   'Artificial Intelligence' is the new buzzword in technology. While it can be debated whether what is referred to as AI is just sophisticated algorithms and machine learning and not this self-thinking entity like 'Skynet' in the movie Terminator, it is well settled that the direction in which technology is moving is going to disrupt traditional economies. It not only has an impact on the nature of jobs but has the capability of altering human thinking abilities. In this module we shall explore the debates in technology about the nature and impact of 'AI', automation and machine learning on the society. The automation debate will be understood within a larger debate regarding the history of technology – innovation centric history and use centric history.

   Readings & Viewings:

   - Extracts from **'The Glass Cage: Where Automation is Taking Us´** by Nicholas G. Carr
   - 'Artificial Intelligence's White Guy Problem' by Kate Crawford in The New York Times (June 25, 2016) https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/opinion/sunday/artificial-intelligences-white-guy-problem.html
   - Extracts from **'The Shock of the Old_ Technology and Global History since 1900'** by David Edgerton
   - Movie: **'Modern Times'** by Charles Chaplin

4. **'Reality of the Virtual' – Thinking and feeling in the age of internet technology**

   Time: 10 hours

   The web has opened spaces in which we can create our virtual selves and lead virtual lives. This 'virtuality' is increasingly becoming part of our everyday real lives. Social media platforms have created spaces in which individuals enter into relationships and form communities in online space, the effect of which can be felt very sharply in real life. In this module we shall explore our engagement with the online spaces and its impact on our identity and self-expression.

   Readings & Viewings:

   - Extracts from **'The End of Forgetting: Growing Up With Social Media´** by Kate Eichhorn
   - TedX talks and other video lectures available on YouTube

5. **'Discipline and punish' – Technology as a tool for social control**

   Time: 10 hours

   The era of massive databases or what is referred to as 'Big Data' has dawned, thanks to the endless supply of personal information from the masses to the government and tech companies. This personal information of the individuals is being collected with the excuse of providing us with services. However, there is increasing evidence that such personal data can be used to control the behaviour of people by the government, assisted by tech companies. In this module we shall explore the debate about data surveillance and its possible impact on freedom of expression.

   Readings & Viewings:

   - Extracts from **'The Net Delusion – The Dark Side of Internet Freedom´** by Evgeny Morozov
   - The Aadhar Debate – Columns and Essays in EPW and other news magazines
   - The Different Ways in Which Aadhaar Infringes on Privacy (https://thewire.in/government/privacy-aadhaar-supreme-court)
   - Documentary: Nothing to Hide – The Documentary About Surveillance and You (2017)

6. **'Library Genesis' – Access to knowledge in the age of internet**

   Time: 5 hours

   The traditional education model had within it an asymmetry between access and availability of learning resources and the number of people with a deep desire to learn. The internet reversed this asymmetry by opening up resources to the masses. However, the traditional gatekeepers of the learning resources – the book publishers, producers of cinema and music – were threatened by this opening up of resources and came down heavily on individuals and communities who were facilitating the access to resources. In this module we shall explore the changing ways in which we access knowledge and the way in which the difference between producer and consumer of knowledge is slowly getting erased.

   Readings & Viewings:

   - Statement from the **'Library Genesis'** community
   - Documentary: **Steal This Film** (Part I & II)

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Articles

- Fast and Furious: The turbulent reign of Arnab Goswami – The Caravan Magazine (01 December 2012)
- Supreme Being: How Samir Jain created the modern Indian newspaper industry – The Caravan Magazine (01 December 2012)