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The International Journal of Media Studies (IJMS) provides a venue for the discussion and dissemination of frontier research in media and communication. This cross-disciplinary journal aims to foreground the reconfiguration of contemporary social, political, economic and technological contexts while engaging with theoretical, empirical and methodological inquiries at the intersection of mass communication, journalism,, cultural studies, film studies, policy studies, technoscience, visual communication and digitality. The mandate of the journal is to provide a platform for an understanding of the above fields through disciplinary and cross-disciplinary inquiries spanning the social sciences and the humanities. IJMS is a double-blind peer reviewed open access journal that will carry original research articles, research notes, book reviews and scholarly commentary.



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Note from the Editor

Digital Society in Transition

It is a matter of great joy for the Department of Communication, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University to bring out the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Media Studies* in the form of an open-access online publication. At the outset, we would like to thank our Honourable Vice-Chancellor, Prof. E. Suresh Kumar, who conceived the concept of the online journals for the Schools/Departments of the University and provided unstinted support and encouragement in our efforts toward materialising the initiative.

Articles in the inaugural issue include, among others, a few selected articles from the “International Conference on Digitality and Communication: The Cultural Logic of Data Societies” organised by the Department of Communication during September 5-7 2018 at the EFL University. The Conference, as well as this inaugural issue of the International Journal of Media Studies provide a focus on the cultural, economic and political consequences of the culture of digitality that now pervades our everyday existence.

Policy analysts the world over who now increasingly talk about the consequences of the fourth industrial revolution focus their attention mainly on what is commonly known as technological unemployment that is unemployment caused by technological changes. This means that global capitalism, for the first time in its history is seriously considering job loss as an important issue in the wake of AI and robotics entering the world market. What Capitalism has never in the past been seen worrying about was the unemployment created by its efforts to reduce labour use by introducing capital intensive technologies in the production process. It has now become clear that while the new digital technologies would eliminate human labour across the board, it will not eventually create new opportunities to compensate for such massive job losses. Most recently, OECD, conducted a study in which they openly admitted that the fourth industrial revolution will lead to a 10 percent of human activities in the labour market shift completely from human labour to machines and in about 25 percent of activities will be partly made free of human labour (OECD, 2017). The document also openly admits that such dislocations can in fact create wage freeze and increase inequalities. Frey and Osborne (2013) in an earlier study

had pointed to the fact that in USA, further automation can cause a shift of 47 percent of human labour to machine labour causing huge unemployment. They also found that many of these jobs will be in the transport sector, and in office administration. They also took into consideration that the demand for service robots has been steadily increasing. This is a global trend.

The question ‘what is human’ is one of huge transformative potential in the modern world. The contemporary global socio-political and economical contexts are only accentuating this question further. The vexing issues of new technologies can be raised and discussed only after relating it to this historical challenge. If we are trying to see the massive changes within the given paradigm that we are situated in, it would probably be highly limiting. If we are breaking the existing paradigm, we should definitely see how and where the process materialises, and what its possibilities are. For instance, consider the question of privacy. Privacy is not a new issue at all. It has a historicity and we can think of privacy as a concept that is deeply rooted to what we understand as human, what we define as human, how we exist as human and how we have problematised our existence as human. The concept of privacy thus, has personal and social dimensions. Personal privacy is a biopolitical construct that has come up along with the concept of human as an individual in the civil society and it is a historical subject-object relationship. The social privacy is one that relates this individual to the society, connects and complicates one’s relations with the society. In a society that is led by algorithmic commercial data mining and analytics, the question of privacy is increasingly becoming vexed and complicated.

We see this massive transformation of life-world preceded by several structural changes during the past three or four centuries. An important matter to be understood is the huge change that happened in the transition from agrarian society to industrial society. The autonomy of the subject, freedom of his/her choices were concepts that mostly new industrialism brought in while it was building a new social order. The freedom for the individual that was envisaged was a freedom to satisfy one’s needs. The individual could decide what to buy, what to consume, and no government could interfere in this personal choice. It is from here that the concept of individual freedom sprouted and developed. While discussing the data societies of our times, we need to look back to these primary conceptions today because it reflects how the new industrial global scenario is influencing humanity in these fundamental terms. To just cite an example, let me recall the concept of ‘panopticon’, a concept that has become all too familiar for most of us. It is an architectural framework of regulatory

monitoring for the jail system that was put forward by Jeremy Bentham and later used by Foucault to explicate the entire surveillance and regulatory mechanisms of modern times. The structure in which one is keenly monitored without one's knowledge is used not just as an operational model, but as a societal approach, a cornerstone of a value system in modern societies. But the new data societies have made this model redundant and the new systems of surveillance are swiftly changing making the panopticon model obsolete beyond recognition. We are living in a time when even the idea of surveillance has become deeply entrenched and rooted into our structures and systems in ways that our privacy concerns are increasingly becoming meaningless and pointless. The surveillance camera commissioner of United Kingdom, Tony Porter, for example, admits that regulators and the government are struggling to keep up with the pace of technological change (Weaver. 2017).

The strength of global corporatism is its capacity to first unleash new practices and concepts and then invent the means to sustain them and contain possible resistance to such practices. These new processes also in way coincide with the corporate desire to constitute a new global governance system in which they play a direct significant role, different from a liberal democratic regime that we are familiar with. Data societies are also heralding the birth of a new kind of global political regime. It was in Arendt's "Origin of Totalitarianism" that modern societies were scrutinised in terms their potential to turn to tyranny and she gave some theoretical insight about how such turns happen in history (Arendt, 1958). She argued that such regimes first change all formal establishments and systems to suit its needs. Secondly, they seek and achieve the approval of the masses for doing so. If we can go by Arendt's definition, it is not difficult to see that there is a global corporate regime emerging that nurtures a different kind of political ambition. What we need to look up closely is how nations would remain and sustain henceforth in the high tide of data led transformations of the new global order.

We need to closely follow the new contexts where new technologies, particularly communication technologies have become central to the global capitalist enterprise. This is particularly important for two reasons. One is obviously its radical significance in understanding the transformations within global capitalism. Second and perhaps more important is the fact the introduction of such technologies have been always accompanied by efforts to cover up their exploitative dimensions. On most occasions what we have seen is the creation of a hegemonic discourse that tends to obliterate the objectionable dimensions of the diffusion of such

technologies and purposefully highlight a narrative of glorification pointed towards focusing on the relative advantages of these technologies particularly for the poor, the marginalised and the underprivileged. This is perhaps the dominant approach within humanities and social sciences.

This issue of the journal attempts to explore the digital, not just in its material manifests, but also as a way of thinking, as an ideological and cultural logic that has come to define and shape human life. The discourse of computation, management and control of data and the ever-perfecting self-regulation of devices have combined to curate the abstract logic of capital to an alarming perfection. Also debatable are the advent of the assemblage of mobile broadband, cloud computing, internet of things and a host of other technological systems as objects, as ideas and as ideological apparatuses. This issue focuses primarily on the question of how and in what forms do the convergence of discourse, data and devices come to define the logic of ‘digitality’ in a variety of socio-cultural, political and economic contexts.

Mohan Dutta, in his paper looks closely at the Smart City (SC) imaginary as a new template for development, contextualising the SC project within the larger neoliberal framework, he argues that based on “a series of communicative inversions, the SC imaginary sells itself, drawing in the digitally familiar youth to its empty promises of technological futures that would solve key problems” (p. 18). He calls for more understanding of, and conversations with, subaltern positions in the growing contexts of resistance and opposition to SC projects. Particularly from the marginalised and less privileged communities the world over. Suruchi Mazumdar traces the historical trajectories of trade unionism in newspapers in the Kolkata city in India exploring the notion of professionalism in the pre and post reform liberalisation era and concludes that it “remains significant in the relationship between journalists and unions and in the latter’s ability to contribute to democratic action” (p 21). Thomson ‘s paper takes up the issue of workplace surveillance practices and its connections with the processes of neoliberal governmentality. Employee participation in corporate wellness goals and competitions outside the workplace are also taken up for critical analysis. Preeti Raghunath’s paper provides an analysis of frameworks that address data protection. It focuses on the possible ways to think about Data Protection legislations and practices, particularly in South Asia. Aditya Deshbandhu, in his paper probes deeper into the content streaming applications in juxtaposition with similar platforms of streaming content for media forms like podcasts. Binging is seen in the paper both as an activity and as a particularly new way of

engaging with broadcast content. Theoretically the paper is informed by McLuhan's concept of remediated understanding providing a social dimension in an increasingly integrating global communication society. The paper by Sujith engages with multiple questions of digital archiving of photographs, retrieval of which greatly involves personal and political choices of the archiver. The papers in this volume, thus, raise interesting ethical, social and political questions that are becoming increasingly relevant in the realm of global communication studies. Issues such as surveillance, democracy, freedom, resistance and transparency germane to media and communication discipline, figure prominently in the papers that are included in this volume. It is with great gratification and expectation that we are putting up the first issue of IJMS. I thank all contributors for their patience, cooperation and intellectual solidarity. I also take this opportunity to thank our colleagues from academic and administration streams whose support and encouragement has been significant.

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Digital Transformations, Smart Cities, and Displacements: Tracing the Margins of Digital Development¹

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Abstract

In this essay, drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork in the subaltern peripheries of urban India, constituted in an academic-activist politics of developing advocacy interventions, I critically interrogate the discursive construction of Smart Cities. The rhetoric of Smart Cities in Asia reflects the neoliberal imaginary that seeks to organize urban spaces in the ideology of efficiency and speed, while simultaneously erasing the voices of the subaltern margins that are continually expelled to materialize the smart imaginary. Through the deployment of communicative inversions, the seductions of the smart city serve to prop up promises of freedom, development, and sustainability that are not borne out in the reality of the lived experiences of inhabitants. Attending to the tropes of technology, efficiency, inclusivity, and sustainability, this essay attends to the materiality of displacements that form the bedrock of urban projects across India being set up as the bases of a digital future. These digital imaginaries are accompanied by the proliferation of hate and calls to violence across digital platforms. In this backdrop, drawing on the culture-centered approach, the essay offers a framework for academic-activist interventions grounded in an ethic of listening to subaltern voices.

Bibek works as a daily labourer in the tea stall outside of the NewTech Office in New Town in Kolkata. His family lived in the slums that formed the landscape of the marshlands in the area. With the New Town project, as more land was acquired, the party musclemen came in to evict the colony of tin-roofed one-room houses that lined the highway. This he had known as home, growing up with his three brothers and two sisters. In the tea stall, there are many of the information technology workers that come in regularly. Dressed in their white shirts, and navy pants, they talk about the clients in the U.S. and U.K. Bibek learns from their conversations about the

¹ Some sections of this Chapter are drawn from my book, *Imagining India in Discourse*, published with Springer.

offices of clients in New York and San Francisco, how they have to practice how they speak English so they can communicate clearly with these clients. Sometimes, he sees these clients, mostly White, come visit the office in New Town, when they are brought to the tea stall to give a taste of the street-side tea culture in Kolkata. Bibek says that although mostly he gets paid Rupees 60 per day for working ten hours, this is not enough money to pay for the medical expenses of his ageing parents, or to cover for the food for his family of five. He mentions how there are no unions to represent workers like him, and how he lives in everyday fear of being displaced again from the tin-roofed one-room house he has now built from his daily savings. The visits of the dalals (referring to intermediaries) to the colony have grown over time, with increasing threats of eviction. He has heard that the lanes going into New Town are going to be further expanded to make it attractive for new IT companies. This threat of being displaced is an ongoing threat to his family, producing a sense of anxiety about being uprooted that is a part of his everyday life. He also notes how the Trinamool Congress (TMC) musclemen have sprouted in the past five years, with an ever-increasing presence of violence. He places this anxiety about violence amid the messages he has been receiving on his mobile phone about the *miyans*, Muslim infiltrators from Bangladesh, that are going to take over West Bengal. He takes out his hand phone, a 2010 Nokia model with a broken screen, and shows me images he has been receiving about the Muslim infiltrators and their attacks on temples. The anxiety about being displaced again is multiplied exponentially by the fear of the Muslim infiltrators from Bangladesh that are taking over West Bengal. The “New Town” “Smart City” project that was initially projected as one of the 100 “Smart Cities” (hereafter SC) projects after the first inauguration of the Narendra Modi government in 2014 later wrote itself out because of the disagreements between the ruling TMC in West Bengal and the BJP government in the Center.

Since 2005, India has signed on to the SC agenda for development, putting in place a vision for building smart cities across the nation as a marker of the preparedness of the nation for next-generation development (Datta, 2015). The SC imaginary crafts a template of development that extends and gives completeness to the digital development narrative at the heart of the contemporary neoliberal transformation. Through the narrative of the SC, the development narrative in the Indian mainstream catches up with the global narrative of digital transformation, anchored in the Asian context by the model of authoritarian neoliberalism, Singapore. The seduction of the “Singapore model” lies precisely in its propaganda of

delivering growth and lifting Singaporeans out of poverty, erasing systematically through its authoritarian control on the discursive sphere any articulation of poverty or organizing among the poor and the working classes. In the Indian template of SC therefore, the “Singapore model” recirculates, reproduces, and amplifies itself, projected as a model of development that leapfrogs the incremental stages of development, launching an urban digital infrastructure that is projected as being at the forefront of the global economy while at the same time achieving sustainability.

In this essay, I will critically interrogate the digital transformations that underlie the “smart city” movement, the political economy of this transformation, and the displacements that are written into these transformations. The making of the “smart city” is predicated on the ongoing reproduction of the margins, that must be continually expelled from its everyday livelihood and displaced from its already peripheral location at the margins in order to produce a coherent rhetorical image of the SC. In this sense, the very concept of the “margins” is rendered mobile at an accelerated pace, as it must continue to peripheralize itself to enable the hegemony of the rhetoric of smartness. The ever-expanding digital seduction of the smart city, folded into glossy images of apartments, high rises, amusement parks, hospital services, and greenery, is marked by the continual displacement of the spaces on which and from where the margins can articulate their rights. Workers such as Bibek that perform the manual labour of the smart city are continually expelled from their livelihoods, accompanied by the erasure of frameworks of labour organizing. This magnifying interplay of violence and erasure is discipline through the incorporation of the digital infrastructure in a politics of hate, manufacturing anxieties that undermine collective organizing for rights. The material expansion of the smart city is built on the constant pressure exerted on the underclasses, continually erasing spaces and possibilities of organizing by on one hand, incorporating them into cultural anchors of Hindutva revival and, on the other hand, by erasing them through ongoing threats of violence. In this essay, I will first attend to the framework of digital development, locating the smart cities project within this framework. I will then attend to the ongoing practices of erasure of development’s margins through the interplays of the symbolic and the material, often written as scripts of violence that displace and expel. In this backdrop, I will examine the possibilities of resistance as the basis of imagining other developments, anchored in democracy and labour rights.

Digital development and the neoliberal Indian imaginary

In a quick meeting with a Singapore sociologist, I am regaled with the story of Chandrababu Naidu's SC project in Andhra Pradesh, the Amaravati project. This colleague shares excitedly about the role Singapore is playing for the project, offering its expert knowledge on smart planning to the construction and planning of the city. When I saw this colleague many months later, he shared his disappointment that the project seems to have been stalled because of the complexities of Indian bureaucracy and Indian land laws. He tells me that there have been many protests against the land acquisition for the Amaravati project that have become the hindrance to the project. I read in this colleague's dejected voice the very promise the Singapore model offers to such resistance, of consolidating land under the state's bureaucratic control so it can be deployed toward the goals of capital generation, development, and planning. Land, consolidated under the instruments of the state and land records, delivered through digital platforms, is placed under the logic of smart planning, being traded as a commodity through digital platforms. The digital technology, both as a form and tool of smart planning, is integral to the neoliberal transformation of land, turning it into a commodity in the global market. Note in this neoliberal imaginary the inevitability of urbanization as the monolithic future of development, working through a wide array of authoritarian techniques to silence other imaginations.

The neoliberal project

The articulation of the digital is imbricated within the overarching neoliberal logic. Since the 1990s, successive Indian governments have implemented economic liberalization as the monolithic solution to development (Ahmed, Kundu, & Peet, 2011a, 2011b), demonstrating what Kaviraj (2010) terms as an "elite consensus about the direction of macroeconomic policies" (p. 43). The large-scale privatization agenda has been carried out in the language of development, with the digital emerging as the new frontier for enclosing public spaces. The religious faith in the market as the solution to India's development forms the architecture of this neoliberal imaginary (Kohli, 2006a, 2006b, 2013; Pedersen, 2000). Noting the elite consensus on neoliberalism, Chopra (2003) observes:

This newly formed elite group, which no doubt is substantially comprised of the older elite groups in addition to new entrants, and the Indian state thus appear to have embarked afresh on a shared history, one founded on a

neoliberal view of the nation and the world. In sharing the categories of neoliberal thought, the elites of Indian society, at once, affirm and reinforce the neoliberal vision and policies of the Indian state. The Indian state, in turn, continues to sanction and promote the privilege of the newest incarnation of an Indian elite. (p. 440)

Neoliberalism in India, similar to neoliberal projects implemented elsewhere, emerges out of a close alliance of state and traditional business interests, manipulating new spaces of privatization to generate profit. These traditional elite alliances work alongside a newly emerging class of Indian industrial elites that profited from the technology sector and therefore, depended on the opening up of India to international trade. These reforms created new market opportunities for an aspiring professional class, conversant in English, trained for the emerging technological market, and therefore, positioned well to benefit from the mobility offered by the new global economic opportunities. The proliferating media industries post-liberalization, with ever expanding markets for television networks, unveiled new market opportunities for media professionals. These internal forces of change constitute the zeitgeist of neoliberalism, rendering as common-sense the ideology of the free market, driving forward with zeal the neoliberal economic reforms across India, as the foot soldiers of the international financial institutions (IFIs) (Dutta, 2017; Kohli, 2006a, 2006b; Pedersen, 2000).

The overarching ideology of neoliberalism is upheld through the collaborative relationship among state elites, industry elites, and professional class elites (including media elites), circulating the narratives offered by the IFIs. Worth noting here is the deep-seated realignment of state elites with business interests since the 1980s to actively promote a growth-driven statist agenda, which then translated into an overt liberalization agenda in the backdrop of the economic crisis of 1991 (Kohli, 1997; Shastri, 1997). The cultivation of the neoliberal ideology among the political and bureaucratic elites started in the mid-1980s, led by a change team of pro-reform elites who strategically positioned the reforms as solutions to development to key stakeholders.

Essential to India's foray into economic liberalization was the narrative of development, and development continues to be the trope through which policies of liberalization are justified (Peet, 2011). The anchor of liberalization is economic growth, and economic growth is seen as the driver of development through trickle-down. The trickle-down rhetoric frames economic liberalization as the solution to development and poverty

alleviation, offering the dogma of the free market as the panacea for India's problems (Chopra, 2003). The dogma of neoliberalism sets up the free market rationality as an objective truth, obfuscating the possibilities of interrogating evidence or for evaluating the claims made by the proponents of neoliberalism. The privatization of public resources is anchored in an underlying discourse of national development, punctuated in a linear trajectory of economic growth. The nation state occupies center stage in this reworking of the economy, with the agenda of liberalization being carried out by the state, defining a pace for the reforms that fit the agendas of the state. The economic liberalization processes saw the widespread emergence of the civil society sector as less and less dependent on the state and increasingly operating in a space that has been left open with the retreat of the state. The emergence of the elite in the civil sector space is tied to an articulation of development that is privatized, and narrated in the languages of empowerment and participation.

