Chapter 8
Political Economy of Spatial Turn in Digital Landscapes

Abstract The spatiality of spatial-digital compression is a virtual construction. Virtual turn in spatiality is about to map the spatiality of digital gadgets. Digital gadgets cannot operate in absence of time and location. Digital gadgets have inbuilt features of time and location, in absence of both, operational efficiency of such gadgets would be compromised, somehow. Both time and location help to map the spatiality of digital gadgets. This section is about to map the virtual turn in the spatiality and spatial mapping in digital gadgets.

Keywords Spatial-digital compression · Virtual turn · Senseless public · Fake news · Spatiality

8.1 Spatial Turn in Virtual Landscapes

The growth and business projections of social media were talked exclusively in academic volumes in the last one decade. Interdisciplinary approaches were evaluated variedly to understand the subject of communication accordingly. In spatial science the study of communication was restricted to traditional media but since the last few years especially after the Geographical Information System (GIS) and quantification approaches helped the scholars to decipher the constructions of virtual spaces in respective representations and interpretations. The chapters in the book discuss the concept of ‘spatial turn’ and how and to what extent social media accommodated spatial turn as an interdisciplinary approach.

Social media institutionalized the senseless public? What is senseless? How a senseless public is institutionalized? What constitutes public? What does the public denote? Senseless is blurred idea or vision or fictitious identity or concocted naming were assigned or discussed on social media platforms. Senseless public is such spatiality where such blurred ideas or concocted naming was assigned for mundane reasons including political. Social mediasphere is a senseless public where such discussions are often found around various subjects ranging from economic to cultural to political to geographical. It is not restricted to one particular topic or subject, it can be any subject, but deliberately controlled by IT Cell of respective
countries or organizations in order to push their concocted ideology upon the theme or issue or subject.

Social media is the home of spatial spaces where spatiality is shaped into various shapes and sizes and discussed among users whether in the sense of problem or policy or politics. Most of the time such discussions end with no conclusion or contentious turn where making silence on such issues is quite better than putting some odd views publicly. Here, the public is a social media sphere that’s embedded with different layers of meaning and representations in the shape of view or an idea or a naming. One can understand the senseless public in terms of endless or infinite mapping of any issue which talked across the platforms where there is no clear-cut demarcation rather it incorporated all such valid points or elements were considered to understand the issue or topic. Social media provides us a platform to put forth our ideas, issues, views and understanding as per se. But how someone taken the same issue apart from original approaches or completely different thinking, in that sense, this study found that we are institutionalized the senseless public, the meaning is represented in such a way that we cannot draw a conclusion rather it looks like a mosaic, all different idea infused in it.

Though, spatiality is all about to denote the spatial indication at its first glance (since the issue uploaded across the social media, it discussed for white unless it is replaced by another issue and gradually in a sequence manner issue lost its spatial importance). In the age of social media the issues are embedded with spatial indication but across the platform it lost their original indication rather shaped as senseless public where issues, views, thinking and understanding lost its meaning, though exists in its original structure, process and stages.

Such views, thinking, reports, analysis, maps, texts, videos, memes, emoticons and signs, of course, found in circulations across the platforms in myriad nature and characteristics but only few of them acknowledged by the users while rest lost its spatial landscapes in the virtual landscapes. The spatial landscape of contents is like a metaphor when contents attribute such chronology and phenomenology as special characteristics. For example, the outburst of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China became contentious for myriad ways and very soon the whole world engulfed into the catch of COVID-19 that caused both economic and human losses across the world. Wuhan is a popular city in China but since COVID-19 spread, thousands of memes or textual messages or videos were made to signify Wuhan as metaphor, in both positive and negative representations and interpretations. Wuhan is a spatial landscape but the same has been used through digital configurations where sometimes we can judge as senseless public—the space is concocted and represented across the social mediasphere.

We can’t live in isolation in the ‘information age’, when the social mediasphere is a reality that can’t leave you in isolation unless you have a strong desire to keep minimal online or less interactions with outer worlds. But more or less, digital gadgets are penetrated in the human lives and living side by side with human activities.

