

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture38

Features of Cyberculture and Cyberactivism

In this lecture, we will continue with the key features of popular cybercultures and locate cyberculture within the study of popular culture, more precisely under the concept of subculture. We will examine how and why it is categorized as a subculture. The key features include its formation and the intersection of technical, social, economic, and other contexts. We also explored the contexts for its production and consumption.

These contexts, particularly regarding everyday cyberculture, popular internet personal communication technologies (PCTs), workplace digital culture, and the information and entertainment culture of new media, are characterized by four key features. Whether it's workplace digital culture, PCTs, or everyday information and entertainment cultures of new media, all can be understood through these four characteristics.

The first is convergence. This concept refers to the usage of digital spaces or cyber culture applications across multiple media forms, highlighting how various elements come together in a shared environment. For instance, we see different media platforms merging, creating a rich tapestry of content and interactions.

The second key point is remediation, where old forms of media are transformed into new formats. For example, Web TV combines elements of cinema and traditional television with the World Wide Web. As previously discussed, these TV channels are now integrating with platforms like Netflix and Amazon. We must closely observe how these older formats, such as cable TV, will be remediated and integrated into the new media landscape.

The third characteristic is consumption. This involves examining how audiences engage with digital content and how their consumption patterns shift in response to evolving technologies. Lastly, we will consider the role of production, exploring how creators adapt to these changes and how new forms of content are

developed. By analyzing these key features, we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of cyberculture and its impact on contemporary society.

Linked to consumer culture and shaped by new media technologies, consumption is set for significant change. What transformations will we witness in various contexts of new media technologies? Lastly, interactivity is redefining the roles of audiences, listeners, and viewers. Audiences are no longer passive consumers; they actively engage their intellect to discern what is useful, deciding where to invest their time and where not to.

These four key features illustrate this shift. Now, let's locate cyberculture within cultural studies, specifically under subculture. In cyberspaces, we observe the emergence of subcultures that serve as enablers, allowing for the existence and proliferation of various cultural movements, including countercultures that may be viewed as illegal or antisocial.

Subcultures emerging from cyberspaces are often labeled as illegal or antisocial. This framing is crucial for understanding their place within subcultures and the broader study of popular culture. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a vital role here. For instance, hackers raise questions about ethics and authenticity. These subcultures utilize ICTs to challenge corporate and government-controlled information, software, and cultural meanings, positioning themselves in opposition to dominant powers.

Another aspect to consider is the social construction of technology. When we discuss social construction within society, culture plays a significant role. However, technology also influences this dynamic. The social construction of technology leads to the categorization and labeling of users. Those who operate within government norms are often deemed legitimate users, while those who use technology for protest or other subversive purposes may be classified as subversive or deviant.

This understanding of how subcultures interact with technology highlights the complexities of identity and belonging in digital spaces. As we navigate these changing landscapes, we must continue to explore the implications of these dynamics for our understanding of culture, power, and resistance in the digital age.

If you're using technology to engage in activities deemed criminal, such as fraud or scams, you will be labeled a criminal—these are socially constructed labels. Society constructs these labels based on behaviors. For instance, the show *Jamtara*, which we discussed in relation to OTT platforms, explores phone scams in India. The series highlights how scammers often send links or ask for OTPs, depicting activities occurring in a specific region. The individuals involved are usually labeled as criminals or cybercriminals because they use digital technologies and ICTs to conduct these scams.

Unregulated subculture practices often utilize technology in ways that are not monitored by businesses or governments. These activities are frequently deemed illegal or threatening by mainstream standards. When subcultures engage with technology, they typically operate outside regulatory frameworks, making their practices appear illegal or harmful to mainstream institutions.

Alternate media plays a significant role in these discussions. Subcultures often view alternate media as emerging from outside the mainstream. This form of media is produced outside traditional markets and state control, serving purposes such as political dissent, protest, and fan activities. Alternate media challenges dominant narratives and provides platforms for marginalized voices, contrasting sharply with mainstream media.

For example, alternative media might include grassroots news outlets, zines, or online forums that address issues overlooked by traditional media. These platforms are crucial for political dissent and grassroots activism. Subcultures like mod and punk also utilize alternate media to express their identities and viewpoints.

Cybercrime can be seen as a subculture in itself, encompassing a range of activities that challenge societal norms. Individuals within this subculture often share techniques and knowledge, fostering a sense of community among those who engage in illicit activities. This highlights the complex interplay between technology, societal labels, and the formation of subcultures. By examining these dynamics, we gain insight into how cultural identities are constructed and contested in the digital age.

Ultimately, the examination of these subcultures reveals not only the nuances of criminality in the context of technology but also the broader implications for

society. Understanding these interactions is essential for grappling with the future of digital culture and its impact on social norms.