The discourse of liberalizing India is presented in claims of certainty, offering neoliberal reforms as the only solutions for addressing the problems of India (Chopra, 203). The depiction of the nation state and its problems thus is closely intertwined with the rationality of the market, with the positioning of the free market as the solution to the problems thus presented. The privatization of problems creates new markets and therefore new opportunities for capitalist extraction. The framing of problems and the solutions that are attached to these problems are both embedded within the overarching logic of neoliberalism, reflected in calls for privatization, opening up of trade boundaries, and minimization of tariffs and subsidies (Kohli, 2007). The solutions to India's problems thus reflect the neoliberal ideology, and are located in the realm of the free market, with an emphasis placed on minimizing trade barriers, weakening organized labour, and removing tariffs and subsidies. The rhetoric of neoliberalism as development obfuscates the dramatic inequalities that are produced by neoliberal policy reforms, on one hand, and simultaneously positions the logic of trickle-down as an agreed upon reality on the other hand (Patnaik, 1997). The portrayal of the trickle-down logic supports the privatizing agendas of the state built on the argument that privatization creates greater opportunities for economic growth, which then should translate into greater benefits for the poor and underserved classes. The poor thus are configured into the neoliberal project as sites of intervention, with the goals of neoliberalism being presented as solving the needs of the poor. This rhetoric of neoliberalism stands in sharp contrast to the materiality of evidence in India, registering large scale inequalities, increase in rural poverty, and increasing disenfranchisement of the poor (Patnaik, 1997).

According to the proponents of the neoliberal narrative, the liberalization of India has catalyzed growth, although the data on India's growth and its relationship to liberalization remains contested (Topalova, 2007). Moreover, the economic liberalization of India has generated uneven distributions and further exacerbated these inequalities. The economic conditions of the margins of Indian society have further declined with the reforms, with greater disenfranchisement of the poor from their sources of livelihood. This is especially the case in the context of agriculture, access to food, access to basic resources such as education and healthcare, and access to sources of livelihood. Moreover, reforms carried out in the name of poverty alleviation have been specifically directed at the privatization of public resources, thus weakening the public infrastructure that was otherwise available to the poor and disenfranchised communities in India. The inaccess to healthcare is evident in the form of a weakening public health system and the simultaneous growth of a public health care structure that often remains out of reach for poor communities. Situated in the backdrop of the discourses of neoliberalism are the everyday realities of lived experiences of large proportions of Indians that are left out of the growth story.

The digital as neoliberal infrastructure

The free market aspirations of India are enabled through the power of technology. Technology expands the reach of the market. Neoliberal technology, itself a form of technocratic experiment driven by experts, is anchored in technologies of communication and mobility. Technology on one hand differentiates the urban from the rural; on the other hand, it marks the primitive, the rural, the backward as the site for transformation to generate new markets for expansion of capital. The depiction of rural India as a vast-untapped market offers the enticement for the development of technology-based solutions that enable access to these distant markets. Technology thus expands the reach of the market and connects rural Indians to global brands. Consider for instance the Chapter titled "*Thinking outside the bottle*" by Muhtar Kent, Chairman and CEO of The Coca-Cola Company published in McKinsey's "*Reimagining India*" (pp. 133-134):

One of my favorite examples of how we're trying to come up with solutions tailored for the Indian market is eKOCool, a solar-powered mobile cooler we developed for use in the tens of thousands of rural Indian villages that lack electricity. The eKOCool looks a little like an ordinary

pushcart, but it's actually a sophisticated marriage of technology and local market savvy. Stores using our eKOCool solar coolers can stay open later and generate extra power to do double duty recharging mobile phones or electric lanterns. We hope to distribute more than one thousand eKOCool carts to rural store owners in India by the end of 2013—and we have begun testing them in dozens of other countries...For the Coca-Cola Company in India, the rewards from being in the market will materialize only if we see our investment in broad terms: not just capital investment in bottling plants and trucks but also human investment in schools and training, social investment in women entrepreneurs, and technological investment in innovations like solar carts that can power a cooler, a mobile phone, or a lantern by which a young boy or girl can study. That's an expression of our commitment to India—and our commitment to succeed on India's terms.

The technology of the eKOCool creates and enhances the market reach of Coca Cola into the hard-to-reach and distant areas of rural India. Technological innovation is measured in terms of the reach created by the innovation to new markets. The power of the technology of eKOCool is embodied in its ability to deliver chilled Coca Cola products operating on solar power and without depending on electricity. Rural Indian villages lacking electricity can now be connected to the market for Coca Cola products through the technology. In this sense, technology bypasses the limitations of poor infrastructure and lack of development resources in rural India. The intertwined relation between technology and market reach points to the ways in which technology offers the pathway for the penetration of market knowledge, incorporating rural Indians into the folds of Coca Cola.

Note also the link that technology creates between markets and development, with technology as the vehicle for the dissemination of the market. The benefits of the market are intertwined with the development of India, in investments in schools and training, in empowering women entrepreneurs, and in building opportunities to study through the power of technology. Access to the market becomes synonymous with access to development; social investment works alongside capital investment. The technology of the solar carts that can power the cooler as well as a mobile phone or a lantern drives India's development even as it creates greater access among rural communities to Coke. The technology of eKOCool not only delivers a bottle of Coca Cola but also the light of a lantern by which a young boy or girl can study. The rural citizen is empowered through the technology to participate in the neoliberal economy even as he/she is transformed into a consumer of Coca Cola.

Technology transforms the citizen to the consumer in the global market. In another Chapter in “Reimagining India” titled “Bricks and clicks” authored by Philip Clarke, CEO of Tesco PLC., the technology corporation in the front lines of the SC projects in India and globally, digital technology will transform the ways in which Indian consumers participate in and relate to the market (p. 141):

India bears all the hallmarks of a country where digital technology will bring enormous benefits...But in many ways, India's digital commerce revolution will be unique. In India, people who access the Internet only through a mobile or a tablet device are expected to account for 75 percent of new users and 55 percent of all users by 2015. Inevitably that will mean greater demand for content designed for the small screen. As Internet penetration increases and this new multichannel world expands, Indian consumers will enjoy unparalleled choice; not just more information and a greater variety of goods and services to buy but also a choice of ways to shop at whatever time they like.

The framing of the benefits of digital technology in the language of the market depicts the role in development technology is envisioned to take. Technology enables development through its penetration, which in turn enables access to the market. Digital technology produces the Indian consumer that is presented with a plethora of market choices delivered through multiple channels. Technology brings to the consumer new array of choices in the form of greater access to goods and services, access to new information, and new choices in ways of becoming a consumer by shopping. The ubiquity of technology constitutes the ubiquity of the market, ever-present in the life of the consumer by bringing about new ways of shopping around the clock, at the convenience of the consumer. In other words, technology does not only increase the reach of the market across space but also constitutes the extension of the market across time.

New technologies bring new partnerships and relationships constituted in the realm of the market. These relationships with the market are situated in the backdrop of growth and efficiency, technology thus serving development through the instrument of the market. Consider further the description of the technology-enabled market offered by Clarke (pp. 142-143):

To capitalize more fully on these new opportunities, Indian retailers must work with suppliers to drive growth and efficiencies in the supply chain and distribution networks. Developing partnerships with suppliers will help improve products' quality, freshness, and flavor. At Tesco, we're

using blogs, discussion forums, and customer data to make our operations more transparent and accessible to our suppliers. With social media causing customers' tastes to change ever more quickly, the challenge now is to keep up with the change by analyzing data rapidly and sharing it throughout the supply chain, so manufacturers, farmers—and anyone involved in shaping the product—can help maximize the appeal.

Growth and efficiency are brought about through the power of new technologies that connect retailers and suppliers in productive partnerships directed toward developing products in continual product improvement cycles. Technology-enabled partnerships improve the quality of products and services both by increasing access to consumer data as well as by fostering platforms that enable the simultaneous participation of various stakeholders. Data gathered through digital technologies and information collected over digital platforms such as blogs and discussion forums enable the effective acceleration of product development and modifications through partnerships between retailers and suppliers. Note here the causal role attributed to social media in shaping customer demands, and in the role of technology in monitoring these demands as ways of continually improving product quality. The power of technology enables the speed of product development and modifications. This catalytic power of technology forms the basis of the SC imaginary.

Smart Cities

The imaginary of the SC, articulated at the millennial turn, extends the neoliberal model of global governance amid the rising global challenges to it, namely climate change, growing income inequality, and growing alienation of large sections of the global population. I argue that the turn to the SC as a discursive anchor enables the grotesque expansion of neoliberal policies, while simultaneously framing these policies in the language of responsiveness to the global challenges to the expansion of capital. In other words, the SC imaginary is a discursive trope that offers specific material arrangements of digital and new communication technologies to enable the accelerated consolidation of capital. Juxtaposed amid interchangeable terms such as inclusive city, green city, sustainable city, SC serves as an umbrella terms for holding in a wide array of layered appeals that can be juxtaposed on it and superimposed on it, based on the market, audience, and problem being positioned.

Empty rhetoric.

The imagination itself in this sense is empty, made to be whatever the technocratic elite, political classes, and technology marketers would want it to be, depending on the market and the context. Note the following depiction of the SC mission of the Government of India available on its dedicated website.

The purpose of the Smart Cities Mission is to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local area development and harnessing technology, especially technology that leads to Smart outcomes. Area-based development will transform existing areas (retrofit and redevelop), including slums, into better planned ones, thereby improving liveability of the whole City. New areas (greenfield) will be developed around cities in order to accommodate the expanding population in urban areas. Application of Smart Solutions will enable cities to use technology, information and data to improve infrastructure and services. Comprehensive development in this way will improve quality of life, create employment and enhance incomes for all, especially the poor and the disadvantaged, leading to inclusive Cities.

The SC therefore are the sites of neoliberal reproduction, marking off urban spaces as laboratories of experiments with neoliberal policies, arranged in the specificities of smartness. Note however the very ambiguity in the rhetorical posturing of smart outcomes, devoid of empirical articulations of what constitutes smart. This form of ambiguous communication, communication that reiterates the tautology, a smart city is one that produces smart outcomes, is reiterated in various forms in the promotional materials of the SC project. The definitional ambiguity that constitutes the SC vision of the Government of India also forms the basis of the appeals generated, with imaginations of data, information and infrastructure coming together to deliver the other imaginary concoction, inclusive development. This basic premise of neoliberal organizing as driving growth is juxtaposed in the backdrop of empty signifiers such as “quality of life,” “liveability,” and “inclusivity.” Also note the ways in which the poor and the disadvantaged are thrown in alongside promises of employment generation and income enhancement. Such is the techno-seduction of the SC rhetoric that evidence, warrants, backing do not need to be provided. Devoid of reason, the SC rhetoric operates as an affective trope that seduces its audiences into a vision that legitimizes new and more extreme forms of neoliberal transformation.

The rhetoric of SC is in content often empty, a collection of futuristic images, narrative accounts, advertising promised, packed into simulations that are targeted as recruited new sources of capital. The precise opportunities of capital themselves are often unrealized, projected as promised into a future. The futuristic premise of smart cities reproduces promises of innovations, themselves often based on the premise of iterative and cyclical learning. Underneath the advertising though, which is often uncritically reproduced in the literature, there is often little substance and content to what actually is being delivered as smart (see for instance Kong & Woods, 2018). Paradoxically, in a piece that projects itself as offering a critical reflection, and therefore a template for what is termed critical application, Kong and Woods (2019) offer a “fourth space” that they claim is emancipatory, enabling equitable access, and rebalancing power, a template of what they call “smart urbanism” based on the pillars of “digital space, data are/and power, and participatory governance” (p. 681). Situating their proposal of a fourth space in the context of the authoritarian regime of Singapore, they note:

When implemented for the benefit of all, digital technologies and the data they produce can lead to co-constructed urban spaces and, ultimately, more participatory – or decolonised – forms of urban governance. Thus, whilst smart urbanism has been criticised for providing a ‘powerful tool for the production of docile subjects and mechanisms of political manipulation’ (Vanolo, 2014: 883), fourthspace recognises the emancipatory potential of digital technologies, and correlates political power and governance with the degree of voluntary engagement with the project of urban inclusiveness. This is recognised in Singapore, where Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted in 2014 that, whilst the government was responsible for creating a ‘smart’ framework and infrastructure for citizens to contribute to, ‘the participation of the whole nation is vital to make Singapore an outstanding city in the world to live, work and play’ (cited in Housing and Development Board, 2016). (p. 697)

Note in the positioning of the participatory and decolonized nature of the “fourth space” they propose in the context of Singapore the strategic erasure of the various techniques of repression used by the Singapore government to control and silence digital dissent.

Number of activists, including the noted human rights activist Jolovan Wham and the activist Sangeetha Thanapal have been targeted by the state for their digital posts. Journalists and civil society actors have been subjected to legal proceedings by various actors of the state for their social media posts. In March 2018, the Singapore state, introduced the draconian

prevention of online falsehoods bill (POFMA), that generated concerted protests across academia, activist spaces, journalistic spaces, and internationally because of the power it gives to Singapore ministers to determine falsehoods and therefore, control speech. The benevolent participatory planning depicted by Kong and Woods is a whitewash of state-controlled techniques of managing democratic participation, often through the use of defamation, laws of assembly, sedition law, and now, an online falsehoods law. The uncritical reproduction of the claim made by the Prime Minister of Singapore about citizen participation is situated amid the everyday reality of state repression on forms of expression. Marx, Adorno, or Horkheimer would be rolling in their graves at such functionalist co-optation of critical theory to uphold an authoritarian regime's technoeperiments with urbanism, going on to depict the methods of data-based planning, monitoring, and authoritarian governmentality as emancipatory. Participation is incorporated into the smart infrastructure of the city through the actual erasure of participation in Singapore through its draconian policies. Such "communicative inversions" are fairly common in the SC discourse. What is critical in the SC discourse is the promise of the digital technology to bring about citizen participation and engagement, constituted within the overarching logics of a state invested in building infrastructures for capitalist expansion.

Communicative displacements.

The "communicative inversions" constituted in SC discourse occur on layers of displacements, with each layer juxtaposed on the other based on the persuasive goals of the discourse. Ecology, sustainability, newness, technology, industrialization, creativity are all deployed in different turns, superimpose on the SC, with smart as the trope that holds them together. Inherent in the seduction is the articulation of digital technology as the elixir, capturing the interplays of big data, strategic planning, and innovation. Consider for instance the "Digital Dholera" SC, one of the first smart city projects proposed by Narendra Modi after his rise to power on the basis of the promise of bringing in clean government and development in the 2014 elections.

The 100 SC initiative, pitched as both a model for scaling up Modi's Gujarat model, and for reproducing other Asian models such as "Shanghai" "Hong Kong" and "Singapore" across India, is the image building exercise that whitewashes Modi's links with the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and more importantly, his alleged role in the Gujarat pogrom for which he had been banned from traveling to the US and UK. The initiative itself, projected across digital platforms as a new

birth of India into a new era, is a makeover of Narendra Modi from a communal politician to an architect of development. Note for instance the celebratory tone at the Launch of Smart Cities Projects, with the Prime Minister stating, ““There cannot be a transformation as long as we take things in bits and pieces. We need to adopt a comprehensive, interconnected and vision-oriented approach,” We are told SC embody a transformation, offering solutions to poverty, ““It is now our responsibility to provide strength to cities so that it can mitigate the maximum poverty, in the shortest time, and adds new avenues for development. It is possible as it is not a difficult task.” How this is going to translate through SC is however not at all evident. One of the key communicative inversions in the SC imagery of rational city planning based on data and technology projected on the discursive space is the absence of reasoned argumentation based on evidence.

Capital investments.

The premise of the SC lies in the creation of spaces for capital investments. Digital technology and its capacity to gather, organize, and deploy big data is positioned as driving innovations that create new market opportunities. The global hegemony of SC is therefore embedded in public-private partnerships for building digital infrastructures that bring in hitherto unimaginable opportunities for capital. This ability to anticipate futures and opportunities for investments forms the crux of the digital turn in the neoliberal governmentality captured in the SC initiatives. The large scale displacements of people and livelihoods is organized under this premise of bringing in future capital investments. Therefore, the SC framework is fundamentally the legitimization of large-scale allocation of public resources to build infrastructures that attract private capital, with the premise of the privatized infrastructure enabling additional investments and development. The cascading effect of digital capital is in its premise of generating new resources for new forms of capital and new markets. The citizen, incorporated into the smart city, is reworked under the agenda of the ever-expanding market, always being re-invented as consumer for new technological products, services, and plans.

Smart citizens

The technologically seductive formula sold by the SC imaginary is pitched in the digital media lexicon, speaking to a young audience fed on digital

technology and seduced by the enchantments of the technology as a deliverer of jobs. The digital simulations of the smart city speak to the interpretive grammar of this audience, depicting roads, hospitals, playgrounds, living areas, transport systems, seamlessly communicating with each other, connecting the private to the public. The citizen thus disciplined, works with the technology from the everyday negotiations of home to the negotiations of work, surrounded by and immersed in the technology. The success of the smart city is thus dependent on the smart citizen, trained in the digital technologies of the city, and disciplined to participate in the participatory and engagement frameworks that are hosted on digital spaces. Even as everyday forms of participation and protest are controlled, specific forms of disciplined participation are cultivated to enable the everyday functioning of the smart city.

Smart Hindutva.

The infrastructure of the “Smart City” is also the infrastructure of hate, where space is re-organized to mark zones of purity, to outline the boundaries of belonging and expulsion (Chopra, 2006). Under the premise of smart transformation is the marking of the primitive cultural other, the body of the republic that is primitive, diseases, and a threat to the transformation into the digital utopia. In spaces such as Dholera, the basic infrastructure of the smart city then is built on the displacement and zoning of the city, expelling the minorities, lower castes, untouchables, and lower classes to the margins of the city (more on this in the next section). The neoliberal transformation of the Indian economy that forms the bedrock of the “smart city” imaginary is also the basic infrastructure that upholds the turn to culture. Citizens such as Bibek are continually displaced by the multi-layered materialities of urban innovations, and are strategically incorporated into the digital networks of hate that keep the power structures intact.

Expulsions and displacements

Folded into the SC imaginary is the subaltern, expelled from her livelihood, and existing in continuous layers of ongoing displacements to make room for neoliberal expansion. At the heart of the discursive construction of the SC, accomplished through the strategic arrangements of words and images, is the expulsion of the subaltern margins. Worth noting in the discursive and material constructions of the SC are what I depict as communicative

inversions, “the reversal of communication to communicate the opposite of material occurrences.” The symbolic construction of the SC, materialized through graphic designs, animated pixelations, and rendered videos, communicatively invert the actually existing materiality of space. Communication, and more specifically communicative inversion, circulated through digital technologies preconfigures, anticipates, and materializes displacement, unseeing strategically the lands that are grabbed to make room for the SC projects.

To control resistance to these expulsions and displacements that fundamentally violate human rights (more on this in the next section), communicative inversions are systematically deployed. Resistance, projected as barrier to development and progress, is then formulated as a site of state and police violence. Moreover, the everyday constructions of communicative inversions are directed at undermining the resistance. The power and control of meetings held in the ambits of the state structures is accompanied by misrepresentation of the meetings, strategic erasure of publicity of the meetings, and various techniques to limit and intimidate attendance at the meetings. Police violence is often a normal feature in silencing protest.

