DEPARTMENT OF LIBERAL ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (DLHS)

CAMARADERIE

Special Edition: New Directions in Critical Media Research

Sparking Curiosity: Exploring New Frontiers in Media Research

By Dr Swathi Shivanand

The seminar series "New Directions in Critical Media Research" was conceived as part of the Research Methodology and Research Ethics course for first-year Masters in Multimedia Communication.

As they embark on their research journeys, we wanted to introduce them to not only how to conduct research but also what kinds of academic research are being undertaken in key areas of media. Given that the master's program has three broad tracks that students can specialise in: journalism, film and marketing communication, we invited both new and accomplished researchers to speak about trends in research in these fields.

Further, social media research has rapidly evolved, drawing in the interests of many disciplines, including media studies. Media laws and ethics is a relatively understudied field in India, but the need for it has never been more urgent given the desire for its control by the state and other organised interests. Two out of five lectures then were focussed on research possibilities in these fields.

The seminar series then was both a practical and hopeful exercise: practical in that students could use it to assist in their research and hopeful in that it could spark their interest in areas they did not know of but needed desperate attention.

Editor's note

In this edition of Camaraderie, we delve into the fascinating world of critical media research through a seminar series organised by Dr Swathi Shivanand during the months of January and February.

The series brought us new insights to think about. For example, we, as consumers of information, are constantly bombarded by messages through television, social media, newspapers, and more. But how often do we stop to analyze these messages and their impact? Critical media research provides a framework for doing just that.

It equips us with the tools to dissect media content, understand its underlying biases, and explore how it shapes our perceptions of the world. By engaging with critical media research, we become more active and informed consumers.

We can better understand the power dynamics at play and how media content shapes our perspectives. This issue features articles that explore these themes in various media formats, from analyzing popular films to unpacking the advertising strategies of social media platforms. We hope it encourages you to become a more critical media consumer, questioning the messages you encounter and engaging with the world around you in a more informed way.

Behind The Film Lenses With Dr. Nirmala MN

by Kaushiki Chatterjee & Sanjana Ram

The fourth lecture of the seminar series "New Directions in Critical Media Research " was hosted by Dr. Nirmala MN, Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of Media Studies at Christ (deemed to be) University. She completed her Ph.D. in Film Studies and is a recipient of a CSDS- ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. Her research area lies in the areas of Film Studies, Film labour, Health Communication and Gender and Caste studies. Dr. Nirmala is also a recipient of the National Film Archive of India research fellowship.

Our student, Sanjana Ram, engaged in an insightful conversation with the host regarding her journey to research. When asked about her interest towards cinema, she replied that she has always been a cinema lover.

Photo credits: DLHS

However, her initial focus was the technicians and behind-the-scenes workers. Once she started delving deep into the matter, she learnt how film sets consist of workers from marginalized sections of society, and the absence of appropriate labour laws goes unnoticed. The payroll, long working hours, conditions exposed during work hours, and their families back home all go forgotten behind the 1000-inch screen.

Although Nirmala's story started as a journalist in the Times of India, covering extensive health stories and a few celebrity bytes, she elaborates how her journalistic skills of observance, writing, interview taking, and ethnography came in handy during her research process.

She elaborates how the field of ethnography is vast, and she took two years to develop a bond with the marginalized workers in the film sets. Being an outsider with a different socio-economic background was indeed a difficult process, but gradually, with time, there was a trustable connection with the subjects.

Nirmala further explains that ethnographic studies are time-consuming because of their long process; one must be made aware of when to begin and end, as there is so much to explore, read, and write about.

However, due to deadline constraints, it ends, but the research arenas to explore continue. When it comes to monetary support, she explained how her fellowships and working at a Public University gave her support and stability, making the research process easier.

She adds how the workers have been generous to her when introducing her to their families, sharing in-depth information about work culture, wages, job insecurity, challenges faced every day, lack of stability and employment opportunities.

