Institut für Kommunikations-
und Medienwissenschaft
**Professur für Medien-
und Kommunikations-
wissenschaft**

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Seminar Forschungsfeld Medienkultur und Medienbildung

Communicating Media: Siri, Alexa & Co.

Module Research Module I: Media Culture and Media Pedagogy (581)
Wednesday, 1 to 3 pm
(Last date of change: 21 February 2022)

MOODLE course: https://moodle2.uni-leipzig.de/course/view.php?id=36715

Module: Research Module I: Media Culture and Media Pedagogy
After participating in this module, students will be able to use their knowledge acquired in the course of study so far as well as their methodological competence to a concrete research question on media culture and media education. They have the ability to formulate scientific questions, justify them and select appropriate research methods. The students can name, describe and critically classify research methods. Furthermore, they are able to develop and independently apply a survey and analysis analysis instrument suitable for the research question and to apply it independently. Furthermore, they are able to develop and substantiate arguments independently in group work and critically question the ideas of others. Furthermore, the students have the competence to carry out research projects and to critically their own approach critically and reflectively.

Aims of the seminar
Conversational agents are all around us. We have placed them in our homes, talk to them on the phone, chat with them on websites, and even find them in our cars. There are movies imagining the intimate relationship between humans and their machine interlocutors. Companions like Replika have their own fan base. Far from being mere fun or play, conversational agents carry an increasing portion of our communicative labor, for instance, as virtual receptionists, call agents, or voice assistants.

Given the rise of machine communication, the seminar explores the conditions and ramifications of this wave of innovation. It faces a number of critical questions: How can, shall, and want we

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live together with conversational agents? What expectations or conceptions do people have of them? How are they communicating with devices like Siri or Alexa? What concerns do they have, for example about their privacy or the role of chat bots play in political campaigning? The seminar invites us to think about the political and ethical issues that are raised anew or in a different form when we communicate with autonomously speaking machines.

The seminar is designed as a research project seminar. The aim will be to develop a theoretical foundation and, building on this, to set up concrete empirical research projects. Students acquire a critical understanding of automated communication and smart machines. Students practice transferring these conceptual foundations to individual areas of action and life and are able to develop an independent research design and test it. Furthermore, students practice teamwork, scientific work and presentation skills.

Participation
The seminar will be held offline and mostly synchronously. The obligatory common ZOOM room will be announced in the MOODLE course.

Task of all seminar participants:

All participants fulfill the tasks mentioned in the respective session descriptions.

Task of the project groups: The project groups

> a) develop a research project based on the seminar contents. This includes the formulation of a research interest and corresponding questions as well as the establishment of research guiding assumptions. These considerations are documented in a short exposé (1-2 pages).

> b) present the project for discussion in the seminar on the basis of the exposé.

> c) revise the exposé, incorporating feedback from the project presentation in the seminar. The completed expose addresses the following points: Research interest and research question; research guiding assumptions; empirical approach to data collection and analysis.

> d) carry out the research project on the basis of the exposé and document the analytical steps in data collection and evaluation.

> e) present their results for discussion in the seminar.

For those submitting their portfolio (see examination info below) in the seminar, the additional task is to

> (f) prepare a project report of about 8-10 pages. In addition to the points documented in the exposé, it also presents and critically discusses the results of the project.

Examination
Together with Methoden der Medienkultur und Medienbildung the seminar forms the Research Module I: Media Culture and Media Pedagogy. The module is completed with a portfolio.

Participants of both seminars in the Module have to indicate in which of them they want to submit their portfolio. This must be indicated before June 1, 2022 to either Prof Pentzold or Prof Ganguin, respectively (by email).

See §11 of the examination regulations BA Communication and Media Studies:

"Portfolios consist of two to three partial performances and should reflect the different topics of the courses and their implementation by the students. Examples of achievements in the portfolio include presentations, case study solutions, documentation, research concepts, evaluation and presentation of research data, exercises, papers, and protocols. The composition of the portfolio will be announced by the instructor at the beginning of the module. Services for the portfolio will be provided throughout the lecture period. The processing time for compiling the portfolio after all performances have been completed is four weeks. Further details are regulated by the guidelines for the examination performance portfolio, which are decided by the examination board of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Philosophy and are announced as usual in the faculty."