Subaltern resistance as other imaginations

In this backdrop of the consolidation of the neoliberal project through the re-working of cultural tools into the language of digital technologies, subaltern resistance marks the unruly spaces of transformative politics. Hope, articulated in these spaces, offers an entirely different logic that bypasses the communicative inversions reproduced exponentially through digital platforms. Worth noting in the account of the neoliberal transformation of India is the large-scale protests against neoliberalism that offered the basis of alternative political economic imaginaries in the 1990s. The accounts of the economic reforms in India depict the pivotal role of elite politics, working across the political, bureaucratic, and private industries that conceptualized, designed, and carried out the reforms. These accounts systematically erase the subaltern voices organized against the penetration of the neoliberal project in the various parts of everyday life.

The narrative accounts of the people, of India’s subaltern groups that resisted and continue to resist the monolithic and seamless perpetuation of the neoliberal project offer the basis of a politics of hope. Specifically in the context of the actual smart city projects, subaltern resistance forms the basis of reclaiming space, for challenging the SC rhetoric, and for

challenging the very basis of SC implementation. The Dholera SC project for instance is a site of contestation, with ongoing and sustained resistance put up by farming communities residing in the region against the grabbing of their land. Under the umbrella of the Jameen Adhikar Andolan Gujarat (JAAG) or Land Rights Movement Gujarat, farming communities have organized to protest the land grab, foregrounding their imaginaries of sustainable livelihoods. Their notion of sustainable livelihood, tied to subsistence farming that sustains them, is paradoxically under threat by the SC project that offers the seductions of sustainability and ecological balance. Through protests, placards, posters, marches, the farmers resist the land acquisition. They attend in large numbers the environmental impact assessments that are nationally mandated, ensuring their voices are heard. The new and accelerated legal structures that were introduced in Gujarat to first track land acquisition, bypassing the national policy framework on land acquisition, are now being scaled up for implementation nationally. In this backdrop, the model of farmer and community protests against the SC project in Dholera in Gujarat is also a model for resistance to be scaled up, as a model of solidarity and resistance.

Re-working academia

Amid this neoliberal onslaught, including the concerted attacks on academia through privatization and metricization (Dutta, 2018b), sold through culturalist language, re-working academia in solidarity with subaltern struggles is essential to the politics of hope. This is especially critical at a juncture where communicative inversions are continually deployed in the form of academic projects of digital culture, cultural development, cultural participation, and cultural industries precisely to legitimize violent displacements and erasures of subaltern communities, often funded through networks of private foundations, global development agencies, and IFIs. Projects of urban rebuilding, redevelopment, and redesign, with designated spaces for culture, on one hand, appeal to new market segments of aspiring and diaspora urban audiences and new investments, and on the other hand, displace subaltern communities from their livelihoods.

Projects of digital cultural industries, cultivated as seductions for the neoliberal classes, are layered over the expulsions and displacements of subalterns they constitute (see for instance). Projects of smart ageing for instance create opportunities for academics to map the resistance to technologies among the elderly, with the goal then of proposing smart

solutions that address these barriers to technology adoption (see for instance Kong & Woods, 2018b). Similarly, academic projects of technology uses among the poor use the language of culture to map the poor for digital technology corporations, often funded by these technology corporations (Sambasivan, Rangaswamy, Cutrell, & Nardi, 2009). Communicative inversions often deploy terms such as voice, emancipation, and empowerment, while working precisely to hold up the hegemony of neoliberal technology. Academia, narrowly constructed in the terrains of fundable research, is positioned within the pragmatic logics of global capital, incorporating large parts of cultural studies into serving the agendas of capital, albeit through the communicative inversion of cultural studies. Terms such as activism, advocacy, and justice are grossly inverted to serve the logics of capital expansion and state discipline to attract capitalist investment.

Much of digital culture work for instance is incorporated into state initiatives for attracting capitalist investments. The rendition of the next digital smart city prototype, reproduced and displayed through digital and offline platforms and distribution channels, created by digital cultural workers, circulates a cultural vision of a new India by erasing the voices of the subaltern communities underneath it, expelled by it, and displaced by it through ongoing expansions of capital. The looking to the future, generated through digital cultural work, is also the erasure of subaltern struggles in the present. The artful cultural rendition of the Digital Dholera SC project works through the erasure of the real Dholera, the many villages of over 100 families that subsists on the basis of farming. Such materialist readings of cultural artefacts is critical to the decoupling of the link between cultural studies and neoliberal market promotion, actively creating spaces for solidarities with the subaltern margins in the struggles against SC. The work of cultural centering is the centering of narratives of the subaltern margins by co-constructing communicative infrastructures for subaltern voice. Such communicative infrastructures for voice, working in solidarity with subaltern communities disrupt, decolonize, and dismantle the very hegemony of the city and its inevitability (Dutta, 2011, 2014a). Subaltern voices articulating rural livelihoods as the futures of sustainability for instance invert the communicative inversions, pointing toward altogether different visions for development. For instance in the case of the EIA meeting for the Dholera project, conducted by a state-appointed consulted, farmers made sure they showed up in large numbers to be heard. The report however that was released erased many of these voices of resistance and was filled with disinformation. In this context, the work of academic-activist-community collaboration becomes one of holding the reports

accountable to community voice and disrupting the communicative inversions that are circulated. The work of communication is particularly critical in disrupting the layers of disinformation that constitute SC propaganda.

Conclusion

The SC imaginary offers a new template for development, folding into it a framework for development futures. In this essay, I situate the SC project within a neoliberal framework, noting the ways in which SC captures the new frontiers of neoliberalism amid the global challenges climate change, inequality, and alienation. Through a series of communicative inversions, the SC imaginary sells itself, drawing in the digitally familiar youth to its empty promises of technological futures that would solve key problems. The suspension of critical and reasoned participation forms the basis of the discursive formulation of the SC that is circulated globally. As a neoliberal future, the SC trope legitimizes new techniques of state power and control as it silences dissent in order to create new possibilities for attracting capital. In this backdrop, subaltern resistance, embedded in collective resistance to SC projects, disrupts the propaganda, calling instead for dialogue and understanding. Moreover, subaltern resistance offers a trajectory of hope, crafting a transformative anchor for constituting academia.

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Journalists and Trade Unions in Kolkata's Newspapers: Whither collective action?

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Abstract:

This paper explores trade unions' relationship to the notions of journalistic professionalism through a historical study of journalists and newworkers' unions in newspapers in the east Indian city of Kolkata. Much of the literature on the challenges that contemporary journalists face accords with experiences in India: the proliferation of digital ICTs; media concentration and conglomeration; and the rise of contractual employment and decreased collective power of journalists, which have been associated with a loss of bargaining power in newsrooms and the erosion of professional autonomy. A section of scholarship of journalistic labour tends to perceive unionised workforce as a necessary response to the challenges of market economy. Yet, the ability of journalism to exert control over its field of practice vis-a-vis external interests (Waisbord, 2013, p. 56) has long been argued to be an important concept in the narrative of the profession. Arguably, the notion of journalism's "differentiation" from "external interests" has been challenged in a "hybrid digital environment" with people engaging with news in different forms "as audiences, users, producers, sources, experts, or citizens". This further complicates journalist unions' responses to the notions of professionalism. In India, a developing economy where organised labour largely enjoyed democratic rights and freedoms in the era after Independence from British colonial rule, the unions of journalists and other newspaper employees were engaged in a long-drawn struggle for structured wages as recommended by a statutory wage board. Yet unions and the journalistic profession have witnessed complex transformation in a "post-industrial", "entrepreneurial" and "atypical" work environment due to changes in "the dimensions of labour and working conditions" (Deuze & Witschge, 2017, p. 8). Through a historical study of trade unions in Kolkata's newspapers, this paper argues that the notion of professionalism remains significant in the relationship between journalists and unions and in the latter's ability to contribute to democratic action.

Keywords: digital communications, journalists, labour, political economy of journalism, precarity, trade unions, professional autonomy, editorial content

Introduction

The consolidation of market forces in highly capitalist media in advanced industrialised countries altered the nature of journalistic work with less power for journalists in newsrooms and the erosion of professional autonomy in the editorial process. The process of news production and journalistic work began to resemble any other industrial work as the pursuit of bottom-line profit became strong in market-driven news media. Martin (2008, p. 26) quotes Mosco (1996) to suggest that "...making news, like the production of other media content, is a “complex process of production, one that, however unevenly, has come to look more like the labor process in the general economy."” In India, where traditional sectors such as print and television continue to grow hand in hand with the digital unlike the survival crisis of traditional media in much of the developed world, several hundreds of print and broadcast journalists were affected by mass layoffs over the past few years (FICCI-KPMG, 2016; IFJ, 2016). This current spate of job losses emphasises the importance of collective action in Indian journalism.

The role of journalists and other media workers' trade unions remains significant in a discussion of the democratic potential of the media. When journalists and other media workers are unionised it is seen as a scope for democratic communication (McChesney, 2015; Mosco, 2009; 2011; McKercher & Mosco, 2007). It is argued that journalists, when organised as trade unions, protect professional journalistic norms from the commercial interest of owners (McChesney, 2015), encourage professional autonomy and oppose the profit-seeking initiatives of corporate owners (Mosco, 2009; 2011). Strengthening the role of journalistic labour union in the media thus has been proposed as a strategy of media reform (McChesney, 2015; Mosco, 2009; 2011; McKercher & Mosco, 2007, McManus, 2009). However, scholars argue that there remains a difference between the work of journalists as "professionals" and "trade unionists" and argues that journalists "depart from the common characteristics of many professions" to act as trade unionists (Benson, 2008; Gall, 2008). The ability of journalism to exert control over its field of practice vis-a-vis external interests (Waisbord, 2013) remains an important concept in the narrative of the profession. Thus, while discussing their potential to protect professional autonomy, one must also consider the journalist and media workers unions' relationship to the profession. At the same time there tends to be less "differentiation" in the work of journalists in a hybrid digital environment as people engage with news in different forms "as audiences, users, producers, sources, experts, or citizens". This further complicates journalists' relationship to unions as professionals. This paper begins to

explore this question through a historical study of journalists and newworkers' unions in newspapers in the east Indian city of Kolkata, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, a setting that had a history of leftist politics that shaped India's trade union movement in the early days. A coalition of left parties, led by a Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM), remained in power in the state government from 1977 to 2011.

Organised labour in the Indian context largely enjoyed democratic rights and freedom in the decades of rapid industrialisation in the post-Second World War era after the country's independence from British colonial rule (Chibber, 2009). Prominent newspaper unions in India such as the National Union of Journalists, India (NUJI), Indian Journalists' Union (IJU) and All India Newspaper Employees Federation (AINEF) functioned as central trade unions in the post-Independence era and were primarily involved in a long-drawn struggle for structured pay. At the level of national politics unions split into warring factions. Trade unions in general are also linked to the major political parties and the union leadership is especially controlled by the party bosses. Politics in West Bengal emerged into a space for partisan manipulation due to the CPIM's hegemonic control in the state's political map, civil society and every aspect of public life in the past. Despite such splits and divisions in the union movement and the onslaught of market economy in organised labour, trade unions of Indian newspapers remained relevant in their prolonged judicial struggle for achieving statutory recommendation for structured pay (IFJ Report, 2010-11). The Indian context also remains ideal to explore the notion of professionalism. The Indian economy witnessed structural changes since the 1990s with market reforms. Kolkata lagged the rest of the country in corporate investment in the industrial sector (Nielsen, 2010). But the structural changes of Indian economy since the 1990s still triggered ideological changes. Chatterjee (2008) observes that there has been a growing tendency among the urban middle class in the country to view the state apparatus with suspicion (irrespective of whichever political party is in power) and greater social acceptance of the corporate capitalist sector in their commitment to growth and professionalism (Chatterjee, 2008). This further justifies an interest in trade unions' responses and relationship to the notions of professionalism in Kolkata's newspapers. Drawing on the theoretical framework of political economy of communication and sociological studies of the profession and qualitative interviews with journalists and union members, this paper traces the changing relationship between journalists and unions in Kolkata's newspaper history and argues that perceived notions of journalistic professionalism and professional identity remain significant in the possibilities of a united trade union movement.

Qualitative Interviews

For this project 46 in-depth interviews were conducted in Kolkata. The target population of the study consisted of individuals connected with the city's newspaper industry: union members, journalists, the senior editorial staff in decision-making positions and former journalists. The sample included eight union members; two of the interviewed union members were working journalists and the rest were former journalists with major newspapers of Kolkata. Members of the following industry unions were interviewed — National Union of Journalists of India (NUJI) and its state chapter West Bengal Union of Journalists (WBUJ); Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and its state chapter Indian Journalists' Association (IJA); All India Newspaper Employees' Federation (AINEF) and its state chapter, West Bengal Newspaper Employees' Federation (WBNEF). Most major newspapers in Kolkata also have separate unions for employees of each specific organisation that are referred to as plant unions in the industry. But the above-mentioned unions were selected for this study keeping in mind their prominence, reputation and role in the history of union movement in Kolkata's newspaper industry and also because each of these unions had members from across various newspapers. AINEF and its state chapter WBNEF had both journalists and non-journalists as members and had plant unions as members. The qualitative interviews in this research were also complemented by archival studies of union documents and reports.

Journalistic Professionalism: Theoretical Overview

Liberal theories of the press traditionally argued that commercially-run news media, when free from the direct control of the state and guided by competing market condition, can be held accountable to the audiences through self-correcting mechanisms of the marketplace, legal protection ensured by the state and shared journalistic professional values (Curran, 2002; Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982; Hackett, 2005). In the early 20th-century American writers such as Walter Lippman argued that the "emergence of professional ethical code insulates journalism from the corruptions of the market" (Kaplan, 2010, p. 27). Professionalism was encouraged by media owners to make their product (news) credible and this enhanced their commercial prospects (McChesney, 2008). Thus, it can be said that journalistic professionalism aims to give legitimacy to the principle of free market media. "...the rise of professionalism proved that the market could coexist peacefully with other social structures, where other value systems and logics of social action prevailed" (Hallin, 2008, pp. 45-46).

Journalistic professionalism refers to the ethos, ideologies and values that determine ideal professional behaviour and legitimise the need of journalism's freedom from government regulations (Curran et al., 1982). Traditionally, in liberal views professional journalism referred primarily to the values of objectivity, impartiality and fairness (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 2006; Waisbord, 2013). Deuze (2005) summarises a set of values that are associated with professional journalism in an ideal form in liberal theories: public service (journalists' goal of fulfilling public service by imparting impartial information and acting as watchdogs), objectivity, autonomy (journalists' freedom to report without interference), immediacy, and ethics. In India, the press as an institution witnessed statutory freedom ever since the country's independence from British colonial rule in 1947 — free press represented one of the democratic institutions of independent India and was perceived as crucial for effective functioning of a multi-party democracy (Sonwalkar, 2002). The strength of the ideas of free press and freedom of expression and belief in the country's democratic institutions historically shaped the role of journalists in the post-independence era in India. The press emerged as "a major agency of communication, information dissemination and public debate", "raising public and governmental awareness on a range of issues" including programme and policy failures (Sonwalkar, 2002, p. 825).

Professional Journalists versus Trade Unionists: Responses to Commercialisation:

The concept of value-free "professional" journalist emerges from Durkheimian ideas of differentiation and specialisation of reporting functions (Salcetti, 1995). Professional values allow journalists to assert their occupational authority, group cohesion, professional power and assert themselves as a distinct occupational group in times of social conflict (Schudson, 2001; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). Political-economic critiques of professional journalism posit that differentiation and specialisation of reporting functions do not necessarily translate to journalists' control over their work conditions (Salcetti, 1995). The unionisation or collective action of "media workers", therefore, is seen as a factor that encourages individual journalists' control over their work process and autonomy (Mosco, 2009; 2011; Gall, 2008). Mosco (2009), for instance, refers to research by Fones-Wolf (2007) that documents how coalitions of citizens and labour organisations in the United States led a strong opposition against cross-ownership or the establishment of media conglomerates in the past and became successful in airing pro-labour shows on corporate-owned networks. Recent research by Salamon (2018) draws attention to strikes by

newsroom employees at *Peterborough Examiner*, a local newspaper in Peterborough city in Canada's Ontario, after it was acquired by the influential Thomson Newspapers chain in 1968.

Historically, Indian newspapers witnessed a strong trade union movement. Prominent newspaper unions in India such as the National Union of Journalists, India (NUJI), Indian Journalists' Union (IJU) and All India Newspaper Employees Federation (AINEF) functioned as central trade unions in the post-Independence era and were primarily involved in a long-drawn struggle for structured pay, as recommended by a statutory wage board. Six wage boards for journalists were set up in India since 1955. Awards by all wage boards in the past were opposed by associations of publishers and owners of newspaper companies, who often challenged the law in the Supreme Court, which happens to be India's highest court, on the ground that the wage awards, as recommended by the board, did not take into the industry's capacity to pay. But the journalists and their unions after a prolonged struggle achieved victory in 2011 when the latest statutory wage board, named after justice GS Majithia, submitted its recommendations of wage revisions, which were accepted by the central government (IFJ Report 2010-2011). Retirement benefits and promotion policy, issues that the unions campaigned over decades, were addressed by the wage board and a standing body was proposed to deal with the wage award's implementation and any other issue involving the working relationship between media owners and journalists (IFJ Report 2010-2011). The latest wage awards also covered contractual workers. In recent years the unions also filed contempt charges against media owners for not implementing the wage awards despite an existing court order — the media owners were directed by the Supreme Court to implement the Majithia board's wage recommendations in full spirit even though the contempt charges were dismissed. The trade unions have also been active in their struggle for press freedom, protecting journalists' rights, safety and in enhancing professional skills (IFJ Report, 2010-11). The Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ), for instance, also drew attention to corrupt editorial practices such as paid news (the practice of giving favourable news coverage to political parties during elections) in 2009 by initiating sample surveys of newspapers that would highlight and offer an estimate of the magnitude of the practice (IFJ Report, 2010-11).

Referring to scholars, McManus (2009) thus observes that "a strong journalists' union... might resist ethical violations such as running ads as news" (p. 231). Labour union convergences (labour convergence in North America like the merging of the International Typographical Workers

Union (ITU), the Newspaper Guild and the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians under the Communications Workers of America), social movement organisations and global convergence of labour (McKercher & Mosco, 2008) have been perceived as strategies of democratic media reform. Through historical studies of newworker unions' temporary alliance with university students during strikes in Canada's local newspaper Peterborough Examiner in 1968-69, Salomon (2017, 2018) argues that "temporary labour convergence" (of "knowledge workers" in different sectors) can be seen as a successful campaign strategy for media workers' unions. In India, in the 1980s trade unions of journalists staged a spirited opposition against a proposed Defamation Bill and Bihar Press Bill (seen as a mechanism for censorship of the press), which drew the support of the opposition, trade unions and other members of civil society (Alva, 1982). National-level journalist unions such as NUJI, IJU and AINEF converged with global journalists' unions like International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) over the past decade to jointly work towards protection of journalists' rights, protection and press freedom among other pertinent issues.

At the same time journalism is defined by notions of professionalism that demarcates the profession from trade union activity. Scholars (Benson, 2008; Gall, 2008) observe that the "field of journalism" is driven by its own rules of the game and that journalists must depart from the specific characteristics of the profession to act as trade unions. Gall (2008) differentiates between the work of journalists as "professionals" and "trade unionists" and argues that journalists "depart from the common characteristics of many professions" to act as trade unionists (p. 101). Jemielniak (2012) observes that professionals are often willing to make huge sacrifices for position and prestige even at the cost of obvious economic interest. Referring to scholars, Salomon (2015) observes that "editorial workers" demonstrate the dilemma of the "middle class among employees": It can be said that even though editorial workers/ journalists tend to be exploited within the broader social division of labour, they do not necessarily identify as members of the working class, are often well-educated and privileged as compared with other professions.