When Nirmala was asked how it felt to be the only woman in such a male-dominated industry conducting her research, her response was motivating. She explained how women's representation is less, but there are DOPs, light women, etc. Who is working and making their own space?

The change is there; the change can be noticed; however, the ratio continues to be lower in the film industry, especially behind the sets. Nirmala adds that the shift is a gradual press, an, regional, and culturally inclusive cinema and work environments are emerging in modern India. However, making this a reality with appropriate and proper representation will take a longer time and process. But it's better to get started (which the industry has) than to follow the same male domination and discrimination till the present day.

The interview ended on an optimistic and motivational note, inspiring the students to see behind the scenes the glamourous industry where discrimination, labour laws, financial instability, and the stories of the unsung heroes are cut like an editing tool.

The seminar session gave the students a better understanding of the field, the research process, and the importance of being the voice for the voiceless.

Photo credits: DLHS

Ethics of Research – Why is it important?

By Shangbhavi Roy

Ethical codes of conduct in research have evolved over time, often spurred by horrifying violations of human rights and dignity. One pivotal moment in this evolution was the Nuremberg Trials, particularly 'The Doctors Trial', which shed light on the abhorrent human experimentation conducted by the Nazis during World War II. The aftermath of these trials led to the formulation of the Nuremberg Code, a landmark document establishing principles for ethical medical research.

The Nuremberg Code emphasized key tenets such as informed voluntary consent, prioritizing societal good, avoiding unnecessary harm, allowing participants to withdraw, and researchers halting studies if ethical concerns arise. Despite these foundational principles, history has shown that unethical research practices persisted.

In the 1960s, disturbing examples like the Willowbrook School and Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital studies in New York highlighted further ethical breaches. These studies involved deliberate infections and lack of informed consent, leading to public outrage and calls for stricter ethical guidelines.

In response, the World Medical Association introduced the Declaration of Helsinki in 1964, which expanded upon the Nuremberg Code's principles. Emphasizing participants' interests above societal gains, the Declaration aimed to safeguard research integrity while prioritizing humanrights.

Today, ethical codes of practice guide various research disciplines to ensure professionalism, protect participants' interests, and maintain independence in research and the researcher. Organizations like the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Social Research Association (SRA) have developed comprehensive ethical guidelines emphasizing transparency, informed consent, and integrity.

However, debates persist regarding the enforcement and practicality of ethical codes. Some argue that codes may stifle creativity and fail to address nuanced ethical dilemmas, particularly in complex research settings. Critics also warn against the potential misuse of codes to shield powerful interests and advocate for researchers to challenge societal injustices.

Nevertheless, the fundamental principle of informed consent remains paramount in ethical research. Without it, research risks violating human dignity and eroding trust between researchers and participants. Covert methods and deception, as cautioned by scholars like Erikson and Warwick, can have far-reaching societal consequences, undermining the fabric of trust essential for a just society.

> "Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do."

- POTTER STEWART

Problematising Questions with Kulveen Trehan

By Akanksha Mitra

Photo credits: Krishnapriya P

The past decade has been a tornado for marketing communications. Kulveen Trehan, in her online seminar at Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Bengaluru, paints a vivid picture of this transformation.

The industry had the same old marketing sales playground and transitioned into one that became dominated by Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). But then came a game-changer, the 4th Industrial Revolution, with its AI, big data, and cloud computing arsenal. Suddenly, research problems took on a whole new dimension – the sheer volume of data demanded new approaches.

This data revolution wasn't just about numbers, rather, it reshaped the entire marketing research landscape. Job profiles got morphed- research associates, a previously unheard-of title, became an essential player. IMC in itself became a more fluid term, with concepts like "brand extensions" and "brand positioning" reflecting the dynamic nature of brand building. Take Tata, for instance- once a steel giant, it is now a household name in sales and automobiles, an example of brand extensions in this new era.

Even the set of questions regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR) has transformed into a vibrant research area. Consumers are now being aware and looking beyond products, scrutinising work cultures and employee well-being.