Hate speech and credit card fraud are clear categories of cybercrime that illustrate the misuse of technology for illicit purposes. These activities show how individuals engage in inappropriate behaviors, leading to various types of fraud. The political dimensions of cyber culture, particularly as described in P.K. Nair's book on cyber culture, emphasize the role of political interventions in subcultures. Cultural differences in subcultural practices often prompt political actions, such as human rights campaigns and social reform movements.

The growth of secret societies is notable in this context. Numerous secret societies, such as the Hare Krishna movement and the Freemasons, have utilized information and communication technologies (ICTs) to attract broader membership and disseminate their beliefs. These societies manipulate online platforms to share their practices widely.

In countries like India, anti-state and activist groups also form significant subcultures. For example, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which gained traction online, is considered a subculture because it actively opposes government actions. These movements reflect a growing engagement with digital technologies to mobilize support and awareness.

Global subcultural movements, such as Black Lives Matter, represent another dimension of cyber culture. Despite having substantial mainstream support, these movements are classified as global subcultures. They exemplify how ordinary civilians can join together in advocacy against systemic issues, illustrating the power of digital platforms to unite diverse voices.

Diverse forms of subcultures range from everyday technology usage to significant threats against institutional structures. The spectrum of subcultures is vast; minor daily changes in technology can be as impactful as major state-level threats posed by organized groups using ICTs. This diversity is crucial for understanding how subcultures intersect with popular culture.

P.K. Nair's work also provides an overview of cybercultures, encompassing networks and digital cultures from the late 20th century. Over the last three decades, fields like Internet studies and media studies have emerged,

contributing to our understanding of cyber culture and information spaces. Cyber culture refers to cultures formed in or associated with online social environments, emphasizing their connection to digital social interactions.

The definition and scope of ICTs involve the collection, processing, storage, retrieval, and transmission of information in various forms. This information is digitized and transmitted through convergent technologies, such as personal computers, smartphones, and the Internet. These technologies facilitate the creation and dissemination of cyber cultures, influencing how we interact and form communities online.

By examining these dynamics, we gain insight into the complexities of identity, power, and resistance within digital spaces. Understanding these interactions is essential for grappling with the future of digital culture and its broader social implications.

Leading the integrated communication forms, they also shaped by multimedia applications such as mobile phone, surveillance and video conferencing. So everything that we are talking about is an ICT. If you're using an app for video conferencing, that is an ICT. If you're using an app for surveillance camera, anything to do with that is ICT. Mobile applications. Any mobile application that is ICT. It is an enabler. It is a tool that helps you do other things in this social digital space.

The evolution of cyberspaces has been significantly reshaped by the widespread use of mobile phones and digital technologies in everyday life. These digital technologies profoundly impact how we engage with the world daily. Today, activities such as blogging, gaming, social networking, and online shopping are central to the user experience, illustrating the integration of cyber culture into our daily routines.

Importantly, cyber cultures are not monolithic; they encompass a variety of practices influenced by real-world conditions. This diversity highlights two key points: first, cyber culture permeates our everyday lives through activities like blogging and gaming, which have become integral to our daily existence. Second, the non-monolithic nature of cyber cultures emphasizes that they are shaped by various social contexts and experiences.

Cyber cultures and society are interlinked, affecting and being affected by material conditions. They shape identities based on race, class, gender, and other factors. For instance, when considering class, it becomes evident that access to cyberspaces varies significantly. Not everyone can afford the necessary technology or internet access, which in turn impacts participation in cyber cultures. This inequality underscores the fact that cyber spaces are not universally accessible, leading to disparities in how people engage with digital culture.

These disparities can create a divide in who participates in online communities and how they are represented within them. Those with limited access may miss out on the benefits that digital engagement offers, such as opportunities for social connection, information exchange, and economic participation. Therefore, understanding the intersection of class and cyber culture is essential for comprehending the broader social landscape.

Moreover, the influence of race and gender cannot be overlooked. Different racial and gender identities navigate cyberspaces in unique ways, often shaped by societal biases and structural inequalities. This intersectionality informs how individuals experience and contribute to cyber cultures, making it crucial to consider these factors when analyzing digital interactions.

The evolution of cyberspaces reflects the complexities of everyday life, shaped by various technologies and social dynamics. The integration of mobile devices and digital platforms into our daily routines has redefined how we interact with each other and the world around us. As we navigate these changes, it's vital to recognize the diverse practices that characterize cyber cultures and the real-world conditions that influence them. By understanding these elements, we can better appreciate the rich tapestry of digital culture and its implications for identity, community, and societal structure.