Extant literature (Davies, 2008; Donsbach, 2010; McChesney, 2008 ; 2015; McManus, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; 2012; Weaver, 2009) concludes that commercially-run news entities' aggravated concern for profits and the need to reach out to the widest possible audience affect the norms of professional journalism. The developments of capitalist media markets since early 20th century coincided with changes in newsroom

management with owners exercising greater economies of scale over more newsrooms, cutbacks in budgets for journalism and downsizing of journalistic labour (McChesney, 2008; McManus, 2009). These processes have proven to be adverse for ethical journalistic standards and professional autonomy of journalists (Beam, Weaver & Brownlee, 2009; Weaver, 2009). Despite being a fairly diverse and fragmented market as per international standards, trends of integration started to become visible in Indian newspapers since the 2000s — most family-owned media conglomerates moved beyond print to invest in radio, television and the Internet (Kohli-Khandekar, 2010; Thakurta, 2012). The ABP group, Kolkata's leading media conglomerate and the publisher of the largest-selling vernacular newspaper *Anandabazar Patrika* (ABP) and the English daily *The Telegraph*, diversified into multiple media sectors of publishing, broadcasting, mobile and Internet and started to operate as a regional media conglomerate from the late 1990s. In the mid-2000s the *ABP* group drew foreign investment through a partnership with Star TV that ended in 2012 (Barman & Bhat, 2012). These structural changes triggered ethical concerns like increased influence of advertisers, masquerading of advertisements as news and the impact of various profit-seeking initiatives on editorial content (Kohli-Khandekar, 2010).

Journalistic Professionalism and Trade Unions in a Digital Economy:

These structural changes translated to “pracracy” (loss of permanent jobs, lack of social security and work insecurities) of journalistic labour; these processes, along with the challenges of a market economy, deregulation, privatisation and digitisation of media industries are also known to have affected journalistic professionalism as well as possibilities of collective action and weakened the power of traditional social groups such as trade unions in media industries (Davies, 2008; Salamon, 2015). Kolkata's news rooms till recent past did not witness significant retrenching of staff. However, media reports said that in February 2017 the *ABP* group asked hundreds of employees to submit their resignation with immediate effect (Mitra, 2017). A report in the magazine *Outlook* said that the media group cut down jobs and streamlined operations after the eldest son of the family, Aveek Sarkar, stepped down following the group's negative campaign against the ruling party, which came back to power with a thumping victory (Mitra, 2017). The *Outlook* report said that elder Sarkar brother “had great plans for expansion of business with more print content” and thus hired staff for the print business. The “private multinational firm Heys was hired to devise a plan to resuscitate the company” because it had budget deficit and

ran into losses. The new management, led by the younger Sarkar brother, had a different style of working (Mitra, 2017).

The notion of journalism's "differentiation" from "external interests" has been challenged to an extent in a hybrid digital environment. In a digital environment, the central question is how the "fundamental aspects of journalism are questioned, contested, or reinforced" due to the presence of a diversity of actors. Previous scholarship says that "(journalism's) differentiation is less clear in the digital environment" with people engaging with news in different forms "as audiences, users, producers, sources, experts, or citizens" (Witschge, Anderson, Domingo & Hermida, 2016, p. 3). This has been described as a "phenomenon of blurring boundaries" (Witschge et al., 2016). Salamon's (2018) research describes how digital communication tools enabled collective resistance/ action (through classic tactics of boycotts, strikes and class action lawsuits against employers) by freelance journalists (self-employed workers contracted by companies to do short-term assignments) in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom against contracts that forced freelancers to assign the copyrights of their work to the media companies.

Journalistic Professionalism versus Collective Action in Kolkata's Newspapers

In this section I would discuss how the responses of journalists and unions to the notion of journalistic professionalism in Kolkata's newspapers changed over the decades since India's independence. Journalists in Kolkata's united together with other newworkers in the era prior to and in the immediate aftermath of India's independence. This period coincided with landmark judgements that remained significant for press freedom and journalistic autonomy in the country. However, there was less unity between journalists and other newworkers in the following decades.

Journalists as "workers": United movement in pre- and post-Independence era:

The left-leaning political leadership of Bengal had a strong role in organising the trade union movement in the newspapers of Kolkata and the rest of India. The members of the undivided Communist party led journalists and other newspaper employees in united action against the management before and after India's independence from British colonial rule in 1947. There were important strikes in newspapers such as the now defunct Bengali daily *Jugantar*, which were spearheaded by journalists prior

to the independence. But journalists did not have the right to form separate unions at the time and organised in newspapers as workers along with other newspaper employees. The first organised struggle of Indian newspapers began in Kolkata in 1946 by the employees of *Amritabazar Patrika* for fair wages and better working conditions of journalists (Silver Jubilee Conference Pamphlet, AINEF, 1986). The trade unions in Kolkata's now-defunct newspapers, *Amritabazar Patrika* and *Jugantar*, which were controlled by the same newspaper group, were known for militant agitations on wage-related and other issues (Samaddar, 1994). Journalists organised as newspaper employees in the era and remained a part of "plant unions" such as *Patrika-Jugantar employees' union*.

"Journalists were the leaders of these movements and worked alongside non-journalists to organise the movements. Journalists gave the leadership or acted as frontline leaders in most newspaper unions. Journalists and 'non-journalists' worked together in union movement till the middle of the 1950s" (S. Bose, personal communication, 2013).

There was unity in the union movement in the first phase. The majority of employees in Kolkata's leading newspapers such as *The Statesman*, *Anandabazar Patrika* and the now-defunct *Hindustan Standard* (also owned by the ABP group) and *Amritabazar Patrika* were involved in non-editorial work. It was seen as wise to organise with "non-journalists" (non-editorial newworkers) since they comprised the majority. In the post-Independence era trade unions of journalists led a struggle to institute self-regulatory frameworks such as the press council through the country's First Press Commission of 1952. These initiatives led to the creation of journalistic code of ethics and contributed to the development of journalism as a profession. The Working journalist Act was instituted in 1955, which covers rights of journalists like leave (including maternity) and holidays, payment of gratuity, retrenchment, hours of work, compensation for overtime and recommended the setting-up of a wage board. These state-led affirmative action that was seen to huge implications for the profession in the country was the result of joint trade union movement of journalist and other newspaper employees (S. N. Sinha, personal communication, 2012). Journalists earned the right to form separate trade unions only after independence and began to unionise separately from 1950s onwards. The Indian Federation of Working Journalists (IFWJ) was formed in 1950. Yet, there remained unity between journalists and other newworkers and the trade union movement continued as a united movement of journalists and other newworkers.

Professional Journalists versus Political “Workers”: Splits in Labour Movement:

After India's first statutory wage board made its recommendations in 1956 (accepted by the central government in 1957) there was a realisation that the interests of “non-journalists” were not fully represented. This justified the need for non-editorial newworkers to unionise separately. In the 1970s the trade union movement in Indian newspapers further disintegrated with the growing separation of the work of journalists from “non-journalists”, who were seen to have political identities as opposed to being neutral. This was one of the reasons of the rifts and divisions of organised labour movement. In the 1970s, for instance, there was ideological rift within IFWJ (right-wing factions within the union objected to the left parties' influence) that led to its split into NUJI. NUJI was more influenced by journalists leaning to right wing parties like the Bharatiya Jan Sangha (political predecessor of the Bharatiya Janata Party). The united union movement weakened as a result of such rifts (S.N. Sinha, personal communication, 2012). Though newspaper unions had no official links with political parties, prominent unions of Kolkata such as the West Bengal Newspaper Employees Federation (WBNEF) (state chapter of All India Newspaper Employees Federation [AINEF], a composite union of journalists and other newworkers) had the support of the leftist political class (Samaddar, 1994). In the late 1960s WBNEF along with Statesman Employees Union (SEU) staged agitations on wage-related issues like bonus, allowances and revision of service conditions through prolonged picketing in the office premises (Silver Jubilee Conference Pamphlet, AINEF, 1986). Significantly, such agitations also drew the support of senior leaders of the leftist political class (Silver Jubilee Conference Pamphlet, AINEF, 1986). Though union members argued that the trade union movement strengthened as a result of political links with West Bengal's leftist political class (Silver Jubilee Conference Pamphlet, AINEF, 1986), such political links also alienated journalists from unions.

The rift between journalists and non-editorial newworkers became conspicuous with important strikes in the post-Emergency era (during the brief period of Emergency rule in India between 1975 and 1977 democratic freedoms and civil rights were withheld with imposition of heavy censorship, arrest of journalists and dissolving of the press council). In 1984 a 72-day strike erupted in *ABP* when the management hired outside labour while the workers attended a union meeting and work was stopped after altercation between union members and outside labour and management staff (Samaddar, 1994). The strike, which raised the demand of pension for employees, also drew the support of the working class led by different

central trade unions and prominent leaders of the trade union affiliated to the then-ruling Communist Party of India (CPIM) (Samaddar, 1994). The publication of the *ABP* was withheld for more than 50 days due to this strike. In the case of this prominent strike led by the WBNEF in *ABP*, journalist unions, WBUJ and IJA, protested the action of withholding the publication of the newspaper and remained distant from strike-related activities, which were perceived as being influenced by the CPIM. Journalists in particular objected to the idea of trade unions withholding the publication of the newspaper because as professional journalists they saw it as an essential duty to provide information.

The nature of our profession (journalism) is such that it cannot fully accommodate the characteristics of a regular trade union movement... Also journalists are dependent on the management in the editorial who assign the beats... (S. Shikdar, personal communication, 2013).

The trade union movement had always been strong among ‘non-journalists’. ‘Non-journalist’ employees had more bargaining power with the management at the level of the production.... Journalist trade unions only became active at the time of attacks on journalists (P. Ghosal, personal communication, 2012).

Significantly, unions such as the WBUJ and IJA represented only journalists; whereas, WBNEF, which was traditionally more powerful than others, enlisted both journalists and other non-editorial newworkers as members and was predominantly stronger among non-editorial, blue-collar newspaper employees. While in India journalists and other newworkers united on the prolonged struggle for the implementation of mandatory wage revision, as recommended by a statutory wage board, there remained distance between different unions on professional issues such as government-led attacks on press freedom. In West Bengal, a press corner in the government secretariat building, then called the Writers’ building, was shifted forcibly by the left front government from its past strategic location outside of the chief minister’s room to a less prominent position in 1992 (after political opposition-led protests at the press corner). Kolkata’s journalists, who perceived this incident as a state government-led attack on press freedom, united on behalf of the local press club rather than as a union to protest the forced change of location of the press corner. WBNEF, perceived to be close to the left political leadership, refused to join journalists in their action against perceived injustice by the state government.

Journalists as anti-government and neutral: Professionalism in Post-Reform era:

The necessity to be critical of the government was perceived as a key professional role by journalists in Kolkata in the post-1990s era when the media witnessed capitalist development. In the 1980s and 1990s, the CPIM-led state government in West Bengal had thumping victories in consecutive elections despite failures in governance, administration and discontent of voters (especially the urban middle class) at its poor civic services, the existence of a non-performing government bureaucracy and the decline of academic standards in state-run schools and high rate of unemployment (Basu, 2007; Banerjee, 2007). Many journalists witnessed the ruling party's power excesses for decades. This contextualises the importance of the government watchdog role in Kolkata's newspaper landscape.

...newspapers have a role in keeping a check on the government.... I happened to witness the misrule of the CPIM government since 1980 when I started working as a journalist (A. Ghosh, personal communication, 2012).

... (when) they (the government) become anti-people, then we are critical (S. Sen, personal communication, 2012).

In 2006 and 2007, when the left front government announced plans of acquiring agricultural land for corporate industrial projects (a small car factory for India's leading industrial group Tata Motors and chemical hubs and industries for Indonesia-based Salim group), there emerged massive oppositional peasant protests that united activists, intellectuals, civil society members and members of political parties of different ideological affiliations (Nielsen, 2009). When there was violence and physical attacks on journalists by the cadre of the ruling party in 2007, journalist unions in particular organised protests under the banner of WBUJ and IJA. But WBNEF, perceived to be linked to the ruling party, stayed away from the protests organised by journalists.

Even though mainstream politics in the state emerged as a space for political contestation, Kolkata's journalists shared the professional values of objectivity and information dissemination.

Misrule is misrule. There is no need to specify this as CPIM's misrule. Whoever stays in power... the state power has a certain character... (S. Mitra, personal communication, 2012).

I didn't share any pathological anger against the CPIM... (A. Ghosh, personal communication, 2012).

The rise of 24-hour Bengali news television in Kolkata's media landscape from the mid-2000s further encouraged journalists to be professional and neutral. Journalists could not afford to ignore important news at a time when readers already had access to important news related to the protests through other sources of information such as 24-hour local television.

This is not a period when there is no television... If a newspaper doesn't publish news you will not read it anymore... Credibility issue, that's the main branding (S. Sen, personal communication, 2012).

I tried to gather the main facts as a reporter... I presented the incident in a neutral manner to my chief reporter. Then we decided if we could carry the story or how much information we could reveal (C. Mandal, personal communication, 2012).

Professionalisation of Journalist Unions:

The WBNEF, which traditionally remained stronger as compared with other unions, lost power after the left's election losses in the state since 2011. Since 2008, journalist unions such as WBUJ and IJA remained primarily engaged in professional activities such as training and skill development of journalists. These unions also raised awareness on issues such as the attacks on journalists by the police and their protection and self-defence in the face of attacks. NUJI also ran a journalism school as part of its professional activities, apart from efforts in increasing membership strength. While unions traditionally represented only print journalists in India, NUJI, WBUJ and IJA also worked to enlist as members the journalists of privately-run television news media. From the late 1990s onwards contractual employment became common in Kolkata's newspapers, which affected the working conditions of journalists and led to employment-related insecurities. The system of contractual employment of journalists was initiated in Indian newspapers by *The Times of India (TOI)* and was followed by big players such as the *ABP* in Kolkata. While journalist unions such as WBJU and IJA in Kolkata protested attacks on journalists and other issues of press freedom, there were no organised movement against the management's policies of contractual employment that caused job-related insecurities among journalists. The WBUJ and IJA also did not raise issues such as editorial freedom or journalists' control over their work processes in newsrooms despite unionised journalists significant presence in big newspapers such as the *ABP*.

We are not in conflict with the management... we are vocal only on wage-related issues and matters of professional training (D. Ray, personal communication, 2011).

We started a plant union in *ABP* (ABP Group of Publications Journalist Union) (affiliated to WBUJ)... We do not have a control on the owners' business policy. We cannot take a stand... we don't want to protest on these matters (D. Ray, personal communication, 2011).

Proprietors' ideological values often determined the editorial policy of Kolkata's newspapers. The intrusion of the advertising into the editorial remained common especially in the Kolkata edition of the *TOI*. But editorial freedom has not emerged as a significant agenda for journalists' organised movement in Kolkata's newspapers.

Editorial policy affects a journalist's work in the sense that one has to conceal facts in some instances and in other instances one has to play up certain things... (C. Mandal, personal communication, 2012).

While Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ), Bombay Union of Journalists and Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ) protested against job losses of journalists in the city edition of *Hindustan Times* (*HT*), *The Telegraph* and *ABP* (both owned by the ABP group) as these dailies scrapped departments, shelved editions and folded bureaus in 2017, Kolkata's unions remained relatively silent on job losses. Big newspapers such as the *ABP* lagged in the process digitisation than other major Indian dailies such as *Dainik Jagran*, *Hindustan Times* and *Malayalam Manorama*. As compared with the rest of India, there remained less scope for Kolkata's journalists to work in digital platforms.

Conclusion

The findings of this paper suggest the following: In the pre- and immediate post-Independence era, journalists organised as workers along with other newworkers, which contributed to the collective strength of organised labour in Kolkata's newspapers. In the following decades, there emerged split between journalists and other newworkers, perceived as non-journalists, on the basis of growing professionalisation. This process also weakened the union movement. Thus this research suggests that journalistic professionalism remains significant in the process of collective action of media workers and for unions to contribute to democratic media reform. This paper thus also seeks to elaborate on the meanings of journalism professionalism in Kolkata's newspapers that witnessed capitalist development since the late 1990s.

Significantly, in India the role of the press and journalists turned exceptionally adversarial in the 1970s, especially during the brief period of

Emergency rule (Sonwalkar, 2002). This period witnessed spirited struggle by sections of the press and journalists (Sonwalkar, 2002). The Indian press' hostile attitude to the government further heightened in the following decades with the newspapers' less dependence on government revenues, the rise of advertising and the growth of media markets. These processes can be seen as pertinent in the notions of journalistic professionalism in Kolkata's newspapers. The traditional liberal notion of press/ professional journalists as the government watchdog is said to have lost some of its democratic potential in an era when "the media are themselves so powerful that they, in some estimations, form the stage on which much politics is carried out" (Matheson, 2010, p. 83). In post-Soviet Russian media system, for instance, investigative journalism or the watchdog role encourages journalists to expose only the misdeeds of the Soviet era, while the power excesses of the present political formations are often ignored (Vartanova, 2012). Chatterjee (2008) observes that the shifts in India's macroeconomic framework in the 1990s translated to the "dismantling of the licence regime, greater entry of foreign capital and foreign consumer goods", "the opening up of sectors such as telecommunications, transport, infrastructure, mining, banking, insurance, etc, to private capital", "many more entrants into the capitalist class" and ascendancy of the relative power of the corporate capitalist class over that of other social groups (p. 56). The left, which lost political legitimacy in its traditional bastion of West Bengal and the rest of the country over the past decade, remained indistinguishable from any other political parties, committed to neoliberal agenda, and clearly fell in line with the neoliberal reforms initiated in India since the 1990s (Menon & Nigam, 2007). In this context, journalists' necessity to be anti-government/professional can be interpreted as the urban middle class' need to view the state apparatus with suspicion (irrespective of whichever political party is in power) and greater social acceptance of the corporate capitalist sector in their commitment to growth and professionalism (Chatterjee, 2008). These processes, on the whole, show journalists' "visible advance towards elitism and professionalism" (Jemielniak, 2012, p. 41), processes that have been common among programmers, IT engineers and other knowledge workers. While trade unions help in the battle to improve working conditions, pay, working hours and job security, this has been argued to be a "hazardous step" as regards the professionalisation of "high-tech jobs" (Jemielniak, 2012). This paper suggests that studies of communication workers' unionisation must explore journalists' relationship to professionalism.

While capitalist development of the news media, deregulation, privatisation and digitisation of media industries, coupled with contractual/ the precarity of labour, weakened the power of print unions (Davies, 2008;

Salamon, 2015), this paper also refrains from a universal history of capital. For instance, in India state chapters of national unions in Bombay, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala (BUJ, APUWJ and KUWJ) remained stronger than others in collective bargaining with the management. Kolkata lagged the rest of the country in corporate capitalist industrial development and in capitalist investment in the industrial sector (Nielsen, 2010). Yet, organised labour in Kolkata's newspapers remained weak even though organised left political movement in West Bengal historically marked the beginning of trade union movement in Indian newspapers in the post-War era. Politics in West Bengal emerged as a space for partisan manipulation in the 1980s and 1990s because of the then ruling left's strategy of using the administration to consolidate its party base in the countryside, of allowing its party bosses in the districts and villages to control daily administration and state institutions and its hegemonic grip at every level of civil society (Banerjee, 2007; 2011). Reports of corruption and human rights violations by the CPIM party apparatchiki remained rampant in the 1980s. These political processes seek to explain the meanings of professionalism and journalists' necessity to be professional/ anti-government in Kolkata's newspapers. The research suggests that the "professional-non-professional" binary is manifested through the "split" between the "non-political" (journalists as government watchdog) and "political" ("non-journalists"/unions) in Kolkata's newspapers. Traditional Marxist analyses underplay the influence of journalistic professionalism in media production (Curran et al., 1982, p. 14) even though professional journalistic norms are known to find support in multiple societies in different forms (Weaver, 2009; Waisbord, 2013; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). The presence of trade unions in the media has been recognised by UNESCO as a key indicator for journalistic professionalism and democratic development of the media (UNESCO Report, 2008). This research aims to show the way forward for media workers' trade unions by emphasising the necessity of closer links between the profession and traditional union action.