Employee communication has expanded to encompass mental health along with salaries and benefits. The ability to engage with these evolving questions becomes paramount in this dynamic environment.

Trehan highlights the concept of "paradigm wars," where research methodologies clash. She makes a point that marketing isn't just about cold data; stories still reign supreme. Quantitative studies rely on positivist methods and deductive reasoning to seek pre-defined options.

The emergence of "constructionism", where theories are built as we go, becomes a perfect fit for the uncharted territories of the digital age. COVID-19, for example, demanded such qualitative research during its course, venturing down the "road less travelled" to understand completely new situations. Techniques like ethnography, both digital and brand-focused, are becoming crucial tools in this new world.

The key lies in bringing these diverse methods together- a concept Trehan called "mapping research." Evaluating the outcomes of a campaign or strategy is a study on its own. It's not just about media consumption anymore; cross-platform research delves into media mixes.

Can transit advertising, like ads on buses, create a transmedia storytelling experience during election campaigns? This is the kind of groundbreaking research that pushes boundaries.

Trehan also emphasised the importance of understanding the digital media scenario beyond social media. The PESO framework, encompassing Paid, earned Shared and Owned media, provides a holistic view.

Measuring campaign effectiveness, hence, becomes crucial. Campaigns like "Bubbles of Happiness," in Trehan's eyes, demonstrate the power of a well-executed strategy.

The seminar delves beyond understanding and problematising marketing tactics, touching upon social issues.

Gender representation in advertising is a prime example, with campaigns like "Stem the Gap" striving for a more balanced portrayal. Trehan stressed the power of research that can benefit not just academics but also policymakers. Areas like public administration, sanitation, and pollution have market research play a vital role in creating sustainable cities.

The example of the lack of women on Wikipedia is a powerful illustration. Male bloggers dominated content creation, leading to the creation of WikiWomen. This story highlights the importance of questioning the status quo and using research to create positive change.

Kulveen Trehan's seminar puts out a compelling picture of conducting research in the digital age. It's constantly fluxing, demanding new research methods, storytelling, and a keen eye for social impact.

Photo credits: Krishnapriya P

Dr. Siddharth Narrain Delves into Research on Media Platforms and Legal Terrain of Gender and Sexuality

By Krishnapriya P

Photo credits: DLHS

Highlighting the kinds of research happening in the fields of law and gender and mapping out the directions they are following, we had an engaging talk with Dr Siddharth Narrain, who specialises in media, constitutional, and gender-sexuality law at the Adelaide Law School. He focused on how specific laws have developed as law and media infrastructures have changed and emphasised the different modes of research that can benefit and lead to policy work. After the seminar, we talked with Dr Narrain about platform regulation, media representation and how research can impact these two fields.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the influence of social media on legal proceedings, and this is something that you also touched upon in a book you edited, Acts of Media. So, what implication do you believe this phenomenon has on the administration of justice and legal systems?

In Acts of Media, one of the entire subsections we do is looking at forensics trials, media trials and forensics. I guess the focus is on the administration of justice and what we call fair trial and evidence.

And how increasingly, if you see from the Talwar case onwards, but even other kinds of cases like that where the idea of a fair trial is compromised often because of the kind of media reportage on issues. But, in the case of Jilal Shah, we saw a lot of the press and the media conducting their own trial and this gets a little more complicated now because you have social media involved.

And this creates, I think, a kind of crowd mentality as well as a mob mentality where you go after somebody because you want vigilante justice or maybe you're going after somebody for their political views or you might believe that something is a very heinous crime and so, therefore, it must be prosecuted strictly etc.

What are the potential research avenues to explore the impact of media involvement on laws that concern gender and sexuality?

Media reportage and the way the media reports issues of gender and sexuality is very, very important to shaping how the public looks at these issues and in a country like India, where issues of gender and sexuality, still, there's a lot of space for better understanding among the public. We consume A lot of information about these issues as the public and generally through newspapers, broadcast channels and all the social media we are reading and a mix of those.

