



Digital Tribes: Power, people, and Possibilities in the 21st Century

Course Information

Course Duration: February 2026 – May 2026

Credit Hours: 4

Prerequisites: None

Equivalent Courses: Not Applicable

Exclusive Courses: Not Applicable

Instructor Information

Instructor: Smt. Priyanka Chaturvedi, Member of Rajya Sabha

Biography: Smt. Priyanka Chaturvedi is an Indian politician, columnist and social activist currently serving as a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha representing Maharashtra and as Deputy Leader of Shiv Sena. She completed her schooling at St. Joseph's High School in Juhu, Mumbai. She then pursued higher education and graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) degree from Narsee Monjee College of Commerce and Economics, Vile Parle, Mumbai, in 1999. During her early professional development, she was selected to participate in the Indian School of Business (ISB)'s 10,000 Women Entrepreneurs Certificate program, a global initiative for women entrepreneurs supported by the Goldman Sachs Foundation. She has participated in other forums and programs, including the "Asian Forum on Global Governance" and a delegation of young political leaders to the UK to study democracy. Previously, she was one of the National Spokespersons of the Indian National Congress. She has also been a columnist for Tehelka, Daily News and Analysis and Firstpost.

Course Description

This course examines the political, social, and economic transformations brought about by digital technologies in the 21st century. It analyses how data, platforms, artificial

intelligence, and digital infrastructures reshape power, identity, governance, inequality, and democratic engagement.

The course situates digital transformations within broader debates on political economy, gender, surveillance, neo-colonialism, environmental sustainability, and leadership. Using case studies from India and global contexts, the course equips students with conceptual and policy-oriented tools to critically analyse digital societies and propose informed policy responses.

This course will assist students to analyse data's role in perpetuating power imbalances and inequality, evaluate national digital policies like India's DPDP Act, craft policy briefs or campaigns tackling gendered online harms, and apply trauma-informed approaches in discussions of online abuse victims. The curriculum covers neo-colonialism via big data, AI surveillance, women's online experiences, mental health impacts, rising conservatism, transgender identity politics, environmental costs of tech, and narrative control through social media.

Focus areas

Neo-colonialism, digital age, endanger and empower, moving back to tribes, AI surveillance, privacy, women, mental health, politics, and narrative setting.

Course Intended Learning Objectives

- Analyse how identity, tribalism, and group behaviour are reshaped in the digital age and assess their implications for democracy, governance, and social cohesion.
- Critically evaluate the role of artificial intelligence, data, and algorithms in shaping power relations, decision-making processes, and social dependence.
- Examine the political economy of data, surveillance, and digital infrastructures across governments, corporations, and global systems.
- Understand digital technologies as instruments of both control and resistance within contemporary and historical contexts of neo-colonialism.
- Assess the internet and social media as contested political spaces shaped by competing interests of citizens, states, and private platforms.
- Analyse gendered experiences in digital, political, and leadership spaces, with attention to empowerment, surveillance, violence, and representation.
- Evaluate the impact of digital technologies on children, youth, and emerging generations, including issues of safety, regulation, and political socialisation.

- Critically engage with identity politics, conservatism, and cultural backlash as amplified through digital media ecosystems.
- Examine the environmental consequences of new-age technologies and global inequalities in climate responsibility and environmental governance.
- Analyse the role of digital media in political suppression, mobilisation, narrative construction, and opinion formation.
- Develop media literacy skills to identify misinformation, disinformation, and political manipulation in digital environments.
- Apply theoretical and conceptual frameworks to real-world case studies, policy debates, and contemporary digital political practices.

Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

Internal Assessment will constitute 70% of the total grade.

Internal assessment for this course can be designed as a continuous and application-oriented evaluation, combining written, oral, and practical components. Students may be assessed through short critical reflection notes on readings, documentaries, or case studies; an analytical essay or case study examining contemporary issues such as AI governance, digital surveillance, gendered online violence, or data colonialism; and structured group activities such as debates or discussions on themes like privacy versus security or social media regulation. A group-based digital project such as designing a mock campaign, counter-narrative, or media analysis can be included to evaluate students' understanding of political communication, misinformation, and narrative control. Additionally, a short policy brief or position paper may be used to assess policy-oriented thinking, while continuous classroom participation can be evaluated to encourage informed engagement, critical questioning, and collaborative learning throughout the course.

The end term will be comprehensive and will constitute 30% of the total grade. The details of the end term will be shared accordingly.