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Workplace Wellness: The New Domain of Neoliberal Human Capital Management

Thomson Chakramakkil

Abstract

Workplace Wellness is a concept that emerges in the enterprise management models of developed industrial societies as an administrative intervention to address the productivity issues that arise out of an aging and unhealthy working population. Wellness programmes instituted by corporate planners rely on activity tracking devices and associated data processing software to monitor the physical activity, nutrition and sleep quality in employees and incentivize healthy behaviors. The bodily data collected longitudinally (over weeks and months) from the employees with the aid of wearable technology are used to make a variety of granular and abstract conclusions about their health and well-being and test interventions that improve employee productivity. All these techniques of management mask operations of power that closely scrutinize the body— both at the level of the individual and at the level of population— to facilitate the integration of human bodies into circuits of economic production. This paper attempts to situate these workplace surveillance practices broadly within the history of neoliberal governmentality and specifically within the exercises of power that Michel Foucault calls anatomopolitics and biopolitics. Instead of merely mapping physiolytics onto the Foucauldian account of governmentality, this paper seeks to complicate the traditional distinction between anatomopolitics and biopolitics by demonstrating how the same exercise of power disciplines the individual body (for instance, by creating highly accurate profiles of individual employees and systematically stipulating their bodily behaviors) and regulates the species body (for instance, by monitoring and attempting to adjust larger demographic trends pertaining to health and productivity). This paper also seeks to understand how employee participation in corporate wellness goals and competitions outside the workplace complicates the traditional distinction between leisure and work and reimagines the worker's body as a form of capital that can be absorbed into the domain of economic analysis. Finally, the paper will examine whether the metaphor of the panopticon is adequate to understand the ideological force invested in persuading individuals to voluntarily accept their data being mined for a variety of purposes, and what new theoretical categories can be imagined to accommodate these new technologies of governance

Neoliberal human capital management in Western industrial societies is at a critical juncture. The working populations in developed, technologically advanced societies, due to population control and its accompanying cultural

transformations, are aging without being replaced by a younger, employable workforce. Despite a perceptible fall in the number of people being removed from the workforce as a result of what were hitherto considered epidemics, the sedentary nature of work and unhealthy lifestyle trends ("lifestyle epidemics") continue to lead to absenteeism and diminishing productivity among workers (Stepanek et al. 2017). This contraction in the working population, complemented by the barriers in productivity, is expected to induce circumstances that adversely affect the availability of optimal bodies for the creation of an economic surplus. As a growing body of industrial research indicates that the increase in the average human lifespan afforded by the improvements in medicine and technology has not adequately translated into improvements in "healthspan" (Bloom et al. 2011), corporations are investing in new techniques of systemic management founded on persuading workers to become responsible self-investors in their health and wellbeing. The advent of workplace wellness programs, directed at maintaining and optimizing human capital through a close scrutiny of the human body, and culturally enforced forms of "self-responsibilization" (Brown, 2015), is a direct response to a future where corporations cannot maximize profits, and worse, are forced to contribute to welfare measures of populations which are largely outside the circuits of production. As of 2017, Workplace Wellness has grown into a six-billion-dollar industry in the United States with 92% of all organizations that employ more than 200 people offering some or the other form of employee wellness program (Stepanek et al. 2017).

The interest in bodies that constitute the workforce and the preservation of their efficiency is not a recent development. Michel Foucault, in one of his 1979 lectures at College de France, argues: "And as soon as a society poses itself the problem of the improvement of its human capital in general, it is inevitable that the problem of the control, screening, and improvement of the human capital of individuals, as a function of unions and consequent reproduction, will become actual, or at any rate, called for." (Foucault, 1979)

He also discusses this in his seminal work *The History of Sexuality*, where he traces the history of the state's interest in administering the bodies of citizen-subjects in two distinct but complementary exercises of power that develop in European history.

The first form of power, which Foucault calls "anatomo-politics", pertains to the use of productive (as opposed to deductive) power in the interest of disciplining, optimizing, and increasing the utility of the individual body by studying it systematically and integrating it into

“systems of efficient and economic control” (Foucault, 1976). For instance, in the 18th century, the association between urban living conditions and epidemics were closely studied and public health measures were devised to prevent the large-scale demise of the urban workforce.

The second development, which Foucault calls “biopolitics”, emerges later in the century as the state shifts its focus from the study of the individual body to the study of the “species body”. Foucault associates this development to the emergence of new disciplines such as statistics and biometry which gives the state the capacity to powerfully quantify the general trends in the populations they administer. Biopolitical power, as Foucault conceives it, operates through the study and management of entire populations through demographic aggregates such as infant mortality rate, life expectancy, and other indexes of health and wellbeing. It is exercised as interventions in terms of predicting, improving, and administering the workforce at “the level of the generality of a phenomenon” as opposed to the specificity of each instance (Foucault, 1976). While Foucault theorizes anatomo-politics and biopolitics as distinct exercises of power, he is unambiguous in stating that both these exercises of power are not antithetical, but complement each other in “exerting a positive influence on life and endeavouring to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault, 1978).

Forty years since Foucault devised the vocabulary to describe a specific and important site of neoliberal governmentality, significant changes have occurred in the technological landscape and the economic arrangements that characterize its domain of operation. This paper seeks to demonstrate the strengths and limitations of Foucault’s vocabulary in understanding the assemblage of practices that constitute human capital management, and more specifically workplace wellness, in a world that is being governed using surveillance technology that was unimaginable four decades ago. While the utility of the Foucauldian framework in understanding the process of life-administration cannot be overstated, this paper seeks to demonstrate that this framework, as it is conceptualized by Foucault, does not fully comprehend the complexities of modern worker-subjectivity and the techniques of life-administration that shape it. Hence, an attempt is made here to complicate the historical distinction Foucault makes between anatomo-politics and biopolitics, and further scaffold it with the means to understand the practice of data-driven human capital management. In order to do this, this paper will examine how workplace wellness programs are implemented.

There are two broad processes in wellness management: tracking and nudging. While tracking is about collecting the bodily information of workers, nudging is about using that information to steer workers in the direction of becoming responsible self-investors in their health and well-being. Tracking, in practice, relies on wearable activity tracking devices to collect rich data on employees' exercise habits both inside and outside the workplace by monitoring, for instance, the distance and steps covered, calories burned, sleep quality, and daily active time of the employees. These physiological data points are then used to build highly individualized profiles that are enriched with other metrics associated to the employee such as their age, Body Mass Index (BMI), disease history, blood pressure, and drug use. Most activity tracking devices are linked to online bridge services that allow external applications authorized by the employee, such as an employee wellness application administered by the employer, to remotely import and process this data at regular intervals. Employers can also encourage workers to take various health-risk assessments such as self-administered ergonomic and nutritional assessments and periodical check-ups to supplement the data that has been collected using fitness tracking devices. (Raiser et al. 2018)

The privacy concerns tethered to this level of bodily surveillance by employers are self-evident, especially in the absence of consequential privacy laws to protect bodily data collected through wellness programs. With the advent of big data analytics and machine learning, there is limited clarity among workers on how intrusively their bodily data can be used to shape myriad aspects of their lives. For instance, in the United States, where workplace wellness programs are immensely popular, there are no provisions under Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)—the privacy law that governs doctors and hospitals—to protect the bodily data of employees from being sold to third parties such as banks, insurance providers, and advertisers. This effectively means that data can flow freely into other parts of the economy and, in the hands of a data broker, integrated into algorithms that influence lending and credit decisions, mortgages and targeted advertising (Hancock, 2015).

The second process, nudging, is significantly more outcome-driven. It is also the process that is best explained by the framework of anatonomopolitics. Nudging is about using various techniques of systemic management to persuade employees to become responsible self-investors in their health and well-being. To nudge employees, corporate wellness administrators create wellness goals and competitions that employees can compete in either individually or as teams. The data that has been

previously processed by the application is then used to score employees on various corporate wellness goals and competitions. Employee engagement in these goals and competitions are incentivized with bonuses or vacation leaves, and in some circumstances, the scores or “wellness points” are used to determine the employer’s contribution to the employees insurance premiums or other benefit plans. (Raiser et al. 2018)

It is imperative to understand how this “gamification” of data collection fundamentally changes how workers engage with intrusive surveillance technologies, transforming data sharing into a site of pleasure. Through incentive based, behavior-oriented activities, wellness administrators transform the register through which employees understand the prospect of improving their physical health under the close supervision of their employer. This form of surveillance is no longer a transaction to be suspicious of, but a source of delight (as it involves participating in fun, socially-engaging activities) and a signifier of virtue (as it demonstrates a sense of responsibility towards one’s own well-being). It is also useful to pay attention to the language in which employees are encouraged to adopt wellness activities into their daily routines and share their private bodily data with their employers. Employers insist that enrollment into wellness programs are entirely voluntary— it is merely an optional reciprocal arrangement in which employees who enroll in these programs become healthier and happier while the employers benefit from lower healthcare costs and increased productivity. However, a closer attention to the mechanics of wellness management reveals that this is a decidedly more coercive exercise of productive power that aligns perfectly with the logic of neoliberal governmentality. While workers are not explicitly coerced into enrolling in these wellness programs, the governing rationality of self-improvement internalized by the workers renders them responsible for taking charge of their health and well-being. This consequently forces them, in some measure, to partake in the culture of wellness and data-sharing.

Wendy Brown, in her book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, discusses how neoliberalism transforms individuals and public institutions into projects of management through a process she calls “self-responsibilization”. This process forces citizen-subjects to “engage in a particular form of self-sustenance that meshes with the morality of the state and the health of the economy”. The cultural logic of “investing in oneself” is critical to the phenomenon of human capital management. Brown goes on to argue:

“Both persons and states are construed on the model of the contemporary firm, both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways

that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value, through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment and/or attracting investors." (Brown, 2015)

The modes of persuasion that are embedded into this culture of self-responsibilization are further reinforced by the social media integration available in the wellness applications that allows employees to share their scores/ranks with their peers. (Raiser et al. 2018) Within the application interface, each competition and goal features a unique, sharable leaderboard that displays the employees' exercise statistics and the other performance metrics which consequently encourages/shames them to perform better in the competitive act of taking care of themselves. Comparably, in case of team activities, an employee who is otherwise not inclined to participate in a wellness activity is tacitly coerced/motivated into involvement by fellow team members for the successful completion of a particular goal.

Pramod K Nayar uses the term "diffused multiveillance" to refer to these practices of participatory surveillance where "we willingly subject ourselves to observation but are in turn ourselves observers" (Nayar, 2011). This combination of self-monitoring and willful subjection to surveillance is not a phenomenon that renders itself easily into the traditional account of coercive power. This is, in many senses, what Jason Read refers to as "neoliberalism doing away with the antagonism and social insecurity of capitalism, paradoxically by extending capitalism, at least its symbols, terms, and logic, to all of society." (Read, 2009) It is important to distinguish this modality of neoliberal power from the traditional forms of power deployed by the sovereign-state. Here, power is productive not merely at the level of its consequence (it creates productive outcomes) but also at the level of its exercise. The ideological instruments deployed here are designed in such a way that the subjects of this modality of power accept its governing rationality and voluntarily adopt intrusive technologies that monitor and ultimately determine their behavior.

Therefore, subjecting oneself to the technological infrastructure of bodily surveillance, while appearing to be voluntary on the surface, is enforced through a carefully engineered culture of health consciousness which renders the need for explicit coercion obsolete. In a manner that is typical of neoliberal societies, the market becomes the template for all social relations between the employees. (Giroux, 2014) The apparent choice that is available to the workers—the language of agency that is built into neoliberal governance—makes it exceptionally difficult for the subjects of this exercise of power to mobilize any meaningful resistance against it. This is also why the model of the panopticon, which was fundamental to

understanding surveillance in the twentieth century, fails to serve as a framework for understanding the unique dynamics of this form of data-surveillance. If the gaze of an external observer disciplined the panoptic subjects who were involuntarily assimilated into its all-pervasive field of vision, the gaze of the observer here is internalized by the neoliberal subjects who voluntarily embed themselves into a culture of reciprocity.

Finally, in addition to the data accumulated from individual employees, composite data-sets collected from multifarious devices allow employers to track general trends in populations, which are then mapped onto myriad indexes of productivity. The bodily data collected longitudinally (over a long period of time) from employees are used to make granular and abstract conclusions on employee productivity and well-being. Sophisticated data analytics then allows wellness administrators to test various interventions and their effectiveness recursively, and over several cycles of data collection and analysis, build predictive models that can be used to manipulate general trends in population behavior. Using the same data-set to understand the individual constituents of the workforce as well as the employee population itself is a development that is facilitated by technological advancements in data processing which enables corporate life-administrators to transcend the real constraints of conventionally collected statistical data. This is where the Foucauldian distinction between anatomo-politics and biopolitics must be problematized in explaining the technological practices associated with this exercise of power. Here, the same exercise of power disciplines the individual body (for instance, by creating highly accurate profiles of individual employees and systematically stipulating their bodily behaviors) and regulates the species body (for instance, by monitoring and attempting to adjust larger demographic trends pertaining to health and productivity).

The new notion of “work” created through neoliberal human capital management is also one that contests many traditional conceptual categories that are firmly anchored in the understanding of labor rights. It must also be noted that these rights, in fact, are a product of a history of collective bargaining. For example, the corporate expectation that an employee is mindful of their health (and the resulting productivity) outside the workplace challenges the conceptual categories of “work” and “leisure”—a distinction that is fundamental to any serviceable definition of what constitutes “working hours”. When an employee transfers their bodily data collected on a fitness tracking device outside their workplace onto the employer’s wellness application, they effectively render meaningless the traditional distinction between the time dedicated to be spent on socially

useful labor and the time dedicated to be spent according to one's own discretion.

Jason Read, in his work *A Genealogy of Homo Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, theorizes this development by describing how labor in the context of neoliberalism is no longer limited to the specific sites of the factory or the workplace, but is any activity that works towards desired ends of maximizing the productivity of a worker. This extension of labor outside the workplace creates, Read argues, "a new organization of the production and distribution of wealth, but by the mode of subjection, a new production of subjectivity." (Read, 2009)

This new worker-subject is also one that is devoid of many politically obtained rights which were taken for granted as preconditions of labor in the twenty-first century. What one observes with the advent of employee wellness programs is a re-articulation of these labor rights in an economic register. As wellness applications interact and share information with a constellation of other human capital management applications, what is effectively created is a conception of labor that is deeply entrenched in the reciprocal arrangements that characterize neoliberalism. For instance, if the wellness application is integrated with the benefits or absence management applications that are similarly propelled by employee data, employers can correlate the exercise patterns of an employee with the insurance claims or paid time off availed by them. Consequently, employers can further create arrangements where only a certain percentage of the insurance premium or vacation time is offered to the employee if they fail to meet the minimum physical activity requirements stipulated by the wellness administrators. (Manokha, 2019) In this manner, what were once considered rights of a worker become re-articulated as transactions between the employer and the employee.

The neoliberal society today is characterized by economic arrangements where private stakeholders are increasingly inheriting the roles traditionally performed by the state. Multinational corporations routinely collaborate with the state, in multifarious capacities, in the process of life administration. This, in turn, has complicated the traditional notions of sovereignty, legitimizing the governmental capacity of these stakeholders to use disciplinary and regulatory techniques on populations in new and interesting ways. With exponential improvements in data science and predictive modeling, human capital management is becoming a complex and intrusive domain of biopolitical and anatonomopolitical power. The emergence of new informational subjects, who are in many senses reduced

by technology into correlates of information, requires us to imagine novel ways in which we can interact with neoliberal governance in the digital age. For this very reason, it is important to formulate frameworks to theorize these new exercises of power in relation to their social and cultural consequences, and by extension, find a vocabulary to articulate the anxieties of the subjects governed through these exercises. It would be a unimaginative, however, to conclude one's effort at characterizing technologies of power as conspiratorial without attempting to develop a fine-grained account of neoliberal governmentality and the ideological underbelly of its associated technological practices.

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Human Security in a Datafying South Asia: Approaching Data Protection

Preeti Raghunath

Abstract

In an increasing datafying world, protection of data created and generated as a result of everyday interactions assumes imperativeness. Last year, Europe adopted the General Data Protection Rules (GDPR), which has yet to be subject to substantial reviews to check for inconsistencies and possible blind-spots. Similarly, other national (like India and Brazil) and regional juridical bodies seek to work out frameworks that address data protection. This paper looks at some possible ways to think about Data Protection legislations and practices in South Asia. By alluding to ideas of data justice (Taylor, 2017; Dencik, Arne & Cable, 2016) and underscoring the idea of ‘multiplicity’ of data regimes, this essay paper draws on the idea of human security (King & Murray, 2001) as central to thinking about data protection legalities. This is done, by placing the protection of the essence, proprietary and otherwise, of the human, at the centre of this legal exercise of formulating data protection legislations, to uphold data democracy.

Introduction

In May 2018, the European Union adopted the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as a legal measure to harmonise the many nuances of data-centric practices and their governance. Along similar lines, countries of the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have enacted and implemented legislations that serve the data protection mandate. India, last year, put out a white paper on data protection calling for comments and feedback from various stakeholders, many of whom responded. It is anticipated that the new government that has come into power will be tabling the data protection-related legislations in the country’s Parliament for law-making.

The modern regulation of practices around data like collection, storing, processing, and utilizing, is currently gaining prominence due to increasing focus on data-driven economies and industry. Growing datafication of work and society is being witnessed today, with data gaining immense importance, being remarked to be as important as oil. This paper

looks at ways of thinking about data protection legislations, especially from the vantage point of South Asia. Do the regulatory structures and experiences posit different priorities and problems for the region, in comparison to the rest of the world? Does a non-Western viewpoint to data protection exist? What would a critical data studies approach to the study of data protection legislation draw on? Finally, how does implicating the human in a data-centric discourse change perspectives? These are some of the questions that this short paper concerns itself with, and tries to theoretically address. The first part of the paper tries to understand the legislation, implications in terms of sovereignty, and jurisdiction of data protection regulations. The second part seeks to present the landscape of data protection legalities in South Asia. The third part of the paper provides the mediating ecosystem in South Asia. The fourth and final part of the paper explores the fertile terrain of critical data studies, registering analytic notes on data protection legalities from this vantage point.

I. Legalese: Understanding Legislation, Sovereignty, and Jurisdiction

This author isn't a lawyer and does not hold a law degree, and deems it imperative to demystify legalese and translate it to commonly understood parlance. Laws and regulations are often very complex and even ambiguous, especially when they encompass a range of experiences akin to what the GDPR seeks to cover, to account for those plural experiences. Often, one country's experiences may not stack up against another country's. Similarly, the realities of one sector may not mirror itself in another. Therefore, when it comes to generic data protection legislation, understanding the interrelated triad of law – the legislation itself, the idea of sovereignty that the law implicates, and the regional and distributive focus of the jurisdiction in terms of legislating using the law -- become important.

