

CULTURE, CONSUMPTION, SOCIETY, AND LAW

Responsible Faculty Instructor:

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Associate Professor of Practice

Credits: 4

Credits Type: Non-Law

Cross-registration: Yes

Pre-requisites: None

COURSE DESCRIPTION (COURSE VISION):

The 21st century marketplace is shaped not only by law and economics but also increasingly by popular culture. From the rise of hip-hop branding, globalization of content, and several fandoms to the global dominance of streaming platforms, consumer identity and cultural consumption increasingly dictate how businesses design, market, and sustain themselves. These cultural phenomena are bound by law, policy, politics, and global affairs encompassing hyper-consumerism, consumer protection, anti-consumption, intellectual property, regulations on advertising, digital platform governance, emerging doctrines on privacy and fair competition, geopolitics, etc. Taken together, popular culture is not only an economic driver but also a legal, policy, and political terrain.

The vision of this course is to equip law, business, policy, global affairs, and liberal arts students with a critical, practice-oriented understanding of how culture and consumption interact within, and are constrained or aided by, legal, policy, and political frameworks. Students will explore market strategies, consumer rights, cultural appropriation, influencer marketing disclosures, brand activism, and the growing tension between consumerism and sustainability, all while grounding discussions in critical aspects of legal, policy, and political frameworks.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY:

This elective will adopt a ‘hybrid’ teaching methodology, with theory and case-based practice complementing each other. The course will rest on four pillars:

1. Conceptual grounding in marketing, culture, and branding, learned through foundational readings and lecture inputs.

2. Politico-Legal and Policy contextualization through class discussions and cases that shape consumer-brand interactions.
3. Practice-oriented projects, where students will analyze real-time examples (e.g., Netflix Vs. piracy ecosystems, Pepsi's "protest" ad, Patanjali's branding dispute, Influencer issues, Appropriation of indigenous art, etc.).
4. Critical reflection, through essays and debates on themes like ethical branding, sustainability, brand activism, authenticity, hyper-consumerism, anti-consumption, IP's role in facilitating cultural innovation and often appropriation, etc.

The emphasis will be on interdisciplinarity: legal/policy studies, cultural studies, marketing management, and business ethics woven into one integrated learning journey.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the nature and dynamics of popular culture industries, and their influence on consumption.
2. Critically explain the Politico-Legal and Policy frameworks governing consumerism, branding, and cultural industries.
3. Apply Marketing and Cultural Theory alongside Politico-Legal and Policy frameworks in analyzing disputes, ethical issues, and brand strategies.
4. Demonstrate analytical skills in evaluating ethical and sustainability dimensions of branding and consumerism.
5. Develop practice-oriented solutions in the form of case project papers and policy briefs.

READING LIST (upto 10 select readings):

1. Kotler, P., & Keller, K.L. Marketing Management (select content)
2. Solomon, M. R. Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, Being (select content)
3. Beverland, M. Brand Management: Co-creating Meaningful Brands (select content)
4. Robert C. Ellickson, The Market for Social Norms (Law & Society Review, 1998)
5. Bhatnagar, R. (2020). Intellectual Property and Popular Culture in India (Journal of IP Rights)
6. ASCI Guidelines for Influencer Advertising in Digital Media (2021)

7. Cohen, J. (2002). Copyright and the Perfect Curve: Cultural Appropriation and Law
8. McRobbie, A. (1994). Postmodernism and Popular Culture (select content)
9. Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture (select content)
10. Sundar Sarukkai. Cultural Appropriation and the Law in India (EPW, 2016)

WEEKLY READING PLAN (WEEKLY OUTLINE):

A weekly plan is provided below:

MODULES	WEEK(S)
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing fundamentals: Markets, Consumers, Brands • Law-Policy as the ‘background regulator’ of exchange • Overview of Consumerism/Consumption 	Week 1
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 2: UNDERSTANDING CULTURE; GROUP PROJECT WORKSHOP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions & Explanations from Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology • Popular Culture: Global, Regional, Folk/Indigenous • Group Project Workshop I: Topics & Initiation 	Week 2
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 3: RISE OF POPULAR CULTURE INDUSTRIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Conglomerates, Sports Leagues, Influencer Economy • Case Studies: IPL Sponsorship, ASCI Guidelines for Influencer Marketing (2021) • Debates on Commercial Exploitation vs. Cultural Freedom 	Week 3
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 4: CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND LAW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What drives consumer decisions: Psychology, Culture, Politics • Governance of Advertising, Packaging, and Labeling • Case studies on Consumerism, Anti-Consumerism, Sustainable Consumption – Classroom exercise 	Week 4
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 5: BRANDING BASICS AND POLITICO-LEGAL & POLICY ASPECTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How brands are built: Positioning, Differentiation, Authenticity • IP, Dilution, and Global Disputes 	Week 5
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 6: INFLUENCER CULTURE AND DIGITAL CONSUMPTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media Influencers as Modern Brand Ambassadors, Guidelines, and Dark-side • Classroom debate: ‘Are influencers a threat to the consumer autonomy?’ • Mid-Semester Exams 	Week 6
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 7: THE DARK SIDE OF CONSUMERISM; GROUP PROJECT WORKSHOP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materialism and Sustainability Challenges • Greenwashing, CSR, ESG norms • Case Study: Patanjali’s Health Claims • Group Project Workshop II: Tracking Progress – Culture and Consumption aspects 	Week 7
MODULE 8: BRANDS AND SOCIETY	Week 8

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Activism and Culture Wars • Politico-Legal and Reputational Risks of Brand Activism • Case Studies: Gillette ‘toxic masculinity’ ad and consumer backlash; Disney’s fall 	
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 9: POP CULTURE-IP INTERACTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Appropriation Vs Appreciation (GI tags) • Memes, Fan-art, Parodies, etc. (Copyright) • Case Studies: Clothing, Accessories, Content, etc. 	Week 9
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 10: COMPETITION AND MARKET POWER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Dominance and Monopolistic Concerns • Case Studies: Google, Amazon, Swiggy-Zomato Duopoly 	Week 10
<p style="text-align: center;">GROUP PROJECT EXTENDED WORKSHOPS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Project Workshop III: Final Progress – Culture, Consumption, Brands, Societal, and Politico-Legal/Policy aspects 	Week 11
<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE 11: EMERGING FRONTIERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI-generated Branding & Content, Virtual Markets & Products 	Week 12
<p style="text-align: center;">GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Project Presentations 	Week 13
<p style="text-align: center;">GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS AND COURSE WRAP-UP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Project Presentations • Feedback and Reflection on Practice and Theory 	Week 14
REVISION WEEK	Week 15