University Grading Scale

COURSE LETTER GRADES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION			
Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Interpretation
O	80 and above	8	Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75 - 79	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability.
A	70 - 74	7	Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing material and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65 -69	6	Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.
B+	60 - 64	5	Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B	55 - 59	4	Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50 - 54	3	Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills.
P1	45 - 49	2	Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40 - 44	1	Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40	0	Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.
P	Pass		'P' represents the option of choosing between Pass/Fail grading system over the CGPA grading system in the COVID 19 semester in Spring 2020. The option is provided when students attain a minimum of 40 percentage marks under the current grading structure in a given subject.
I	Incomplete		Extenuating circumstances preventing the student from completing coursework assessment, or taking the examination; or where the Assessment Panel at its discretion assigns this grade. If an "I" grade is assigned, the Assessment Panel will suggest a schedule for the completion of work, or a supplementary examination.

Academic Integrity

The course will follow a policy of zero tolerance for plagiarism. A plagiarism level exceeding 10% will be penalized as per university norms. Attendance requirements will be strictly according to the university norms.

Disability support

Should you need any services or accommodation, due to a disability, to fully participate in class proceedings or during the examination, please contact the disability services immediately at disabilitysupport@jgu.edu.in.

Course Readings/Material

Module / Week	Module Title	Readings / Viewings
Week 1	Tribalism 2.0: Identity, Belonging, and Power	Amy Chua, Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations
Week 2	Artificial Intelligence: Algorithms, Power, and Social Dependence	The Social Dilemma (Documentary); The AI Revolution – NOVA PBS

Week 3	Data, Knowledge, and Control in the Digital World	Edward Snowden, Permanent Record
Week 4	From Codes to Colonies: Digital Neo-Imperialism	Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, India (contextual)
Week 5	The World Wide Web as a Political Space	Stakeholder debates; Privacy vs Access; Gendered lens discussions
Week 6	Women in Digital and Political Spaces: Empowerment, Surveillance, and Leadership	POSH Act; UN Women Action Brief – Eliminating Online Hate Speech to Secure Women’s Political Participation; Case studies of women leaders
Week 7	The Chronically Online Generation	Australia’s Social Media Ban for Children Under 16 (2025) – policy case study
Week 8	Gender Identity Politics in the Digital Age	Reports and advocacy material on transgender identity and security narratives
Week 9	Conservatism, Culture Wars, and Gender Regression	Adolescence (Series)
Week 10	Neo-Colonialism in the Age of Technology	Case studies on data elites and tech overreach (e.g., Apple AirDrop)
Week 11	The Façade of Privacy	George Orwell, 1984; Manu Joseph, Why the Poor Don’t Kill Us
Week 12	Digital Politics, Environmental Power, and Narrative Control	Black Mirror (Series); Anirban Sarma & Samir Saran, Geo Techno Graphy; Paris Agreement; Student-selected digital campaigns

Note: The session plan is tentative and is open to changes during the semester.

Module-wise Description

Module 1 – Tribalism 2.0: Identity, Belonging, and Power

This module introduces students to the concept of tribalism as a persistent feature of human societies and examines how digital platforms have revived and intensified group-based identities. It traces the movement from traditional forms of social belonging to algorithm-driven digital tribes, highlighting how political mobilisation increasingly relies on identity rather than ideology. Drawing from historical patterns and contemporary examples, the module analyses the “full circle” moment where technology reactivates ancient instincts with serious consequences for democracy, social cohesion, and governance.

Learning Objectives

- Understand tribalism as a socio-political phenomenon across historical and digital contexts
- Analyse how identity politics shape political behaviour in the digital age
- Critically engage with Amy Chua’s arguments on group instinct and national instability
- Examine the consequences of tribal thinking for pluralism and democratic institutions

Module 2 – Artificial Intelligence: Innovation, Governance, and Society

This module examines the rapid deployment of artificial intelligence and the debates surrounding its timing whether it’s good, bad, or on a spectrum and whether it was released too early or a necessity(?), necessity, and the consequences. Students critically assess whether AI represents technological progress, a socio-political risk, or an unavoidable outcome of digital capitalism. The discussion extends to the question of AI’s autonomy, whether it truly “exists” as an independent force or merely reflects human biases and institutional priorities. Special attention is given to how social media platforms accelerate dependence on AI systems and normalise their integration into everyday life through documentaries like *The Social Dilemma* and *The A.I. Revolution* by NOVA/PBS.