The Legislation

Legislations on data protection, more often than not, seek to outline the boundaries for fair use of data, in order to protect the privacy and claim over personal records and activities, of individuals and entities. The subject of the legislation is an important aspect to consider. Who or what should the data subject be? Couldry and Yu (2018) contend that the GDPR is grounded in human rights, and poses a big challenge to datafication, especially in the wake of recent misgivings like the Cambridge Analytica fiasco. However, they point that the rights approach is limited when faced with claims of data being collected for public interest. The challenge the very idea that data *should* be collected, as if it is a natural process. They underscore the constructed nature of data collection, and seek to deconstruct the

assumptions behind the inescapability from datafication, or Big Data Exceptionalism (for which they draw on Nissenbaum (2017)). Couldry and Mejias (2019) elucidate the idea of data colonialism, as a form of appropriation and extraction, instead of solely looking at it in traditional Marxist terms, of making data as labour.

The dichotomy of the public and the private is at the heart of data protection legislations. However, the idea of intersubjectivity and the dialectics of the interaction between the private and the public can challenge this dichotomous, sealed categorising of the very human experiences of being and becoming, in these times of hyperconnectedness. Discourses around the GDPR speak of the ‘data subject’ to be the human; however, the larger contextual and ecological frame gains importance, in order to make sense of the human subject, including but not inclusive of the impinging structures of dataveillance and control. What, then, constitutes the protection of human data?

Sovereignty

Christopher Allen presents the idea of ‘self-sovereign identity’ (2016), as a way of defining individual identity today, beyond the yolk of companies or the state or other conferrers of identity. He speaks of an innate, inalienable sense of identity beyond what is prescribed and conferred upon individuals, categorizing and branding them as citizens as against migrants, as voters or employees or as individuals eligible for social security. Allen draws up four stages of the evolution of identities in the digital sphere, and develops his concept of ‘self-sovereign identity’ as closest and in sync with the natural, inalienable sense of identity. This means that the individual user is in full control of their data, and holds sovereign authority over it without ceding to organisations that manage data for the user. Tobin and Reed (2017) of the Sovrin Foundation draw on Allen to suggest that self-sovereignty can be imagined as “a digital record or container of identity transactions that you control” (2017: 8). The authors go on to talk of self-sovereignty as an opening in the silo-centric view of data capture and surveillance by organisations of all kinds. Moving beyond silos, self-sovereignty allows for fluidity, allowing for control in breaking patterns of data ownership by corporations and governments. Self-sovereignty is also marked by portability --- the ability of data subjects, and owners, if you will, to transfer and manoeuvre their data according to their desire. This is another manifestation of the fluidity associated with self-sovereignty, in ways that go beyond turgid stratification of data points.

It seems that the GDPR allows for the rights of humans in the EU to be protected in text, in the face of increasing datafication, by enshrining the following:

- Right of access to data profiling
- Right to rectification
- Right to erasure
- Right to restriction of processing
- Right to data portability
- Right to object

It remains to be seen how the claims over these rights are mandated, complaints mitigated, and how the GDPR is operationalized on the rights front. While the repose of sovereignty and related rights has been elucidated, the extent and expanse of the data protection laws requires emphasis, and is outlined below.

Jurisdiction

The third of the triad when it comes to data protection legislation is the jurisdiction of the law as it is implemented. Jurisdiction would cover the geographical reach and expanse, the depth and extent to which the law implies, and the components of such law.

In terms of the territoriality, data protection law, in consonance with the ways of the internet does not obey national boundaries. The GDPR illustrates the manner in which territoriality is not limited to businesses housed in the EU, but encompasses businesses that are operational in the EU, and indulge in data processing and storage of any kind, in the EU, or engage in data related to the citizens of EU nations. The referent object, clearly, are the individual citizens of EU. The Internet Society, in its update on May 25, 2018, suggested that with the GDPR, “Europe seeks to position itself as a de facto global regulator for privacy” (ISOC, 2018). The scope of the law in terms of the depth and its components are yet to be assessed and beg experience. How would non-digital interfacing between EU citizens and data collectors be measured and compliance ensured under the GDPR? How would non-citizens figure under the purview of the law?

Data Localisation is another related facet of jurisdiction of data protection laws, wherein the data that is collected, processed or stored is to be done within the territorial bounds of a country, in order to minimize threat of data dissipation, theft, or malpractice. For instance, IBM in India recently suggested that they would like to reverse the ownership and

localization pattern, against commonly understood strategies. A spokesperson suggested that the “users” would be the owners of data, but the data itself must flow freely. In terms of data processing, the spokesperson seemed to suggest that the company would take Artificial Intelligence to the users, and not vice versa. Evidently, the region in its broader meaning, emerges as the mediating space/mechanism, as it houses determining factors that affect the implementation of data protection. The next section examines the regional lens in closer detail.

II. Approaching Data Protection Legislation: A View from South Asia

Is there a regional view to data protection? A Europe-wide data protection regulation certainly seems to provide an answer, though one needs to examine if the EU emerges as an exception instead of the norm. This section of the paper seeks to probe into this question, looking at the region as a lens to study the theory of data protection legislation. Geographic markers like the region bring with them specificities that emerge as contributing factors to any experience of legalities. The particularities of histories, culture, physical topography, societal setup and economic environments characterise such an experience of the legal. When it comes to South Asia, one may argue for a “South Asianness” that comes to colour legal experiences. A common colonial past have granted the countries that make up the region, similar legal systems. Along the same lines, interconnectedness of society, language, religions, tropical climactic conditions, and economic conditions are attributes of the South Asian region.

India, the biggest South Asian nation recently put out a draft paper outlining the legalities of the data protection regulations. Calling for comments and responses, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) put out the paper for consultation with various stakeholders to a data protection law. Numerous organisations, legal firms and independent lawyers sent in their feedback and ideas. Last year, India’s communication policy landscape saw the pronouncement of Justice Puttaswamy, in the, upholding the Right to Privacy. The country is yet to see any articulation of a data protection authority who would uphold the legalities around data protection, nor is there a law as yet.

Graham Greenleaf (2013) argues, in an older paper, that Nepal’s Right to information (RTI) laws that pertain to public bodies, have important clauses and implications for privacy in the Himalayan country. He examines the RTI legislation, the Interim Constitution of 2007 (prevailing at

the time of his writing the paper), the fact that Nepal is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), among other legal provisions. He suggests that Nepal is a frontrunner in South Asia, when it comes to privacy-related clauses. He writes:

Nepal's RTI Act has almost all of the features that could be expected in a data privacy Act for the public sector in relation to personal data, such as are found in the OECD Guidelines: right of access; right of correction; protections against access by others; restrictions on use and disclosure by government agencies; restrictions on additional uses by third parties when they do obtain access; 'openness' of government practices concerning personal data; both offences and compensation provisions for breaches; an independent authority to investigate complaints and resolve disputes; and a right of appeal to the courts.

In an updated article, Greenleaf (2017) draws on the Constitution of 2015, to highlight Articles 28 and 47 that underscore privacy. He foresees the creation of a data protection law in the coming years, in Nepal. The country has since seen the passage of a privacy law, the Privacy Act of September 2018, which governs the storage of private information by public authorities.

Bangladesh had seen some articulations in the form of editorial pieces in newspapers, calling for data protection laws in the country. The country saw the enactment of the Digital Security Act of 2018, in October last year. Article 26 of the Act underscores consent and authorization by the individual. In addition, the constitution of Bangladesh underlines the sanctity of home, and release from undue government scrutiny. Similarly, Pakistan put out a Draft Personal Data Protection Bill in 2018, by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MOITT). The Bill also focuses on consent, and speaks of a new enforcement body, the National Commission for Personal Data Protection (NCPDP), to be established. In addition, the country's cybercrime policy focuses on cyber offences and related punishments. Afghanistan does not have a data protection law in place either.

The island-nation of Sri Lanka does not have a data protection law, but recent reports suggest the formulation of the Data Protection Bill anytime soon. There are provisions in the country's Constitution that pertain to the fundamental rights of individuals. De Soyza contends that Article 17 with Article 126 (1) could be as the safeguarding of individual rights against administrative or executive action. Similarly, Article 14A of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution is also seen as touching upon the idea of

privacy. The Information and Communication Technology Act of 2003 is an important Act, and the government suggests that it “is pursuing a policy based on the adoption of a Data Protection Code of Practice, encompassing the private sector, with the possibility of the code being placed on a statutory footing through regulations issued under the Information and Communication Technology Act of 2003. As such, this approach can be seen as self- or co-regulatory approach”.

The Bhutan government’s E-Government Master Plan features the mention of data protection a few times in a futuristic vein, as “emerging issues”, and in proposed plans of action. Greenleaf (2017) suggests that Bhutan Information Communications and Media Bill 2016 provides for data privacy clauses, and he cites Chapters 17 and 21 of the Bill providing a comprehensive data privacy code, besides providing directions on how processed or collected data must be treated if it becomes obsolete, etc. In the Maldives as well, no data protection laws exist at this moment. The country put out a tender last year for the Translation of Privacy and Personal Data Protection Act (*ibid.*)

This section provided an overview of the legal framework on data protection, where they exist, in South Asia. While these frameworks may define the instrumental legal aspect of data protection, the human experiences are mediated by the larger structural and systemic attributes. The next section looks at these aspects, in order to arrive at an integrated overview of the state of affairs when it comes to data protection in South Asia.

III. Mediating Ecosystem: Some features

The South Asian region, replete with the above legal setups with respect to data protection, has some unifying features that together emerge as an ecosystem, mediating laws and experiences of such legalities. This section explores the idea of the region as a mediator, in order to understand the stake that South Asia has in data protection legalisation.

Access: Data protection, and indeed data itself, is the result of a collection of practices that generate recognizable imprints. During such a process, *access* becomes integral to the study of data and its protection. Access, in this case, can be defined in varied ways, ranging from access to information, access to infrastructure, and access to conducive environments. The World Bank describes South Asia as the fastest growing region in the world.

However, the region continues to experience vast disparities in terms of access, especially with digital access rates being very low. Given such a scenario, human access to information and technologies that could help repudiate corporate and private or even national governments' claims over data are not widespread. Access to information and technology that allows for redressal against data capture clearly emerges as an integral mediating aspect of the rights paradigm. For instance, there was some news about a data breach with India's national biometric identity system, the Aadhaar, which allegedly compromised the biometric details of those who have enlisted with the identity system. In response, the government suggested that access to the database was limited, and that there was no cause for worry.

Critical Information Infrastructure: Critical Information Infrastructure (CII) refers to infrastructure that are marked as critical to information economies. Determining what constitutes or comes under a country's CII is fraught with ambiguity, as the parameters for deciding which assets could be termed CII is often a tedious exercise. A country's CII is a determinant in the security of important data and information. The definition and identification of CII in South Asia is at a nascent stage currently. Infrastructure, especially of this kind, accentuate or inhibit the protection of human data, only stressing the need for more of the former variety. Often times, the focus on national security that is intricately intertwined with CII, their identification and maintenance obfuscate human security, at the other side of the spectrum. As a substantive data collection point, CII are vulnerable to data breaches and theft, exposing not just national security vulnerabilities, but also risking the lives of the humans that make up a nation.

Business environments: The larger business environments in South Asia have been characterized as modernizing and welcoming, according to the World Bank's *Doing Business 2015* report. The larger business environment acts as a catalyst in providing for facilities and/or obscuring the lives of many individuals, depending on how "good" the business is. The critical political economy reading of data would help unravel the interdependence of businesses that process, control or store data on the one hand, and the customers, employees, and other individuals on the other.

Larger socio-legal environments – privacy in itself: Another key layer that emerges as an important determinant is the state of privacy itself in the region. This is intricately intertwined with the quality of democracy, the socio-cultural setup, and the larger legal system in place in the region. In

South Asia, two points of views are oft repeated --- (a) that the South Asian culture is bereft of keenness on privacy; and that (b) the poor don't usually care for privacy and that it is an elitist concern. The cultural and class arguments on privacy have also faced rebuttals with work on religious grounding of privacy, and legislations like the Puttaswamy pronouncement that provide an equal footing for all citizens in their claim to privacy.

A regional view of data protection legalities, despite them being at a nascent stage in South Asia, is perhaps possible owing to the numerous commonalities in terms of the above descriptions, despite nation-bound differences as described earlier on. Such a regional view would be negated if national contexts offer vastly different circumstances. However, it may be noted that the above description falls short of regional legal sanctity with the SAARC being critiqued for almost withering away, unlike its South-East Asian counterpart, ASEAN, which has seen some development on this front.

South Asia's experience with data protection is evidently at a nascent stage. Intermediary factors like disparities in access and infrastructure on the one hand, an only growing business climate, and a somewhat closed up socio-legal environment providing for a mixed experience with data protection, that is markedly different from the Western experience.

IV. Registering Analytic Notes: Drawing on Critical Data Studies

In interrogating the intersections of the region and data protection, calls for Critical Data Studies to take cognizance of the spatial turn in data and contextualize it (Dalton and Thatcher, 2014; Taylor, 2015) gain imperativeness. Dalton, Taylor and Thatcher (2016), in particular, suggest that critical data studies (CDS) allows to understand the formation of the "subject", and makes space to understand the individual's actions, their subjectivities, reactions and resistances to a data regime. CDS goes beyond concerns of businesses and private players and their stakes in the business of data and data protection, to privilege the individual "subject". The human element is an integral aspect of interrogating structures of algorithmic assemblages, to reiterate and bring back the focus on the individual who generates data through everyday interactions and activities.

Data Justice and Data Protection: Predictability versus Precarity

One of the cornerstones of a just data protection law is also to provide for data justice, in general. This would translate into meaning that a just data protection law ought to provide the individual, freedom from undue

intrusion and surveillance. While evangelists of algorithmic lives promise neat predictability and enhanced quality of life and well-being, the precarity of life that is hinted at, by dataveillance (Dencik, Arne & Cable, 2016) and hyper-security networks conjures up a Frankenstein-like scenario.

While privacy is often the go-to concept in order to justify data protection, informational privacy marks up dangers of what could turn out to be information monopoly, with only those with access to information from the top leading fully informed lives. Algorithmic profiling only plays into the hands of the information elites, reinforcing their claim to data as well as privacy. Informational privacy spoken from the ground up certainly has potential, if the power in deciding the contours of this privacy rests with the individuals on ground. How does one understand the case of non-citizens, especially in the case of the migrant crisis in Europe? Would they be covered by the GDPR? Clearly, unless the response to datafication is not rooted in the human (which goes beyond the contours of defining an individual), and in contexts of data placement and operation, precarity is the order of our datafied lives.

Newman (2015), in particular, talks about big data being an issue of economic justice, and not just privacy, especially in newly forming data economies. Newman suggests that algorithmic and behavioural profiling that occur on free-to-use platforms are exploitative and generate data at the cost of free labour disguised as entertainment. Similarly, algorithmic profiling and condensation of data into newer forms of recognizable imprints bring in the disciplinary element (Johnson, 2014) of data injustice (Taylor, 2017). When a legal instrument like a data protection law is enacted, it ought to protect the individual from the ramifications of such cases of economic injustice and disciplinary manouvres by the information elite and controllers of data.

Multiplicity of Data Regimes: A Thousand Splendid Suns

The idea of data regimes draws on institutional theory, to underscore the integrated functioning of data, actors in the data space, norms, and interests, together to form structures of power and governance. Data regimes are whirlpools of power, since they structure interactions and the security apparatus around them. Private firms and conglomerates are often part of a data regime, processing and handling data, controlling output and creating and structuring lives and bodies of data.

In order for data protection to be a worthwhile endeavor aimed at achieving liberty and empowering the individual, a closed network of data regimes need to be broken down to give way to an open organisation of multiple data regimes that liberates individuals, citizens, customers, and other “owners” of data. By breaking down rigid structures of power, and allowing for multiple legacies and owners of data, numerous manifestations and utilisations of data are rendered possible. These could be categorised in oppositional terms as conjuring up repertoires of resistance (Hollander, 2015) or simply as numerous smaller, non-oppressive data regimes coming into their own., and yet retaining connectivity if they so choose. This would, in effect, pave way to securing and protecting the human, as explained further ahead.

Human Security as Data Protection: Advancing Critical Data Studies

The concept of human security (UNDP, 1994; King and Murray, 2001) seeks to focus on the human as the referent object of security, and not the State or other dominant regimes. In other words, it seeks to go beyond articulations that privilege as state-centric view of security like national security, to subvert its power in favour of the human. While the concept of human security is linked to non-traditional forms of security, in the world of data, human security would mean that the essence and proprietary sense of being human is not usurped by data authoritarianism. It means that the human is not reduced to merely being a subject of corporeal regimes. The essence of being a human could be defined, in effect, as more than the individual, the citizen, the customer, and other kinds of subjecthoods. The focus on the everyday activities of the human, permits an understanding of big data replete with its algorithmic computing apparatus, as a daily human endeavor. It imprints the human in big ‘data’.

Human security, as the focal point of Critical Data Studies, in studying data protection, allows to foreground emotive rationality as the logic, with its politics being rooted in the emancipatory project. The human security approach complements the idea of multiple data regimes, since it helps steer clear of bindings to singular regimes of power. It allows for coalition-building, and multi-party cooperation (Johns, 2014). It allows for acquaintance with epistemologies of care and helps understand normative conceptual frameworks in a more nuanced manner, thereby allowing us to go beyond deterministic accounts of data institutionalism.

Studies on data protection then, should be rooted in interrogating ownership patterns, access of varied kinds, the right to privacy of the

individual and the ability to “fall off the grid”, as a means to challenge oppressive and/or colonial data collection mechanisms. Critical Data Studies should draw on these claims, and should stay firmly rooted in human security, to understand sustainable means of leading data lives today.

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Unpacking Binging: New Ways of Production & Consumption

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Abstract

The last five years have been increasingly transformative in the realms of broadcast and electronic media; following an inevitable convergence with internet-centric technologies. The emergence of new platforms has enabled the untethering of audio-visual content from specific temporal and spatial bounds as consumption of AV programming has embraced the facets of mobility. This paper critically examines content streaming applications like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar and Voot in conjunction with similar platforms of streaming content for media forms like podcasts. By analyzing the content on offer, the various modus-operandi for content creation and dissemination and the way consumers engage/consume content on these platforms; this paper hopes to arrive at a nuanced understanding of binging both as an activity and as a new way of engaging with broadcast content. In terms of market value, the Indian online streaming market is estimated to be over 100 million regular subscribers and is valued at USD 280 Million. By using specific cases and situating the analysis in the context of an increasingly connected world; this paper will extend the academic understanding of binging by building on the foundations of a remediated understanding (McLuhan) and giving it a social dimension.

Keywords: binging, binge-watching, streaming, podcasts, remediation

Introduction:

a. Web 2.0

The internet has often been considered to be a unique medium and the field of study that examines the role of internet in society is called new media studies. However, it is surprising that the discipline is termed ‘new’ when there is nothing new that the internet as such offers to the general media form (Lister et al, 2008; Manovich, 2001). It doesn’t offer any radical shift in media consumption the way text does to visual or radio does to acoustic or television does to the audio-visual experience at large.

