



From Canon to Hypertext: Digitised Knowledge and the University

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century marks an unprecedented transformation in the modes of knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption. With the rapid digitisation of epistemes, knowledge has shifted from being a static and print-oriented entity to a dynamic, fluid, and hypertextual phenomenon. This paper explores how the digitisation of knowledge reshapes the very ontology of truth, authority, and representation within academic institutions, particularly universities. By situating knowledge in the framework of hypertext and hypermedia, it critiques the hierarchical binaries between knowledge givers and seekers, thereby destabilising the traditional canon of knowledge. Drawing from the theoretical insights of Barthes, Foucault, Benjamin, Adorno, and Raymond Williams, the study highlights how the digital age problematises the unification of truth and introduces a nonlinear, networked scholarship that thrives on intertextuality and dialogic engagement. The notion of digital governmentality is examined as a central concern, where information gatekeeping, surveillance, and ideological filtering shape what is legitimised as valid knowledge. However, this process simultaneously creates fissures that allow for decentralisation, multiplicity, and critique, situating knowledge in a state of constant becoming. Universities, traditionally considered as ideological state apparatuses that reinforce dominant epistemologies, are reconceptualised here as evolving, unfinished spaces that embody the rhizomatic structures of digital hypermedia. In this light, the



university is not simply a transmitter of fixed truths but a site of negotiation where knowledge continually adapts to emergent cultural and technological conditions. The paper argues that digital hypermedia, by enabling interactivity, exactness, and intertextuality, not only redefines the boundaries of truth but also challenges the linearity of print epistemologies. Ultimately, the digitisation of epistemes foregrounds the dialectics between preservation and destabilisation of knowledge, making visible the post-truth condition of contemporary society. By positioning digitised knowledge as both an act of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, the paper suggests that the future of universities lies in embracing this dynamic flux, where truth is no longer singular but plural, constantly negotiated within the dialogic network of digital epistemes.

INTRODUCTION

Today's era that is the twenty first century, is the era of technological advancements. In today's globalised world everything is available within a click through surfing the internet. This has made information readily available without much efforts. And as such it is mostly and generally considered that today's generation doesn't refer to the print mediums as everything is available online. This has raised concerns like the mass consumption of digitised epistemes or knowledge has made the present generation especially the youth more vulnerable to fake information as misinformation readily becomes “viral” and as such the notion of truth and fact becomes prominent.

At the same time, it is also assumed that with the digitisation of knowledge, the earlier traditional knowledge imparting systems has lost its significance and as such it is believed that knowledge has lost its true essence in the 21st century technological era.

In these contexts it can be argued that knowledge comes with power and vice versa. And as such what is represented as truth or valid knowledge is ultimately decided by the knowledge givers rather than the knowledge seekers. So, even if with the digitisation of epistemes and mass consumption of readily available information or data unlike the traditional knowledge systems wherein knowledge was available only through print sources and that too for a limited people. This in a way suggests that even in earlier



times what was considered to be relevant or authentic can be put to question as ultimately it creates a hierarchical set up.

In this vein, one can also argue that with the digitisation of knowledge and its easy accessibility but at the same time, with globalisation and capitalisation the notion of digital governmentality comes into forefront. Information gatekeepers and strategies like data which is included in the canon of digital archiving and filtering of information to cater to the dominant ideologies comes into place and therefore the notion of binarisms between knowledge givers and knowledge seekers still lingers.

This paper therefore aims at throwing light at representation and creation of valid knowledge or truth in the realm of educational institutions like universities and suggest that knowledge is constantly evolving and therefore in a state of constant becoming and in a state of flux. In this light, it argues that in an era where information, data and counts as valid knowledge is filtered and as such is under the surveillance of digital governance but at the same time within this digital governmentality of representing truth, knowledge or valid knowledge lies in a realm of a “hypertext”, wherein one information or data leads to the other and goes on without rupture thereby deconstructing the linearity of what is counted or represented as truth in its constant act of territorialisation and deterritorialisation.

This shall be done to critique the notion of what is constituted as truth and as such envisage the New World order as an era of post truth wherein the digitised knowledge represents a nonlinear and networked scholarship, suggesting that representation of truth in the 21st century technological era lies in a dialectics of desire for securing and preservation of knowledge on one hand and at the same time the dynamic network of the hypertext that constantly challenges and critiques the unification or homogenisation of knowledge or valid data/ truth. This shall be done by suggesting the notion of digitised epistemes as a hypertext in relation with the institution of University by debunking University as an institution of power. Rather University as a space overrides its assumed institutional authority and as such can never be a complete and a finished product.

ANALYSIS

The University as a seat of educational institution seems to impart knowledge which serves the canon of knowledge or information which is considered relevant and truthful thereby highlighting the notion of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus. In this light it can be argued through the notion of hypertext that hypertext allows one to individualise any corpus of material by allowing reader and writer to connect



them with other contexts. This in a way provides the ground for blurring the boundaries between knowledge givers and knowledge seekers suggesting the notion of truth in a realm of slippage.