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate competing perspectives on the rollout and regulation of AI
- Understand AI as a socio-technical system rather than a neutral tool
- Analyse the relationship between AI, social media, and behavioural control
- Develop critical debate skills around technological ethics and governance

Module 3 – Understanding Data, Knowledge, and Control in the Digital World

This module explores data as a modern source of power, examining who collects it, who controls it, and who benefits from it. Students study the intersection of governments, corporations, legal systems, and citizens within surveillance infrastructures. Through discussions on consent, national security, and privacy, the module highlights how digital knowledge production reshapes authority and accountability in contemporary societies.

Students study the intersectionality between governments, law, businesses, people, and surveillance.

Learning Objectives

- Understand data as a political and economic resource
- Analyse surveillance systems across state and corporate actors
- Examine tensions between security, privacy, and individual rights
- Critically engage with Edward Snowden's critique of mass surveillance in his book *Permanent Record*

Module 4 – From Codes to Colonies: Digital Neo-Imperialism

This module investigates how digital technologies reproduce colonial patterns of extraction and domination. Students trace the origins of big data companies and examine how data flows mirror historical resource exploitation. The module also addresses transnational cybercrime, scam economies, and modern forms of digital slavery, particularly in Southeast Asia in countries like Myanmar and Cambodia. India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) framework is discussed as part of a broader global struggle over data sovereignty.

Learning Objectives

- Identify parallels between historical colonialism and digital power structures
- Understand the political economy of data extraction
- Analyse cybercrime as a transnational governance challenge
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of data protection regimes

Module 5 – The World Wide Web

This module positions the internet as a contested political arena shaped by competing interests. Through stakeholder-based debates, students examine privacy, access, regulation, and control from the perspectives of people, governments, and companies to examine the present-day scenarios of the internet and privacy/data laws from various perspectives, i.e., Privacy vs Access. The module concludes by reframing the internet through a gendered lens, highlighting how access, safety, and participation are unevenly distributed.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the internet as a political and regulatory space
- Analyse competing stakeholder interests in digital governance
- Examine privacy versus access debates critically
- Apply a gender lens to internet policy and digital inclusion

Module 6 – Women and Power: From Online Spaces to Political Leadership

This module examines how women experience digital spaces differently from men. Students analyse social media as a site of empowerment, activism, surveillance, and violence. By studying online feminist movements such as #MeToo or the 4B movement alongside cases of targeted harassment and digital vigilantism, the module draws distinctions between visibility as power, objectivity and visibility as vulnerability.

The module then shifts to the political arena, focusing on the structural and cultural barriers women face in politics, including gendered hate speech, online harassment, and institutional delays such as the postponement of women's reservation in India. Comparative perspectives from countries such as the United States, China, and South Korea are used to highlight “glass-half-full” scenarios, demonstrating both progress and persistent inequalities. The module concludes with a study of women leaders across historical and contemporary contexts globally and in India to examine leadership styles, policy priorities, and governance outcomes. Students also critically compare policies introduced by women leaders with those of their male counterparts to assess whether and how gender influences political decision-making. Students will learn through substantial readings/reference frameworks such as:

- The Sulli Deals, Bulli Bai case
- The POSH Act (contextual application to political and digital workplaces)
- The UN Women Action Brief: *Eliminating Online Hate Speech to Secure Women's Political Participation*
- Case studies: Jacinda Ardern and selected women leaders (global and Indian contexts)

Learning Objectives

- Understand gendered experiences of women in digital and political spaces
- Analyse the impact of online hate speech on women's political participation
- Examine institutional barriers such as delayed representation and reservation policies
- Compare leadership styles and policy outcomes across genders
- Critically assess whether women's leadership alters governance priorities

Module 7 – The Chronically Online Generation

This module focuses on children and adolescents growing up in algorithm-driven digital environments. It examines social media as a primary source of communication, identity formation, and information, while highlighting persistent risks related to safety, mental health, and misinformation. Australia's 2025 social media ban for children under 16 is used to evaluate state intervention, corporate resistance, and the effectiveness of regulatory bans. Students will study about how complete bans rarely work, so if not these, what are possible

ways to create safe spaces? Also, how it's giving rise to a new generation of "keyboard warriors."