However, what the internet does bring with it is the ability to augment and amplify existing media forms. By bringing about digitization and the conversion of all mediated content into binary form there have emerged radical new ways for engagement, manipulation and creation of content (Lister et al, 2008; Holmes 2005). This effect is much more noticeable after the advent of Web 2.0 and the subsequent rise of global internet bandwidth. The rise in bandwidth in conjunction with development of advanced web-based applications laid the foundations for storage of large amounts of data in remote servers and the ability to retrieve the same at any connected location.

Web 2.0 and the rise in bandwidth has also enabled the creation of data clouds which enable the infrastructure that allows for streaming and networking applications to function today. However, if Bill Nichols' understanding of cybernetic systems is to be applied in these scenarios. it is important to note that the limits of engagement and interaction are bound by the abilities of the system. In other words, the more advanced the system is; the more possible applications that it can offer (Nichols, 1988).

b. Rise of streaming

The recorded history of streaming media dates to the point where blogs began to transcend the textual form. As the blogosphere began to adopt a more multimedia-oriented format, audio logs began to appear. At the same time there was an emergence of internet-based radio as audio files largely began to embrace a digital form. The first podcast stream was born at the Berkman Center where Dave Winer an RSS innovator combined audio files with an RSS feed to give birth to the podcast form. He uploaded 25 audio interviews at once on his blog from where people could download them and listen to them at their convenience (Locke, 2017).

“My goal then was to upgrade the blogosphere. At that point, it was a clubby social thing, and it was way focused on Silicon Valley and the tech industry. Syndication and RSS hadn’t been done on the web—my idea was that we could do blogging with our voice, but I needed a flow of MP3s that people would find compelling.” (Winer in Charley, 2017)

As audio logs emerged it was not long that people began to experiment with video and soon the popular culture of v-logs and video diaries began to find place on the internet. The term streaming was coined to describe the phrase “video on demand.” The first instance of a live performance on the internet can be traced to the performance of the California based band *Severe Tire Damage* which performed on 24th June 1993 in California but the

performance was streamed to people live in Australia using a technology called multicasting (History of the Internet, 2017). However, it was a long time before the streaming of video became a mainstream phenomenon as the capability of the internet as a global network was quite limited at the time.

c. The YouTube revolution

The launch of YouTube in 2005 began to disrupt/transform the way people used the internet as suddenly the doors to online streaming were opened and the rest of the world had to play catch up. Macromedia Flash became a popular format as videos began to be consumed at a rapid rate; this was also the time that *Netflix* decided to make its move to a digital existence as prior to this it was only a chain of store that rented CDs and DVDs to paying customers.

With the rise of YouTube not only did videos embrace the internet but also the AV form was suffused with the qualities that were unique to users of the internet. The adoption of YouTube wasn't possible without the rise of User Generated Content as the adopters of the platform began to shape it the way they desired. The pro-sumers (producers + consumers) (Lister et al., 2008; Holmes, 2005) of content who had shaped text-based worlds like MUDs, MOOs and experiences like *Zork* did the same for streaming platforms (Turkle, 1995).

As uninterrupted video was now available to anyone, with access to the internet; streaming of content had now become a reality. As the world became accustomed to new terms like "buffering" and "high definition" (HD) it was also left to grapple with means of optimization of both streaming as a form and as well the monitoring content that was being streamed.

d. New ways of doing things

With the assimilation of the internet and its convergent nature into mediated content, the established status quo was challenged. One no longer needed a radio station or a newspaper or a television station to send messages across; three things began to rapidly change as a consequence. Owing to its new digital form content became both instantaneously replicable and easily manipulable (Lister et al, 2008; Homes, 2005). Questions of credibility and authorship became difficult to answer as examples of Baudrillard's concept simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994) began to manifest.

Secondly, the internet's abilities for both instantaneity and its asynchronous nature allowed for consumption of content both in real-time but also at the leisure of the user (Manovich, 2001; Lister et al, 2008). Lastly, the internet's infinitely large archives meant if something ever was on the internet it was more than likely to remain there forever in some form or the other (Manovich, 2001; Lister et al, 2008). Newer content embedded with all these characteristics meant the processes of content creation and consumption would never be the same again.

Binging as an activity

Defining binging

The word 'binge' has been about since the mid-19th century, its first recorded usage was in 1848 to indicate the high levels of alcohol consumption. Overtime 'binge' as a verb began to apply to acts of eating as well and thus it became available as a verb to signify consumption at large. With regards to mediated content binge consumption or 'binging' then becomes consumption of a specific kind of media content in large quantities at a stretch.

Despite the new age currency of the term, activities that can be termed today as binging have been around for quite a while. Binge-reading or binging on books is not a very uncommon practice. Similarly, conventional movie marathons of franchises like *Star Wars* have also been around for the last three decades. With regards to binging in the confines of the home it is something that should have been ideally enabled by the advent of the VHS tape and the technology of the VCR. However, the popularization of binging as a habit happened only post digitization because replicability became both effortless and instantaneous (Lister et al 2008). With the advent of the internet and highspeed FTP protocols the transferring of content eclipsed geographic boundaries. The potential of this as a habit is ever increasing as data storage becomes cheaper and more reliable and the internet gets faster.

Remediations

If McLuhan's trusted tool remediation (Bolter, 2000; Strate, 2008) is to be applied to streaming platforms then YouTube in its early days could have been first understood as always available free television with no advertisements. However, since the early days a lot has changed as YouTube

has grappled with issues of broadcast rights across the world and at the same time in a bid to maximize advertising revenue one finds the content is often riddled with ads. In the nature of content too YouTube has shifted the focus from users merely watching content to a system where it promotes a lot of user generated content monetizing number of views garnered. If we are to remediate YouTube today; it is noticeable that it has successfully collapsed the content producer and consumer binary and created a space which feels more like a community than a streaming platform.

Platforms like *Netflix* and *Amazon Prime* seemed to have gone the other way by paying considerably to acquire rights for streaming traditional broadcast content and then also beginning the production of original content. They however have achieved that by sacrificing the free to access element. They can be remediated as always available television services. Consequently, their way of functioning has ensured the retaining of the producer-consumer binary and thus despite embracing the internet, they remain as part of the traditional broadcast business setup.

Podcasts on the other hand can also be similarly remediated as radio via the internet or paid repositories of audio access. However, on the other hand there are also services like *Tidal*, *Spotify*, *Apple Music* and *Google Play* which have gone the *Netflix* way with regards to music. In fact, with platforms like *Spotify* the music industry, one that was ravaged by online piracy has finally begun to see an inflow in revenue.

The remediation of these platforms allows for us to build a foundation from where we can critically examine what these platforms have transformed and what they have retained from conventional systems.

New means and modes of interaction

With regards to content consumption, the biggest change that these platforms offer the consumers are the removal of spatial and temporal biases. They enable anyone in the world to watch anything on their servers as long as they are connected and also allow them to watch them at any time. The unique retrieval-based design of the application system allows for any user to watch what they searched for in other words what one watches is choice based and so is the time one watches that.

The consumers then are liberated from the time-based constraints of TV viewing in the traditional sense and the unique personal experience allows for infinite pauses, breaks, skips and resumptions from the last

position; things that conventional TV just can't offer. These apps have made the experience more interactive by giving information overlays like subtitles, cast-information and other related trivia.

The consumer on the other hand can download the shows he/she desires and watch them when they have the time. They are also independent of periodicity as most of these platforms make the entire batch of episodes available at one go. The consumer is then free to consume them as they see fit in any specific order they desire.

Algorithmic viewing

The one loss in this entire viewing process is the disappearance of the chance encounter. The time when one comes across a totally new show while switching channels or an interesting new book at a bookshop. In a bid to counter this, most streaming platforms have in place predictive algorithms that keep track of viewer's histories and choices in order to then suggest newer content for viewing (Gillespie, 2014).

While the success of the algorithms' predictions is open to debate, their utility can be questionable for the fear of the experience being reduced to that of a walled-garden. The apps by themselves restrict consumers to content that they have secured rights for and within that limited buffet of mediated content the algorithms reduce the viewing options further. The resultant experience thus can be quite reductive if a consumer doesn't regularly use the search function to navigate the limits of the database.

Unique cases

The curious case of Bee

Netflix launched its yearly statistics about how its viewers were consuming their content on Dec.1, 2017. The data gave trends on what shows were being most watched and how quickly were the episodes being consumed (Netflix Media Center, 2017). One statistic that stood out among the large dataset that was released was of a single user in the UK who had seen the Dreamworks movie *Bee* 352 times in 365 days in a time frame ranging from Nov.1 2016 to Nov.1 2017 (Coy, 2017).

Following two weeks of endless speculation as to who the mysterious viewer was on Dec. 14 Gemma Chalmers accepted that she was the person who had 're-watched' the movie 352 times (Robertson, 2017).

On being asked further, she responded that for her child Jaxson showing *Bee* was the only way to calm him down. Despite trying numerous other successful animated movies like *Trolls* and *Cars* nothing seemed to work the way *Bee* did.

“We’ve watched it multiple times a day to keep him happy. He watches the film from the moment he wakes up until he goes to sleep at night. I know every word of that film. I am completely fed-up with it.” (Gemma Chalmers as quoted in Robertson, 2017)

While preventing babies from crying can be considered one of the biggest challenges in parenting, I can personally attest to the miraculous benefits of streaming “soothing music” (though what a baby considers soothing is at best anyone’s guess) to prevent them from crying. I was in Agra attending a friend’s wedding in February when we as a group decided to visit the Taj. In the group also present was a close friend, his wife and daughter.

As we made our way through the endless crowds attempting to capture the perfect selfie of holding the Taj by their fingertips, the day got sunnier and unbelievably warm for February. The heat seemed to have ticked little Anvi off as she began to cry. No amount of shade from the trees or the cajoling from the parents could calm her down until my friend used his trump card. Quickly blaring was a Tamil song from the trusty YouTube app and lulled the baby into a good mood.

On further questioning, my friend conceded that the song was downloaded and ready to be used at all times. In the last week it had been used on the flight to Delhi, in several sites of national heritage in Delhi and the Shatabdi to Agra and now the Taj was added to this growing list.

While this particular case might seem frivolous and tangential to the discussion there are two unique elements of streaming platforms that stand out. One their ability to perform when you require the most and secondly, their ability to archive what the user desires in a way that it can be summoned by the tap of a few fingers. While often binging is understood as consumption of large volumes of content at a stretch, there is a need for the term to also include repeated re-consumption of the same content. One of *Netflix* and *Amazon Prime*’s coups has been their ability to add sitcom evergreens *FRIENDS* and *Seinfeld* to their respective rosters. To their legions of loyal fans worldwide re-watching the series has become a norm.

Marvel's Jessica Jones

For the longest while, one of the biggest discussions in both the Television and the Film space has centered around the ability of a lead woman character to carry a show entirely on her shoulders. Even Scarlett Johansson with her incredible set of loyal fans couldn't get herself a standalone *Black Widow* movie from Marvel for the longest time. However, post the success of *Wonder Woman*, things have changed in the world of films. In TV however, that change started with the efforts of icons like Tina Fey, Amy Schumer and Mindy Kaling. *Netflix* has done its bit by promoting shows like *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* and *Jessica Jones*.

Part of a larger Marvel Superhero universe and set in Hell's Kitchen, New York; *Jessica Jones* has gone one to become an integral cog in *Netflix*'s successful money-making wheel called the *Defenders*. This case however examines the specific case of *Jessica Jones*' Season 2.

A lot of the critics and viewers have pointed out the incredibly slow start of the season and the time taken by the showrunners to get things going towards the finale. The reviews claim the starting of the show lacked focus but made up for all of it with a thrilling finale (Miller, 2018).

If we were to put the same case in the setting of a traditional broadcast environment, then things would have been very different with *Jessica Jones*. In a setting where ratings numbers are monitored every week and then shows are re-written and re-purposed to suit specific demographics week-to-week; the slow start and lack of focus would have rung the death knell two-three weeks in to the broadcast cycle. If we are to focus on the show's schedules with regards to its pre-production and pilot pitching phases, characters that focus on niche sections of the nerd/geek communities would have gained little traction in the conventional broadcast space as is evinced by the failure of cult shows like *Firefly* and the non-pickup of pilots like *Aquaman*.

Jessica Jones similarly isn't as popular as her other Marvel counterparts and would have gained similarly little traction. However, *Netflix* in an environment unbothered by traditional ratings numbers or by the quest for advertiser demographics at the moment could allow the team to work in a more unconventional setting. The fact that the online streaming platforms' dissemination abilities aren't limited by geographical or time-based elements or the notion of a limited audience makes things much more interesting to examine.

Allowing the team to film the entire season in one go rather than for a yearlong regular TV show allowed for everyone to appreciate what the show had in store. Similarly, the viewers being unbothered by the slow start and the week-to-week wait of episodes were able to quickly make their way to the interesting portions as consumption of content is at their discretion entirely not being structured by the EPG or decision making of the network's executives.

Trollhunters

Guillermo del Toro, the Mexican filmmaker is one of the most diverse creators of content in the global industry today. With a keen eye to tell a story that stands out, del Toro has helmed the direction of classics like *The Shape of Water* and the acclaimed action flick *Pacific Rim*. However, the academy award winner includes an animated TV show in his eclectic resume called *Trollhunters*. In partnership with DreamWorks the show is available exclusively on *Netflix* and has been incredibly well liked. Such has been the success of the show, that del Toro's team has used the finale of *Trollhunters* to lay the foundation for three new animated series for *Netflix*. While the success story stands in its place, what *Trollhunters* allows us to see is the incredible flexibility that streaming platforms allow for collaborative transmedia projects. Similar examples see *Amazon Prime* launching *Jack Ryan* a series set in the universe of Tom Clancy, a universe that has made its mark in the realms of books and video games. Another such example is the acquisition of rights by *Amazon* for the universe of J.R.R. Tolkien (of Lord of The Rings and Hobbit fame) as the pre-production of shows from Middle-Earth has begun.

Closer to home we see the success of shows like *Sacred Games* where established people in other media forms have taken the dive with doing 'television.' While the step to TV for the longest time was considered a step-down for A-listers, the perceptions seem to have now changed. Streaming Platforms with their unique style and disruptive qualities seem to have narrowed the chasms that separate traditional media; in the process carving a newer space where media forms can merge and collaborate for a richer, fuller experience for all parties involved.

Sarabhai v Sarabhai Take 2

Sarabhai v Sarabhai was a sitcom that aired on *Star One* in 2004. One of the first shows on the channel, it was part of several that were specifically made for the urban middle class. A comic take on the usual saas-bahu dramas that

were the part of the erstwhile Indian primetime fare; the show was expected to stand out with its snappy writing and wonderful cast. Despite running for two years and a production list of eighty episodes, the show failed to stand out. However, things changed once the show went off the air. Overtime the show developed a cult following and with re-runs and binge watching, there began a clamor for its return. By the time the fans' calls reached a critical point the channel *Star One* was shut down and it has been rebranded as *LifeOK*.

The production team and the actors were often asked about a possible return and there was never a positive response until the entry of *Hotstar*. *Hotstar* had just entered the Indian online streaming space and had secured the rights for the digital broadcast of the IPL. At the same time, it had also secured the rights of several TV shows for its library, one of which was *Sarabhai v Sarabhai*.

The large viewer traffic for the original series on *Hotstar* coupled with the effect of vociferous fans, *Hotstar* decided to produce a return of the series. The series did return in May 2017 and the response has at best been a mixed bag.

While the response from viewers has been tempered at best, what stands out here is the ability of *Hotstar* to step in and listen to its viewers as opposed to the traditional broadcast space. An existence of a transparent communication channel and a willingness to pro-actively fulfil demand where there's a perceived shortage seems to be the hallmark of the new-age streaming media houses.

Similar examples include the saving of the popular comedy *Community* by Yahoo, and the more recent acquisition of the Neil Gaiman show *Lucifer* by *Netflix*. A willingness to take risks and acquire fans by saving the shows they love not only brings in newer viewers but also can foster long term loyalty when annual subscriptions come into play.

Economics & Numbers

The global market for streaming platforms has seen a steady rise in revenue year on year as the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) was 15.2 percent between 2016 and 2017. The overall size of the market was calculated to be USD 20.1 Billion (PWC in Bloom, 2018) and is expected to grow to USD 82 Billion by 2023. However, Price Waterhouse Cooper's report suggests

that the market will be dominated by adopters from the US for the foreseeable future. Closer to home, the Indian online streaming market is pegged at a modest USD 280 million with a hundred million subscribers.

With regards to platform specific numbers, it is interesting to note that none of the streaming platforms in question are profitable yet. A trend that has become the norm in today's start-up economy. *Netflix* is the best possible example with a debt exceeding USD 20 Billion (Roberts, 2017) for a market that is valued at the same amount. Most platforms have considerable debts that are similar to *Netflix* owing to similar business models save for *Amazon's Prime*. Amazon's video service is part of a larger bouquet of prime services that the global retailer offers. However, looking at their bouquet of original content, their investments are like to be of a similar tune to *Netflix*'s.

The existing trend with internet centric businesses like *Uber*, *Amazon*, *Flipkart* and now the aforementioned streaming platforms is to sacrifice profit maximization in the search for the more elusive customer-share by focusing on economies of scope rather than scale. Consequently, most of these battles are now being fought over the large population bases of India and China. Streaming platforms too are locked away in a constant battle as they dole out subscriptions for free or paltry sums in a hope to acquire a dedicated viewer base.

Though the market for streaming platforms is still in the stage of infancy and most revenue/business model are far from being perfect one thing that has reached maturity is the habit of binging. However, in a country like India only a mere 0.5 percent watches western syndicated content; this trend is of a major concern as most platforms libraries are heavily stocked in this regard (Madhavan, 2017). If India and China are key to unlocking the true potential then there is a serious need for the platforms to embrace the diverse culture of the people they are wooing.

Discussion

Binging though defined as consumptions of large amounts of mediated content also needs to be understood as an evolution of video consumption for the post-modern age. For a society that has increasingly shrunk distances and broken barriers of space and time, it is only natural that their habits also transcend the same barriers. If someone can instantaneously correspond with anyone across the globe they can also expect to watch content instantaneously irrespective of where they are. Streaming platforms can be viewed as the means to fulfil that need.

Bingeing and streaming are just two mere facets of the larger umbrella term of “digital leisure activities,” a small spectrum of these activities today include gaming, video-logging (Snapchat & Instagram stories), social network-based communications and virtual and augmented reality-based experiences. As India and the world at large becomes increasingly poised to make the jump to wards an increasingly digital existence, then understanding new forms of leisure and content consumption preferences becomes paramount.

In India especially post the Jio revolution in telephony, access to data has never been easier and more affordable. For the first time answering questions of access and reach in the traditional digital divide seems a possibility. Once access is widespread, interesting questions that deal with usage patterns and various approaches to newer practices will become interesting sites of inquiry.

Future studies can look at the various ways by which the production processes of digitally mediated content vary as there will be room for newer kinds of production ethnographies. The makers of streaming content don't seem to bound by the traditional power structures that governed traditional media companies, interesting issues with regards to certification, licensing and revenue generation are bound to rise. On the usage side of things, studies can examine how viewers adopt these platforms and how overtime they evolve into practices and eventually then become part of the social fabric. The potential seems vast and we are situated at the best possible time and place to chart the phenomenon.