Course

13 April 2022   **Introduction to the seminar**

Conceptual groundwork

20 April 2022   **Human-machine communication**

Guzman, A. & Lewis, S. (2020). Artificial intelligence and communication. New Media & Society 22: 70–86.

Fortunati, L., & Edwards, Autumn P. (2021). Moving ahead with human-machine communication. Human-Machine Communication, 2, 7-28.

Hepp, A. (2020). Artificial Companions, Social Bots and Work Bots. Media, Culture & Society, 42(7-8), 1410-1426.

Task for all participants: Think – where do you already communicate with a conversational agent? How do you experience these encounters? Please write a short abstract (max. 300 words) and upload it to MOODLE (until 18 April 2022)

27 April 2022   **How robots learned to communicate**

Natale, S. (2019). If software is narrative: Joseph Weizenbaum, artificial intelligence and the biographies of ELIZA. New Media & Society, 21(3), 712-728.

Natale, S. (2021). Deceitful Media. Oxford (chapter 1).

Task for all participants: Find an answer to the question what is needed for human-machine communication to function. Please write a short abstract (max. 300 words) and upload it to MOODLE (until 25 April 2022)

4 May 2022   **Communication issues**

Natale, S. (2021). Deceitful Media. Oxford (chapter 6).

Hancock, J.T. et al. (2020). AI-Mediated Communication: Definition, Research Agenda, and Ethical Considerations. JCMC, 25, 89-100.

Task for all participants: Take a look at https://anatomyof.ai What does it tell you about the backstage of conversational agents?

11 May 2022   **Engaging with smart speakers**

Bogost, I. (2018). Alexa is a revelation for the blind. The Atlantic, May 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/05/what-alexa-taught-my-father/556874/

Thibodeaux, B. (2021). Riding out the quarantine with a chatbot friend. "I feel very connected." The New York Times, June, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/technology/chatbots-quarantine-coronavirus.html

Lynskey, D. (2019). "Alexa, are you invading my privacy?" – the dark side of our voice assistants. Guardian, October 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/oct/09/alexa-are-you-invading-my-privacy-the-dark-side-of-our-voice-assistants

Turan, K. (2013). Spike Jonze's 'Her' shows love's perils — in any form. L.A. Times, December 2013. https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-her-review20131218-story.html

Botsman, R. (2017). Co-parenting with Alexa. New York Times, October 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/07/opinion/sunday/children-alexa-echo-robots.html

Fowler, G. (2021). How Big Tech monopoly made smart speakers dumber. Washington Post, September 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/09/29/smart-home-monopoly/

Task for all participants: Choose one of the above texts (or look for others) and discuss: What are the key issues brought up in the piece, what is the core argument, what insights or provocations are offered? What further questions arise from the texts? Please write a short abstract (max. 300 words) and upload it to MOODLE (until 9 May)

Research planning

18 May 2022 **Finding a topic**

Think about what aspects of the seminar topic interest you most. Do background research. Form project teams. As a team, upload a first draft of the expose (1-2 pages) on MOODLE (by 16 May). Please present your ideas in the seminar.

Project work

25 May 2022 +
1 June 2022 **Setting up a project** (asynchronous, MOODLE course)

You have the opportunity to revise your project expose. It will form the basis for your empirical project. Please upload to MOODLE by 3 June. I will provide written feedback on each synopsis.

8 June 2022 **Project work and consultation I**

Use the time to execute the project according to the steps outlined in the synopsis. I am available for consultation should any questions or issues arise. Please contact me if you wish to take the opportunity of the consultation.

15 June 2022 **Project work and consultation II**

Use the time to execute the project according to the steps outlined in the synopsis. I am available for consultation should any questions or issues arise. Please contact me if you wish to take the opportunity of the consultation.

22 June 2022 **Project work and consultation III**

Use the time to execute the project according to the steps outlined in the synopsis. I am available for consultation should any questions or issues arise. Please contact me if you wish to take the opportunity of the consultation.

Project presentation

6 July 2022 **Project presentation** (synchronous, ZOOM room)

Please present your project as a team!

13 July 2022 **Project presentation** (synchronous, ZOOM room)

Please present your project as a team!