Identity significantly impacts cyber culture, especially concerning gender. Many women face restrictions in their online engagement, particularly in gaming. The stereotype that women are less interested in gaming reflects societal biases and affects their participation in cyber spaces. Understanding how cyber culture influences various identities is crucial.

For instance, in gaming, the underrepresentation of female participants is evident. Women often encounter sexist remarks, not only on social media but also within online games. This harassment can lead to cyberstalking, deterring women from participating in these digital environments. In communities where harassment is prevalent, many women may choose to abstain from engaging, ultimately affecting the diversity of cyber culture.

Turning to techno culture, we see a connection between technology and cultural values. Devices like mobile phones are designed to meet practical needs while reflecting cultural significance. They influence and are shaped by our lifestyles and aspirations. A pertinent example is smart home technology, such as Amazon Echo. This device simplifies daily tasks and integrates seamlessly into our routines, demonstrating the interplay between culture and technology. As smart home technology becomes more prevalent, it not only enhances convenience but also raises questions about privacy and control. The relationship between gender, identity, and technology is essential for understanding the challenges within cyber culture. Recognizing these dynamics can help foster a more inclusive environment, ensuring that all users can engage meaningfully in the digital landscape.

Using technologies like Amazon Echo enhances efficiency by automating home management. With commands such as “Alexa, turn on the lights” or “Alexa, switch off the AC,” these smart devices streamline daily tasks. For example, asking Alexa to play a song saves time compared to connecting via Bluetooth, demonstrating how smart technology simplifies our lives.

Technologies are shaped by non-technical factors like privacy, security, and global market dynamics. These sociological aspects significantly influence the development and use of technology, as finance and market policies play crucial roles in shaping technological landscapes.

Gender also impacts how digital technologies are used and experienced. The gaming community, for instance, is predominantly male, while certain apps with filters may see higher female usage. This highlights how gender dynamics influence participation in digital spaces. Moreover, digital culture intersects with identity, encompassing factors like race, ethnicity, and class. These identities

shape real-world experiences in cyberspace, affecting how individuals engage with technology.

Capital and globalization are closely linked to cyber cultures; the movement of capital impacts technological accessibility and influence. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) facilitate global connectivity, enabling diverse interactions and control over information.

Understanding these sociological and gender-related factors provides insight into the complexities of digital technology use and its broader societal implications. By recognizing how these elements intersect, we can better appreciate the role of technology in shaping our experiences and identities in the digital age.

The tools of global connectivity and control significantly influence the production, distribution, and consumption of technology, closely linked to capital. Migrant workers and international projects play a crucial role in advancing technological developments and spreading cybercultures. Engaged in various global initiatives, these workers contribute significantly to the evolution of technology.

Cyber activism emerged as a notable force in this context. One of the earliest movements was PeaceNet, which began through email lists to promote discussions on international human rights. Unlike today's social media-driven movements, PeaceNet relied on emails to facilitate dialogue around critical issues.

In 1994, the left-wing Zapatista movement used the internet to rally support against the Mexican government. This movement sought democratic management of their territory, direct participation from the population, and equitable land sharing. The Zapatistas highlighted how land and resource management became central issues within cyber activism, showcasing the conflict between state power and local rights.

The Zapatista movement is often regarded as the first informational guerrilla movement, utilizing hacktivism to manipulate computer systems and networks to promote political ideologies and social change. This approach illustrated how technology could be leveraged to challenge authority and advocate for marginalized voices.

As we explore the changing landscape of cyber activism, its evolving forms and impacts become evident. The historical context provides a foundation for understanding how digital spaces transform activism, enabling broader participation and more dynamic forms of engagement.

These movements demonstrate how technology not only serves as a tool for connection but also as a platform for resistance and advocacy in the digital age. By examining these developments, we can better appreciate the role of cyber activism in shaping contemporary social and political landscapes.

We know that there is something called an algorithm that works. The kind of content that you're watching repeatedly leads to similar suggestions because of the algorithm. When hackers manipulate computer systems or networks to promote a political ideology or social change, this is known as hacktivism. They are hacking and enabling activism. It was also considered the first informational guerrilla movement. When we talk about guerrilla movements, they typically occur in land where fighters use guerrilla tactics. Those guerrilla tactics are now being implemented in the world of cyber culture to conduct cyber activism.

The origin of hacktivism begins with the Zapatista movement, but the concept remained unknown until 2003, the year that Anonymous was born. Anonymous is a decentralized online community acting anonymously and in coordination to promote internet freedom and freedom of expression. No one knew who created this group, but many people joined to promote internet freedom and freedom of expression, seen as a fundamental right under many governments. Anonymous carried out several actions intending to have a direct impact on society, including protests against the 2009 presidential election in Iran and against the Tunisian government's response to the protests in 2011. This anonymous activism or cyber activism may lack data on who started it, but it directly impacted society, including the protests against the presidential election, which is significant.