Learning Objectives

- Understand the impact of social media on young users
- Analyse policy responses to online harm among children
- Evaluate the effectiveness and limitations of digital bans
- Propose alternative approaches to creating safer online spaces

Module 8 – Gender Identity Politics in the Digital Age

This module explores how transgender identities are politicised and instrumentalised within contemporary political discourse. Students examine how digital platforms amplify moral panics, misinformation, and extremist narratives targeting gender diversity. Students will also examine recent reports and advocacy efforts proposing new extremist categories tied to 'transgender ideology,' e.g., by the FBI. The module concludes by emphasising the need for sensitisation, inclusive education, and ethical governance frameworks and teachings for the upcoming generations.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the politicisation of gender identity
- Analyse digital media's role in amplifying cultural conflicts
- Critically evaluate policy and security narratives around gender
- Develop sensitivity-informed approaches to identity and rights

Week 9 – Conservatism, Culture Wars, and Gender Regression

This module analyses the global rise of conservatism and its implications for gender rights. Students study how cultural anxieties, nationalism, and moral policing are mobilised across countries such as the U.S., India, and South Korea. By drawing lessons from history, the module examines how digital media accelerates backlash politics and reinforces regressive norms. Students will learn through discussing this with Adolescence (series) in the background and view it through gendered lenses.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the drivers of contemporary conservatism
- Analyse gender regression in political and cultural contexts
- Draw historical parallels to modern rights rollbacks
- Apply a gendered lens to media and political narratives

Module 10 – Neo-Colonialism in the Age of Technology

This module examines the emergence of new global hierarchies based on data ownership

rather than territorial control. Students explore how technology companies accumulate power through control over information, infrastructure, and everyday consumer technologies. The discussion highlights how these structures reshape labour, governance, and inequality. Students will engage through preparing presentations on the emergence of new class structures where the ones at the top held the most data (thus money, power, knowledge, and influence) to understand whether this existed in a similar way in the past. Students will also learn about how the new class controls the structures of the society and then the emergence of neo-colonialism. The module will also discuss the extent of tech-overreach through various consumer products, such as Apple Airdrop.

Learning Objectives

- Understand data-driven class formation
- Compare historical and contemporary forms of colonial control
- Analyse technological overreach in everyday life
- Critically assess power asymmetries in global digital systems

Module 11 – The Façade of Privacy

This module interrogates privacy as a socially unequal concept, as a luxury through the lens of the poor and the privileged. Students examine how privacy operates as a privilege for the wealthy while being systematically denied to the poor. The module also analyses voluntary data surrender for convenience and the ethical contradictions in restricting digital access under the guise of protection. Students will understand these topics wrt 1984 by George Orwell and Why the Poor Don't Kill Us: The Psychology of Indians by Manu Joseph.

Learning Objectives

- Understand privacy as a socio-economic issue
- Analyse trade-offs between convenience and surveillance
- Critically engage with dystopian and sociological perspectives
- Examine inequality in digital rights and access

Module 12 – Politics of Environment, Suppression and Engagement in the Digital Realm

This concluding module examines how digital technologies reshape political power, civic engagement, and environmental responsibility. It begins by analysing the environmental consequences of new-age technologies and technology corporations, including resource extraction, energy consumption, e-waste, and the unequal dumping of environmental costs from the Global North to the Global South. Global climate politics, such as the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement, are discussed to highlight how technological and political power intersect in environmental governance.

The module then shifts to the role of social media in contemporary politics, examining how digital platforms function simultaneously as tools of political suppression and democratic engagement. Students explore how algorithmic curation affects political visibility, polarisation, and the erosion of individuality, shaping how opinions are formed, reinforced, or silenced. Popular culture and critical texts are used to understand the psychological and structural dimensions of digital control.

The module concludes with an applied component in which students engage in group-based narrative creation through memes or digital campaigns. This activity is designed to help students understand political communication strategies, the rise of Gen-Z-led digital protests, and the mechanics of misinformation, disinformation, and hoaxes. Students critically analyse political actors, parties, or movements to evaluate how narratives are constructed, amplified, and contested in the digital realm. Students will learn through readings: *Black Mirror* (selected episodes) and *Geo Techno Graphy: Mapping Power and Identity in the Digital Age* – Anirban Sarma & Samir Saran.

Learning Objectives

- Analyse the environmental impact of digital technologies and tech corporations
- Understand global inequalities in environmental burden and climate governance
- Examine social media as a tool of political suppression and empowerment
- Critically assess the loss of individuality and opinion formation in digital politics
- Develop practical skills in political narrative creation and media literacy
- Distinguish between authentic political engagement and digital misinformation