So in the 2000s, 90s, 2000s, 2010, after 2010, but maybe I would say it's quite possible even now, you would often have instances where you know the media would decide to do an expose on a gay party or say on people doing sex work in a public place. All issues of privacy and sensitivity would be thrown aside for TRP ratings.
That way, it could impact people's lives directly and what other people think about these issues. Society and social acceptance are very much the key to how things are developing here.

I think the English media has become more liberal and progressive on these issues. But it's not uniform, and there are always these, one or two of these instances, in the way that people report these things.

Photo credits: Manasi G

My last question is about digital rights and the increasing concerns about content moderation on social media platforms. How would you envision the contribution of academic research in a way that informs legal frameworks and media strategies to address the challenges associated with content moderation?

Academic research is very important, and it is not just me talking as an academic researcher. Still, even platforms themselves often consult with academics on many of these issues to get a grip on their work. They often follow the works of many academics publishing in this area. In fact, platforms are now slowly, depending on your location, sometimes giving access to a few academics to how things work in a very controlled way because they also want a little more of an independent view of how they can improve things and how it's perceived.

So, there's a lot of scope for academics and researchers in this area. Including academic work across the board, in the digital space and machine learning, but also the work that you people are doing, students here, which is interdisciplinary work, media, law, social humanities, that kind of work, which is very important to understand these things, especially contextually.

One of the things platforms really struggle with is because many of them are global. How do their policies translate in a specific context? And for them to understand that they will often hire researchers. The Facebook oversight board gets the researchers to brief the people sitting there. And so, there's a lot of vital work, even in informing platforms and, of course, the public.

Trends in Internet and Social Media Research— Dr Krishnau Bhargav Neog

by Srividya J

Photo credits: Krishnapriya P

The third session of the research seminar series was conducted by one of MAHE Bengaluru's professors, Dr Krishanu Bhargav Neog from the Political Science department. He discussed a list of social media research tools with the class.

One of the ways how data can be collected is by manually using each social media platform's data collection tool. For example, Facebook has a way of checking the ad revenue for specific pages, while X's Twitter Advanced Search lets you collect data from one account handle during a particular time range.

However, these platforms earn significant profits from selling data to interested third parties, so getting vast amounts of information for free will not be easy.

The first anthropological method to study the internet is Ethnography. A traditional, qualitative ethnography involves going to the field of study and staying there for an extended duration to get an insider's perspective on it.

This immersion period can enlighten a researcher about people's everyday habits, culture, and social structure.

This is typically done for geographical communities; applying this to the internet would involve having live interactions with members of a specific community—for example, studying the South Indian fanbase for Bollywood movies would include going to Comic Cons, movie premieres, or other live events in Southern states and maintaining communication with them.

This approach views the internet as a field of study and involves physically connecting with members and observing their offline and online activities.

A subtype would be Digital Ethnography, in which physical interactions are replaced with digital ones. One can join a group or forum to study behaviour digitally. In both of these approaches, it is ethical to announce your intentions regarding research to the members so that they can give you informed consent about your collecting their data. However, lurking anonymously can be justified for the researcher's safety (such as a risk of doxxing or cyberbullying).

Photo credits: Krishnapriya P

A second approach is to study the link between Anthropology and Leisure—in other words, how humans use the internet for leisurely activities more than productive ones.

Research done under this approach can take a physical, socioeconomic factor such as class or gender or select a leisurely and entertaining phenomenon such as meme culture and study it from a multifaceted lens or its prevalence in internet spaces.

A third, less anthropological approach would involve studying the intersection between Social Media, Public Sphere, and Publics. It is a sociological study that takes social media as a public sphere to examine its political economy—something the class is familiar with due to the Political Economy of News Media course in our first semester. Research under this approach can also involve studying the relationship between content and its medium.