Today, hackers often attack government sites and demand money, typically in Bitcoin. This type of hacktivism cannot be termed genuine hacktivism; rather, it is merely hacking happening widely. While the Zapatistas laid the groundwork for hacktivism, movements like Anonymous expanded its reach and impact. Their actions remind us of the potential of digital spaces to facilitate resistance and drive social change.

Iran and against the Tunisian government, Anonymous released information online about alleged fraud in the Iranian presidential election of 2009 and about corruption in several Arab countries during the Arab Spring of 2010 and 2011. They had access to information that could indicate insider whistleblowers wanting to remain anonymous. As mentioned earlier, through hacktivism, they hacked into systems, retrieving information and making it public.

Social networks are spaces where cyber activism is increasingly present, notably through indexing content and streaming via hashtags. Hashtags like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have gained prominence in our daily lives. The cyber culture movements have undergone extensive development since the early movements, especially with the expansion of the Internet network. Since 2009, many changes have occurred in how ICT works and functions, introducing new forms of culture.

In contemporary times, cyber culture is no longer just a subculture or a deviant culture. It has surpassed definitions closely associated with the science fiction of the 1980s. Today, it can be defined as encompassing the sociocultural and political dynamics of digital technologies. A notable example is the show *Very Parivaric*, discussed in the context of OTT. In its eighth episode, there is a scene where a girl and her family visit the potential groom's house. They are in the early stages of discussing a possible marriage, and the man, likely in his 40s, asks her about her PhD area of study.

This interaction reflects how digital technologies and contemporary expectations intersect with traditional practices. The questions surrounding gender roles and academic achievements reveal shifting societal values influenced by cyber culture.

Moreover, the evolution of social interactions, such as those depicted in media, showcases the impact of digital culture on everyday life. These narratives illustrate how cyber culture permeates various aspects of identity and social dynamics.

As we see, cyber activism has evolved from early movements like the Zapatistas to more organized efforts characterized by anonymity and collective action. The tools of hacktivism continue to develop, showcasing a blend of technology and activism that impacts global social movements.

The emergence of platforms for activism has changed the landscape of political engagement, making it easier for individuals to mobilize support and share information across borders. This interconnectedness has the power to shape public discourse, influence policy, and challenge authority in unprecedented ways.

In summary, the rise of cyber culture represents a significant transformation in how we understand and engage with activism, identity, and society. It has moved beyond niche subcultures into a broader realm that influences everyday life and societal norms. The implications of these changes are profound, as they reshape the fabric of communication, community, and resistance in the digital age.

Cyber culture is now a vital force that not only reflects but also shapes our social and political realities. Understanding its dynamics is essential for navigating the complexities of contemporary life and activism.

She replies, "My area was the sociocultural impact of memes in the evolving dynamics of the digital age." He laughs and says, "Memes, the ones we watch on our phones? Oh, I laugh at those." She feels a bit intimidated and counters that it's not something to dismiss lightly. He insists, "No, no, I'm not laughing at them all, just a few." She explains that memes act as digital weapons, which leads him to joke, "A weapon to make me laugh? People say, 'Kill me with laughter!'"

She tries to make him understand that memes have ended the political careers of many politicians and business leaders. This illustrates how cyber culture can be understood as a sociocultural and political dynamic of digital technologies, promoting reformulation of social relations and the creation of communities.

The emergence of new behaviors and social practices indicates a transformation in cyber culture. Cyber culture describes and gives meaning to user interactions developed through computer mediation, including both online and offline virtual hybrid worlds. A contemporary example is the Korean band BTS, which has cultivated a global culture known as "ARMY." This community connects through computer-mediated communication, transcending national boundaries. Offline meetups among ARMY members exemplify how this culture thrives both online and in real life, further defining cyber culture.

As computer-mediated communication aggregates symbolic patterns and representational structures, we see unique behaviors emerge within communities. In online gaming, for instance, players create symbols, jargon, and coded language specific to their games, fostering a cultural identity among participants. This illustrates how cyber culture forms around shared experiences and interactions within digital spaces.

The inquiry and analysis of cyber cultures have found a home in cultural studies, moving beyond its earlier categorization as a subculture. While it may have started as a niche, cyber culture now encompasses broader sociocultural and political dynamics. Cultural anthropology and ethnographic methods have established a foundation for studying these digital cultures, leading to the term “netography,” which combines Internet studies with ethnographic approaches.

A significant amount of research is still needed to deepen our understanding of cyber culture and its implications in academic contexts. The interplay between technology and culture is ever-evolving, reflecting the complexities of identity, community, and social dynamics in the digital age.