Digital lives and digital socialization are inevitable nowadays. Digital lives are a kind of virtual status when an individual prefers to be online on their favourite platform, purposefully. The expansion of business of smartphones and 4G Internet
speed made it possible for an individual to be online as much as they want, to use such
digital gadgets for sharing, learning, information and knowledge. The association
and intimacy with digital gadgets increased over a period of time irrespective of age,
gender, race, religion, profession, education, tribes and caste. Such intimacy and
association has changed the arithmetic and geometrics of an individual who carried
many apps and smartphones to report across the platform and other services through
digital gadgets what they are made to serve.

The regular features of digital gadgets were shown in both public and private
spaces as digital loneliness—digital loneliness is shaping social behaviour in the
long run when digital privacy is becoming an utmost priority in both public and
private spaces irrespective of age, religion, gender, tribe and profession. Such social
behaviour unlike digital loneliness when no one trust anyone in fact, the social move-
ment of nuclearization of family is further shaping and reshaping, under the expan-
sion of such digital gadgets like smartphones. Digital lives are primary steps towards
digital socialization and that leads to trolls unlike to abuse someone else who often
takes different stands on the given issues or ideology on social media. The informa-
tion technology (IT) cell is a new feature of digital lives when a group of trained
trolls who are often ready to harass someone on social media platforms, if you write
against their ideology. They will use abusive and threatening languages or emoticons.

The use of social mediasphere often push such contentious and fictitious contents
in order to propagate ideology, knowledge, data, etc., that do not have credible sources
rather posed as real or true information in its first appearance but if you go to search
the reality of such information, most of them found fake and misinformation or
disinformation.

Social media institutionalized the fake and misinformation contents? The idea of
fake news is not new to the world (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; Barthel et al. 2016)
but it is treated as new phenomena in the information society where each content
was talked as whether an authentic or fake information. The circulated videos, texts
or images first need to pass the authentication click and thereafter the merit of such
issues, views or news and other ideas. The fake is contentious itself unless proved
that it was misrepresented or moulded from original versions.

The abundance of contents somehow made confused or no other option to scroll
into another page unless found something interesting, whatever. For example, the
case of trolls who often run behind to whom they found odd in the lists that object to
the content. Trolling is not new rather the same found in the society in mundane names
who often threaten or beat or unnecessarily harassed people. So, trolls are nothing,
a digitized version of local goons who are trained digitally to abuse to which they
found odd in the group. Trolls often pass such information that is constructed in order
to achieve a certain political score or fulfil specific need, whatsoever. AltNews.co
or FactChecker.in is about authenticating the news and often checks such uploaded
news; these channels are specifically designated to burst the misinformation and fake
news that is often found among the circulation when users get confused whether the
news is true or fake. When there were no such channels to identify whether the news
is fake or not, people often believed such contents primarily, of course, they have
some suspicions upon that but no other ways rather to digest the news. Digital lives
or digital socialization shaped such information whether in terms of senseless public or fake or misinformation.

Fake news is not a new term rather it is largely undefined and unauthenticated kinds of popular taxonomies (Wardle 2017). Fake news used for political satire (Baym 2005), political propaganda (Khalidarova and Pantti 2016), photo manipulation (Zubiaga and Ji 2014), to deceive (Duffy et al. 2019) and news caricatures (Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016). The fake news is basically carved to make propaganda and satire or draw caricatures to mock or represent purposefully. Moreover, such contents too invite business in a sense of circulation that ultimately serves the purposes.

Social media contents are often embedded with political and economic values? Each shown content has its own values. This study implies basically two indicators: first, political and second, economic or in other words we can have political economic values in totality. Political economy mapped the structural features of capitalism, such as the causes of crises, whereas ideology critique analyses the claims that are made about reality and how true they are. If one wants to understand power, then one needs to analyse both ideology and political economy together (Fuchs 2014). The circulated content has ideological background apart from political economy. Social media platform-industry partnerships are essential to understanding the politics and economics of social data circulating among platforms and third parties (Helmond et al. 2017). The ‘platform’ is an increasingly common type of online organizational form. Online platforms include search engines like Google, Amazon and eBay, content providers like Wikipedia, and social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, traditional software and hardware manufacturers like Microsoft (Bing) and Apple (iTunes and App Store). Online platforms are central to what might be called the content or media infrastructure of the Web—that is to say, the infrastructure through which digital content and media, both privately and industrially created, are distributed throughout the Web (Couvering 2017). The political economy of social media can be understood both as a commodity of the media and as ideologies in the media. This means the media is supposed to bring the political economy as commodities and ideologies? Media used advertisements as a medium to carry both together (Fuchs 2014). Vincent Mosco’s (2009) defined political economic studies, where the production, distribution and consumption of resources, including communication resources are essential and remains relevant in times of new media.