Like almost all structuralists and poststructuralists, Barthes and Foucault describe text, the world of letters, and the power and status relations they involve in terms shared by the field of computer hypertext. Hypertext, a term coined by Theodor H. Nelson in the 1960s refers also to a form of electronic text, a radically new information technology, and a mode of publication. By hypertext, Nelson explains, “ I mean non sequential writing-text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read as an interactive screen. Hypertext as the term is used in this work, denotes text composed of blocks of text what Barthes terms as lexic- and the electronic links that join them. Hypertext media simply extends the notion of the text in hypertext by including visual information,sound, and other forms of data.

Barthes’s distinction between readerly and writerly texts appears to be essentially a distinction between text based on print technology and electronic hypertext, for hypertext fulfills

“the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.” This notion of the reader as producer clearly parallels the characteristics of hypertext, which, by its very nature, invites and even requires readers to choose their own paths, to assemble texts, and thus to become co-writers of the text they read.” (S/Z, Barthes)

One chief effect of electronic hypertext lies in the way it challenges conventional assumptions about teachers, learners and the institutions. It changes the roles of teacher and student in much the same way it changes those of writer and reader. Its emphasis on the active, empowered reader, which fundamentally calls into question general assumptions about reading, writing and texts, similarly calls into question general assumptions about literary educations and its institutions. Within academia too, works or knowledge to come under gaze must be teachable thereby appropriating the canon of knowledge.

In this context it can then be argued that since knowledge is an evolving phenomenon and can never be static as knowledge is ultimately linked with culture which too is constantly evolving (Raymond Williams’ notion of Residual, Emergent and Dominant Culture); thereby the academic canon of knowledge too constantly adapts and changes, thus making University as a space of constant becoming as well.

Benjamin analysed the fact that the past often either just disappears into oblivion or is appropriated by those in power as a means of controlling the present. In this instance through the theoretical lens of Theodore Adorno, it can at the same time be inferred that it is within the realm of digital media wherein



truth or the visual representation of information is done in an exact manner since technology involves precision. In this manner digital media has the ability to embody historical information in a much realistic manner and this becomes more appropriate when digital media is equated with hypermedia. This is so, because unlike the generalised belief wherein knowledge gathered through digital media is not considered relevant with that of the traditional knowledge systems, but it is within the realm of digital media as a hypermedia wherein the homogenisation of knowledge breaks thereby incorporating a dialogic play of information or knowledge. In doing so, the hypermedia in the context of digital media acts as a point of intersection between physical and the virtual space or cyberspace. This also blurs the notion of truth or reality in the context of physical and the digital space. With this blurring one can also infer that the representation of truth in the digital media lies in the realm of exactness in relation to the individual too as the individual in the 21st century lies in an intertextual space between the physical and the digital space.

It can therefore be argued that digital media in the 21st century, had the ability to embody truth and as such it doesn't instrumentalise the representation of truth rather the form of digital media as a hypermedia itself carries the ability in representing truth or knowledge in its exactness in the 21st century.

With the digitisation of epistemes therefore the notion of University as a seat of institution too gets outdated as in the context of universities too there is a constant flux between holding onto the academic canon of knowledge and at the same time constantly adapting and evolving with the evergrowing corpus of knowledge. The future of Universities with the digitisation of knowledge therefore lies in a broad space as a hypertext in representation of valid knowledge as the University space also becomes a form in the embodiment of truth within the rhizomatic structure of digital hypermedia.

CONCLUSION

This paper asserts that the digitisation of epistemes fundamentally reconfigures the relationship between truth, knowledge, and institutional authority. By framing knowledge as hypertextual, it reveals how the digital age dislodges the linear and centralised epistemologies of the past and instead embraces multiplicity, interactivity, and flux. The university, once a custodian of canonical truths, must now reposition itself as a space of negotiation and dialogue where knowledge is both preserved and continuously transformed.

The relevance of this study lies in its capacity to address the epistemological challenges of the post-truth era. In a world saturated with misinformation and digital surveillance, universities and educational



institutions must critically engage with the conditions of digital governmentality while also harnessing the emancipatory potential of hypermedia. This reconceptualisation is crucial for ensuring that knowledge production remains dialogic, plural, and resistant to homogenisation.

By theorising the university as an unfinished, evolving entity embedded in digital hypermedia, the paper contributes to ongoing debates in cultural theory, digital humanities, and educational philosophy. It underscores the urgency of reimagining truth not as a fixed and universal category but as a constantly negotiated construct situated within a networked and digitised landscape. Thus, the paper not only critiques existing epistemic hierarchies but also provides a framework for envisioning the future of universities in an age where digitisation, globalisation, and post-truth converge to reshape the very fabric of knowledge.

AUTHOR'S BIONOTE

Sangjukta Dutta is a PhD Research Scholar at Madhabdev University, Assam, specializing in literary and cultural studies. She has qualified UGC-NET and GATE in English Literature, reflecting her strong academic foundation. Her research interests include critical theory, translation studies, and African American literature. She has published book chapters with ISBN, contributing to scholarly debates in contemporary literary and cultural criticism. Dedicated to research and publication, she actively engages with interdisciplinary discourses. Her work combines theoretical depth with practical insights, emphasizing the relevance of literature and culture in the modern world.

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