Throughout the session, Krishanu Sir provided research papers relevant to the approach for further reading or as an example of the particular approach. He also gave the class several potential topics, familiarising the class with the topic of Trends in Social Media Research.

Legacy Media Research in the Era of AI: Exploring Challenges and Opportunities by Anilesh Kumar

by Pragathi V

Photo credits: Manasi G

The World of Media Research is at a crossroads. It is undergoing a significant transformation with the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). To explore this evolving terrain as part of our research, the department brought up an online workshop titled "Legacy Media Research in the Era of AI: Exploring Challenges and Opportunities" by Anilesh Kumar.

The workshop opened with a discussion of a few seminal works on legacy news media to understand the existing knowledge in our area of interest. It was an eye-opener for the students about the challenges AI presents to traditional media research methods that we would be using.

'Manufacturing Consent', 'Deciding What's News', 'News as Entertainment; 2007', and 'Gandhi meets Primetime' were the seminal works that Mr Anilesh Kumar threw light on. Knowing a few of the grey areas of media research before delving into one is pivotal.

The role of politics or economy in news media, studying today's news media as infotainment, or even the clash between the professional values and ideologies in studying the news media are the primary ideas that were discussed through these seminal works.

Mr Anilesh Kumar offered us a vision of how the traditional news media are embracing Artificial Intelligence(AI) in the production process and how AI can empower legacy media research—then started with outlining the challenges and opportunities that AI imposes in media research. AI literacy in researchers is crucial.

It equips one's research. However, though AI plays a prominent role in the study, it is essential to establish an ethical framework to ensure responsible data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout the research, as Mr Anilesh says.
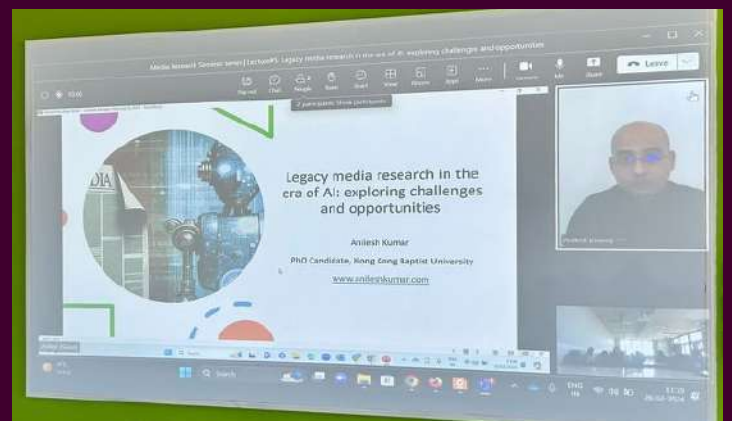

Photo credits: Manasi G

Mr. Anilesh Kumar analyzes a few AI trends in news media production. Focusing on the process followed by practice (production side of journalism), Emphasis on the use of technology, and questions related to institution, power, culture, etc., which shape journalistic practices are yet to be explored.

As a researcher, Mr. Anilesh suggested a few approaches that can be considered for our media research. AI adds science to the art of storytelling, so revisiting the practices (studying the adaptability), Legacy media as a credible source of information, investing contextual diversity. These were a few of the many approaches that the speaker ended the session with.

Nonetheless, Mr. Anilesh answered questions from the students regarding their respective research. Despite the challenges, we were left with different ideas or angles that could be considered for our research.

"Research is to see what everybody else has seen and to think what nobody else has thought."

- *Albert Szent-Györgyi*

WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK?

"It was fruitful and the seminars were extremely helpful for my research, but we missed out on some classes because of this but overall, it was a good experience."

-

Rittik Dhar

"It was really insightful and gave me a lot of resources for my research."

-

Vasundhara B

"Dr. Krishanu sir's seminar was specifically focused on social media research, so it was very useful for my research. The other lectures helped me figure out sources so it was good. "

-

Simran S

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