The political economy of communications looks at a range of issues including capitalism, media ownership, funded mechanism, government policy, globalization, regulation and neoliberalism. The study focused on the capitalism part to understand the spatial issues in the contents of how and why certain issues are chosen to circulate that have hidden ideas of political economy (see in chapters). The political economy is global phenomena and very much spatial in nature and that can’t be separated from any issues that are talked or discussed or circulated on social media.
8.2 Spatial-Digital Compression

Spatial turn is inseparable from social media contents? Everything on the platform is spatial by its nature. Of course, it is indeed true that the uploaded content has some contexts that have spatial affiliation that is inseparable from such contents. The discussion often substantiates such spatial affiliation in mundane representations. The expansion of social media which not only strengthens the communication rather generating, accumulating, sorting and ordering of such data that found on social platforms in virtual shapes in various representations as spatial knowledge, spatial behaviour and spatial politics (Kitchin et al. 2017). Spatial turn is something to look back to explore more differently in different contexts that how to re-examine and reinterpret the same in some other ways. In the first chapter, I tried to express the spatial mapping of digital gadgets wherein the spatial dimensions were mapped in contexts to digital gadgets that is somehow inevitable nowadays. How a layman can map the digital gadgets as spatial expressions and treat the same as other ‘spaces’ that is already mapped by scholars in the past one-century and particularly the works of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Henery Lefebvre (1991) and Christian Fuchs (2014). I tried to add a dimension that we can map our digital gadgets as space in different interpretations and representations as primary space, secondary space and tertiary space, respectively.

The configuration of digital gadgets can be understood as spatial-digital compression—the technological innovations lead the transformation in spatiality. The idea of real space or abstract space shaped further and took virtual turn (the automation technology derived human civilization in such juncture wherein information and mass communication technology shapes the spatial cognition when things are apparently not appeared or not visible by naked eyes rather existing in concept, idea and meaning. Virtual turn embedded in the spatiality of digital gadgets that found in myriad shape and size) within spatial turn. The virtual turn shaped the dimensions of digital gadgets; one can easily read the transformations that shape the spatiality. Digital gadgets transformed the construction of spaces and places. The cognitive construction in digital gadgets shapes the virtual spaces further that helps to map the screen of smartphone, ipod, laptop/desktop as a primary space or first space or spatial practices or visible by naked eyes but unexplored, inquisitive and inconclusive. The screen of digital gadgets embedded with layers of spatiality that shapes virtuality in two more variations. Subsequently, the installed apps within smartphones can be treated as secondary space or second space or technocrat space. And, further when someone clicks the apps or opens the apps for being connected to others or across the world can be understood as tertiary space or third space or lived space that is full of contentious, struggle, politics, existence, skirmish, scuffle, etc.

Spatio-digital compression is all about the virtual construction of digital spaces that is embedded in digital gadgets variedly. Digital became synonymous with time, within fraction of second, two distant persons can share an email to each other. Time submerged into digital gadgets as a spatial indicator that works along with location, which is too spatial in nature. Digital gadgets cannot operate in absence of time and
location. For example, Google map works effectively when both time and location are on and therefore Google map would signify the destination route and time otherwise Google map would not be effectively functional. Similarly, Facebook, Instagram works where both time and location work as spatial attributes to signify the digital spatiality. The spatio-digital compression needs further research to map exclusively how and at what extent digital gadgets are shaped and reshaped the virtual spatiality beside representations or during Internet shutdowns.

Henceforth, spatial turn and Internet shutdown are two inseparable spatial phenomena when a territory is marked separated from the rest of other territorial boundaries on administrative and governance order. Of course, Internet shutdown is a spatial incongruous based on various grounds and spatial incongruous is spreading across the developing countries. Internet shutdowns need separate research in order to map the social, cultural, psychological and economic impacts in the spatiality.

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