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Digital Archiving and its Neutrality: Questions on logic, longevity, and discovery in Knowledge Production

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Abstract

The proposed paper critically engages with the paradigm shift in knowledge production brought in by the digital media. It focuses on the element of accidental discovery in knowledge production across disciplines, particularly the medium of still photography. The logic of digital data archiving and its limitations in terms of facilitating random search and finding, as against analogue media where data is stacked in a traditional and human friendly manner, or the ‘natural’ ordering of archived information in analogue will be scrutinized in the paper. Philosophical questions on the scope, future and utilitarian aspects of archived digital data/information alongside its scopes of retrieval for purposes that they are or were not deemed to be for, will be evaluated critically. The evolution of technology and fate of digital data produced and archived at various junctures of the evolution require critical and philosophical interrogations to see what they were intended to be and what they have become specifically due to digitalization. The new meaning of eternity in the light of the deemed ability of the digital data to stay intact for long or forever against the phenomenon of becoming obsolete too soon with the change of technology that nullifies or challenges the notion of eternity will also be looked in to. Thinking specifically about the medium of photography, random discovery of photographic images in various formal and informal archives and associated research have been a very prominent form of knowledge production. The paper would be an attempt to engage with the discrepancy between the huge corpus of digital images produced and most of it being pushed beyond the scope of retrieval. This poses many pertinent questions to the concept of digital archiving of photos, retrieval of which is highly determined by the personal and political choices of the archiver. The projected neutrality and immense potential of the digital medium thus becomes a farce and will open before us, as a medium fluctuated by infinite political conditioning and biases. The paper will investigate this aspect of the digital medium using the digital archiving of photographs as a field.

Accidental discovery has been a pivotal component of knowledge production and with the normalisation of ‘digital’ as the mode of production and archiving of knowledge or data, there has been a paradigm shift that reduces the chance of accidental discovery and puts up curated and

moderated knowledge on top of the available repository, making it easily found and accessed. Minimal or little accidental discovery or discovery of certain data by chance in the process of searching for something that was not very specifically indented for and the abundance of digitally produced and archived, produced in analogue and archived digitally knowledge, that are archived not based on its own characteristics or materiality, but on a description of it or metadata, makes the knowledge and archives highly curated and influenced. This kind of knowledge is highly predisposed to the biases of the archiver and its scope is limited by the social, political and technological preferences of the person who wishes to access that particular piece of knowledge.

There are assorted classes of knowledge that were produced in various modes before the digital – in terms of production, archiving and the way it was accessed. The analogue mode of production as well as archiving constituted the primary database in museums, both formal as well as informal. The kinds of knowledge that have been produced in analogue forms such as celluloid, photographic paper and paintings – their archival has partially or completely shifted to digital. However, it is not to say that the analogue photography is not practiced any more at all. It is still practiced in certain exceptional cases such as by certain ardent film photography enthusiasts and fine art photographers.

Phases of Digital Inception

A structuring of different phases of digital data production and archiving under broad categories is attempted here based on certain signposts in the field. This categorisation follows a linear temporality based on the invention as well as obsolescence of different modes of data production/archiving:

Phase 1, the Pre-Digital or the Digital Foetus

This was when the ‘digital’ was being conceived, both as a technology as well as an idea. For laymen, it was just occasional news and science fiction – film and literature. Analogue production, Analogue Post production, Analogue Archive had been the markers of the time. During the ‘Digital Foetus’ era, in Photography and Film making, the processes of production, post production, circulation and archiving were done in analogue in its entirety. The process of photography was very much chemical and not digital. The popular imagination and representation of photography was in the form of film rolls and negatives. Silver nitrate films were exposed

using analogue cameras, films chemically washed and developed in no negatives and positive impressions were printed on photographic papers. Even in the most creative of the imaginations of photography, a ‘digital’ future like the present we have today was never there.



Analogue Film Archive



Analogue Photography Archive

Phase 2, the Digital Baby

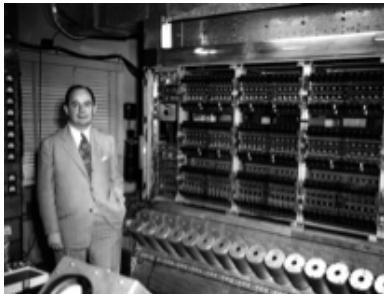
Analogue production, Analog Post Production, Analogue Archive

Technologies such as Telecine, Nonlinear editing, reverse telecine, image scanners were invented, but in the very nascent phase and were seldom used. The newly invented technologies were not feasible technically and financially. The output was inferior to that of analogue counterparts and were mostly perceived as a not so viable, not so user friendly, and very unlikely to get popular technologies elsewhere. Most importantly, though people started hearing of machines called computers – yet the imagination that one day the world would revolve around it was beyond imagination. The knowledge and imagination that computers could be used in easing out the tasks was not very visual but numeric. Computers were machines that could help in doing mathematical calculations.

Phase 3: The Digital Childhood

Digital Technologies evolved and became known to people though were not quite accessible. Technologies of Digital Production (digital camera), Digital Post Production (computer based image processing), Analogue Archive (celluloid and magnetic tapes) got more popular, yet very expensive. Digital cameras and camcorders, nonlinear editing alongside arc lamp projection and printed images marks the ‘Digital Child hood’. Production remained mostly analogue, post production moved digital, archiving and circulation remained analogue mostly. CDS and DVDs got popular in the market over VHS tapes, but the logic of archiving stayed analogue. Computer based storages were mostly confirmed to the hard

drives and floppy disks. CDs and DVDs were popularly perceived as replacements of magnetic tapes and not storage devices.



The first electronic computer built by the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, New Jersey



One of the first-generation Apple computers from 1976

Phase 4: The Digital Adolescence

Storage and memory moving online started here in to the ‘cloud’ in this era of Digital Production, Digital Post Production, Digital Archiving and digital circulation. Media forms moved out of CDs and DVDs with coming of internet. Another major move marked during the era was the upcoming of digital as a substitute of print publishing. Major publications around the world launched online versions along with the print anticipating a digital revolution. A few publications even stopped printing forecasting a paper free world. Platforms like amazon kindle was introduced attempting to replicate the experience of paper in digital.

Phase 5: The Digital Adulthood

The age that we live in where the paradigms are shifted in production, post production, archiving and circulation. It is the age of the ‘new’ where, most analogue modes of production, post production, archiving and circulation became obsolete. Most importantly, alongside most analogue technology, most of the initial digital technologies too met with the same fate. It is this era that marked a substantial departure in terms of the logic of archiving and retrieval of data, moving towards a more curated access from the natural orders of archival and storage as against the analogue.

Phase 6: Digital ‘Old Age’

This time we are unsure of future, only thing that is certain is a change that is inevitable. It is important to note that the progression from each age to the

next was mostly disruptive and forecasting the future on the basis of present was never possible. And the trend testifies it, the way things go throws the unpredictability and hence resulting uncertainty. There have been many films and books that imagined the future in lines of its contemporary times. One example is that of the Blade Runner (1982) the neo-noir science fiction film directed by Ridley Scott starring Harrison Ford. The 1982 film imagined a future world of 2019 where there is a conflict of survival between the humans and synthetic humans engineered to work in extra-terrestrial colonies of earth. Typically, every imagination or forecast of the future is based on the dominant social psyche of the present and in most cases, end up substantially different from the world that actually evolves. Another film that is worth citing in this context is Black Panther (2018), the American superhero movie directed by Ryan Coogler based on the Marvel Comics character Black Panther. The film imagines a technocratic utopia with unspecified temporality. Popular imaginations of utopias materialise here as both awe and fear. The utopias and dystopias and as imagined by Hollywood are reflexive of the popular imaginations of the future and they seldom live up to the reality.



Shift in materiality; Visuality to Digitality

The most important cultural transformation brought in by the digital is the perceived materiality of a photograph. With the photography process going digital and the shift in materiality of the photograph, increased quantities of data are produced, circulated and archived. Instead of visuality, the most innate and independent characteristic of an image is subsided by certain descriptions of data that describes the image, something that is exclusively brought in by the digital mode of production and archiving – the metadata becomes more important than visuality. There arises excessive compulsion on tagging or description that becomes pivotal in archiving and wherever it is not sufficiently carried out, the images produced, though archived ‘safely’, remain inaccessible making it practically non-existent. Beginning from Walter Benjamin in his essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ many cultural theorists have discussed shifts or changes in the materiality, resulting in boundless duplication.

It could be argued that the increased quantum of data is the gift of digital and without which the corpus would have been much smaller in comparison to what we have today. On the contrary, the counter question is where does the increased size of corpus leading to? What happens to the images produced? Particularly what is the purpose that they satisfy? Does the digital mode of production and archiving modify the purpose of the photograph from its capturing moment to that of its archiving and retrieval purposes? What are the kinds and levels of manipulations or modifications that it undergoes in the process? What are the implications these manipulations or modifications bring in on the research or knowledge production that involve the digitally archived and retrieved images?

Obsolescence of Technologies and Longevity of Data

As mentioned earlier, like the analogue modes became obsolete, the digital technologies too face quick obsolescence in most cases. As the technologies of production and storage evolved or changed abruptly, the data produced and stored during the due course were largely not migrated effectively or lost permanently with the outdated or obsolete technology. Numerous technologies of digital data production, archiving and circulation have gone obsolete over time

Gadgets such as Digital diaries that could record digital data for personal use , single CCS magnetic tape camcorders, floppy disks, CD

ROMs, early generation mobile phone cameras and low resolution digital cameras and their inability to migrate the data from previous to new generation platforms due to the requirement of extra hardware with scarce computer facilities made the data remain where it was captured, stored and was eventually lost and ignored with time. A major quantity of it was just recorded and never played back again.



Digital Diary



Handycam



CD ROM



Floppy Disk



Pager



ZIP Drive



Satellite Radio



DV Tape

To sum up, none of the data archived from these gadgets made it to the age of high speed broadband internet and the one terabyte free storage on flickr.com and other similar cloud storages. With the evolution or obsolescence most or all of the data from the old digital gadgets were lost. We assume that the data that is digitally produced now has a possibility of becoming eternal owing majorly to the availability secure cloud storage, cheap and fast internet connectivity. Imagine the plight of storage devices which were so common during a time like the floppy disc, or even a CD rom in the contemporary moment.

Coming back to the question on photographs and their materiality, as the digital stripped photography of its traditional materiality – the film and the photo paper, the way they are archived and accessed went under tremendous change alongside the change in the production technology. However, one may argue that still the photograph can be visually searched on a computer screen through a preview or thumbnails – that is also to argue

that its primary characteristic of visuality can be kept intact. The argument against or the pertinent question is, what happens when the computer or any other interface that decodes the digital data and presents in a way we can see or experience it, is taken away. What happens to a photograph or a film that was a medium self-sufficient in itself to communicate what it intends to communicate without relying on a necessary supporting technology? In the absence of that interface or technology, the data or the knowledge archived in that storage, local or in the cloud, is as good as it was never produced or archived.

Biases of Cloud as an Archive

Now I would like to discuss cloud services, and to mention specifically, the one many of us use the most owing to the abundant space that provide for free, www.flickr.com. It is a service owned by Oath, previously owned by yahoo.com, the photo storage and sharing website that allows the user to store images – still and moving - up to one terabyte for free. The website lets the user to both share the images as well as to store them in private. There are so many other services too, mostly free offered by various companies who are multinational corporations such as Dropbox, Onedrive and Google drive. They come in different subscription plans both free as well as paid. Most of these can store any digital data, it works literally as an extended computer folder elsewhere ‘in the cloud’ and are supposed to be ‘safe’ and accessible from anywhere anytime.

Technocentrism

There are people who keep infinite faith in these technologies. They trust the technology the way an ardent believer believes in God. They care not to question their faith in any degree : the technocentrists. For them, most technology is to be believed in without suspicion. They identify it to be the most logical and scientific, hence absolute trustworthy. Any possible question that may arise on the ethics or reliability of the technology will be conveniently skipped attributing a god like image to the technology that they use. This trust applies to the computer and mobile phone operating systems, email service providers, social media companies and so on. In absolute trust *technofanatics* share everything about them with such companies. The scariest questions are conveniently skipped, what if any of the companies that you trust absolutely breaks the trust? What if we are

locked out of our ‘own’ phones or computers? What if our access to the cloud is restricted one fine morning? What if flicker or google changes its policy and decides to charge you for the services? The possible questions are countless. What if the big databases where terabytes and terabytes of data are stored crash or made to crash one day? One crash may possibly erase the lion share of memories of not just technocentrists, but others too. Imagine the entangled situation where you remember that you had some memories, an idea of the kind of memories- of happiness, sadness, coloured or hazy – but not being able to access them or given a conditional and negotiated access, at a compromise of the privacy and safety of your data that you trusted to be safe and eternal.

With the ownership of the cloud – both present and future, the ‘technocentrism’ seems to have an unadulterated trust in the technologies that make lives easier. Most consumers don’t think of the possibilities, both negative and positive, how and what these clouds can do to us. A technological coup, where a powerful corporation with vested interests taking control of the world through the technology that they own is never a distant possibility. Information is the key in invasion and occupation, that we have in plenty, and the ones who can control or restrict it can control or restrict human kind and could be the new imperialists who would span their empires beyond geographical boundaries.

Getting back to the metadata and description based archiving of photographic images, as the data is stacked and accessed based on the information or the description the archiver attributes, that data may get in to a phase where it will never be made available or be accessed in the same or similar sense the photographer intended it to make at the production stage. An image alongside its traditional materiality, could be stripped off its social and political implications and be something else from thereafter. This misrepresentation is possible in the analogue mode, but the in digital, it is more recurrent, overarching and seldom open to other interpretations. The meanings attached to digital forms are more emphasised, contextualised, associated and recurrent. Rather than letting the viewer interpret what the image’s intention, the context in which the image is placed give them meanings that are more rigid and often deviant from what it was meant or intended to be.

The social, political and cultural affiliation and biases of the archiver is extremely pivotal and critical in determining the destiny of images produced. The keywords with which any digital data is archived is

susceptible to the whims and politics of the archiver. Though in case more structured and professionally managed organisational archives, key wording will have guidelines in place where the endeavour is to keep the information on images value neutral as best and effective as possible. Alongside the tagged information, most online and digital search algorithms do suggest similar data that are likely to be what you are searching in case you don't query for what exactly you are looking for. This way of recommendation with images works for people who are not so sure of what they are looking for and do expect the technology to help them with suggestions. This is the case with most millennials as their research is mostly internet based and keyword driven.

For example, as a teacher of photography, when I ask students to choose some renowned photographers' work to do a style analysis, they don't go and look for interesting images and find out who shot them. Instead they google 'top Indian photographers' or so and whatever comes up and appeals them are taken and analysed for the assignment given. This mode of enquiry not only limits the scope of discovery of images captured at various instances, but also does injustice to the realm of knowledge as a whole. Students encounter only what has been listed and indexed in the search engines and the possibility of accidental discovery of a certain image is very unlikely.

This way of archiving and retrieval, not only alters the way data is archived and retrieved, but also the cultures of discovery and knowledge production. For new scientific knowledge to be produced, it is mandatory that existing pieces of knowledge is accessed. In many instances, the existing knowledge is accidentally discovered and that leads to the production of intended or unintended knowledge. Both in case of intended as well as unintended, the nature of available knowledge is of vital importance. When the data that is made available to the researcher or producer is curated and restricted the scope of the produced knowledge also narrows down to specific and vested interests. Other multiples scopes and possibilities are curtailed by the higher levels of curation and interference. For any kind of research or study, particularly something of great importance, often a researcher need to access archived information. In case of a research that need the photography archives to be accessed, the mode of search and discovery in digital and analogue archives may generate different results. A visual search of printed photographs against the keyword and metadata based digital archive would mostly generate diverse outputs.

Formal and Informal Archives and Public Memory

In an attempt to illustrate my argument, I cite the examples of two watershed events in contemporary Indian history. The Babri Masjid demolition and the Gujarat riots and image archives of both that show up on google search reflect the careful politics that run behind the digital data archiving/ tagging. Assuming that I as a researcher need something more than the images from the black day, I will have to dig deep. Most images that show up are of the demolished mosque, vandalism, supreme court buildings and so on. Images on public record prior to the black day are seldom available. The internet archives in general does not associate the past images to the keyword. On request, the librarian at the Hindu, Chennai commented that in the newspaper archive, there are images of the monument prior to the December 6. However, since they are not of much public interest, they do not show up. So, through a careful archiving what is achieved is an erasure of Babri Masjid as a historical monument, and its location in India's cultural past. Similarly, a search query for any kind of information from different parts of the globe on google yields different results. This kind of a moderated and curated archiving influences the material to be discovered for the purpose of analysis and knowledge production. When you search for Tiananmen square massacre, a search from Beijing yields images that has nothing much to do with the massacre in it

Considering the example of YouTube videos, we search for a particular video with whatever keywords we know about it. But what shows up stacked above and below is what is of interest here. A search for Tom and Jerry yields Tom and jerry videos alongside a couple of other cartoons. Here the algorithm assumes that I am looking for fun in general. Of the many that show is a Cinderella like video titled *sleeping beauty*. If I go for the *sleeping beauty*, what is suggested alongside has a couple of videos that are not typically meant for kids –one example is that of a video titled *Village beauty* and further pursuit leads you to adult content. This discovery depends on the popularity of the video as well as the way it is indexed to be discovered often and readily. In analogue archiving the categories are protectively rigid and possibilities of unwanted content creeping in is limited. To put it in a different perspective, we think we see what we want to see, but we see what they want us to see. The levels of deviation and progression of presentation of these images are decided by the algorithm of the search engine. Politics of ownership of the search engine and the archive is of utmost importance in this context. When these pre-planned and controlled deviation in access of archived data is considered normal, the popular schools of knowledge will also be hijacked. This would eventually lead to a scary future where minds

are hijacked – an involuntary hijack, where the hostages are unaware of the fact that they are captives and their intellectual capital is modelled and controlled by the archivers. Participants are hypnotised and act under the false consciousness of being the custodians and producers of free and independent knowledge.

In the subsequent Real vs Fake scenario, the idea of fake being more appealing through misrepresentation, description and metadata.

Meta Data determined reality:

In Encoding / de coding Stuart hall presents:

"The level of connotation of the visual sign, of its contextual reference and positioning in different discursive fields of meaning and association, is the point where already coded signs intersect with the deep semantic codes of a culture and take on additional more active ideological dimensions." (Hall, 2001).

While Stuart Hall describes the ideological possibilities of visual signs mediated through the semantic codes of a culture, my proposal is to focus more on the encoding phenomenon itself that assembles data based on the hegemonic narrative. In a popular representation on metadata, Hal Draper's short story, " MS_Fnd_in_a_Lbry" (1961) is a satirical description of human civilization's fall due to information overload and the inability to catalogue and access the information. The story depicts human knowledge being compressed and stored in a drawer size box, which has to be accessed through complicated indices and bibliographies. This outgrows the size of all knowledge. The story follows the phantasmagorical narrative line of an anthropologist looking for thread to lost civilization of the humans. (Draper, <http://folk.uio.no/knuthe/kuriosa/draper.pdf>)

Future of Curated Archives?

Draper definitely suggests the fall of human civilisation due to the excess dependency to digital archives. Many dystopic imaginations recreate the digital imperialism and control over the world motif, especially in Hollywood productions. But beyond these popular culture depictions it is quite important to rethink the taken for granted idea of the apolitical nature of digital archiving and the immense dependency to such archives. "Derrida

in archive fever: A Freudian impression" asserts the fact that archive cannot be independent of what is archived. The structure and form of records are informed by the contents and external bodies of knowledge. The archivists are aware of the conditions under which their data attains authenticity and propriety. (Derrida, 1996.)

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