University of St.Gallen

Course and Examination Fact Sheet: Spring Semester 2018

4,620: The Culture of Algorithms

ECTS credits: 2

Overview examination/s

(binding regulations see below)
Decentral - Presentation (in groups - all given the same grades) (100%)

Attached courses

Timetable -- Language -- Lecturer
4,620,1.00 The Culture of Algorithms -- Englisch -- von Scheve Christian

Course information

Course prerequisites

None

Course content

The seminar investigates the role of algorithms for contemporary culture and cultural consumption. Today, in most digital media, algorithms critically influence which products, services, and information is available to us and when. Search and recommender systems determine our search engine results, suggest books we read, movies we watch, friends we have, and relationships we form. They are indispensable to reduce information in times of big data. Interesting about these systems is that their operations usually go unnoticed by its users and we know comparably little about their principles of operation. How do they filter information and make recommendations? Based on what data? Where are they deployed? How do they differ from traditional forms of recommendation? What information do you we not account for due to these systems? And what does their use mean for culture in a much broader sense, in terms of what and how we think and feel? The seminar attends to these question from the perspective of the sociology of culture and by discussing concrete examples. Students shall learn the theoretical principles and functions of selected algorithms and recommender systems and will become familiar with theories of the transmission, evolution and change of culture. The overall aim of the seminar is to make available theoretical knowledge and specific examples to a wider audience on an internet blog designed by the seminar students.

Course structure

Students will form 3 to 4 groups over the course of the seminar to deal with 3 to 4 concrete examples of recommender systems. These examples are used to become familiar with the overall relevance of algorithms for contemporary culture and cultural change. In a first session, students will give short presentations regarding the principles of algorithms and recommender systems as well as theories of cultural transmission and change. In a second phase, students will deal with specific real-life applications of recommender systems and conduct internet-based research. Examples can stem from these (or other) areas:

1. Systems guiding cultural consumption, e.g. Amazon, Netflix, Spotify, iTunes;
2. News and information systems, e.g., google, bling, google news, Yahoo, Twitter or websites of large news providers (papers, TV, news aggregators);

3. Social networks, e.g. facebook, google+, Xing, LinkedIn;
4. Online dating and matchmaking sites, e.g., Friendscout, Parship, iLove oder Flirtfever

In a third phase, results of the groups' investigations will be collated and prepared to be published on an internet blog.

Contextual Studies are considered part of **Contact Learning**; thus, taking part properly implies **regular attendance**. It is the students' own responsibility to ensure that there is **no timetable clash** between the courses they have chosen.

Course literature

Pasquale, F. (2015). *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Striphas, T. (2015). Algorithmic Culture. *European Journal of Cultural Studies,* 18(4-5), 395-412.

Fleder, D., Hosangar, K. (2009). Blockbuster Culture's Next Rise or Fall: The Impact of Recommender Systems on Sales Diversity. *Management Science*, 55(5), 697–712.

Gillespie, T. (2016). Algorithm. In Peters, B. (Ed.), *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture* (pp. 18-30). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lupton, D. (2015). *Digital Sociology*. New York: Routledge.

Jannach D. et al (2010). *Recommender Systems: An Introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Steiner, C. (2013). *Automate This: How Algorithms Took Over Our Markets, Our Jobs, and the World*. New York: Portfolio.

Beer, D. (2013). *Popular Culture and New Media* (Chapter 4). New York: Palgrave.

Additional course information

Christian von Scheve is Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Sociology, Freie Universität Berlin, and Research Fellow at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) Berlin.

Examination information

Examination sub part/s

1. Examination sub part (1/1)

Examination time and form

Decentral - Presentation (in groups - all given the same grades) (100%)

Remark

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Examination-aid rule

University of St.Gallen

Practical examination
No examination-aid rule is necessary for such examination types. The rules and regulations of the University of St. Gallen apply in a subsidiary fashion.

Supplementary aids
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Examination languages
Question language: English
Answer language: English

Examination content
The exam comprises the topics that are chosen by the students.

Examination relevant literature
The exam literature is based on the topics that are chosen by the students.

Please note
We would like to point out to you that this fact sheet has absolute priority over other information such as StudyNet, faculty members' personal databases, information provided in lectures, etc.

When will the fact sheets become binding?

- Information about courses and examination time (central/decentral and grading form): from the start of the bidding process on 25 January 2018
- Information about decentral examinations (examination-aid rule, examination content, examination relevant literature): after the 4th semester week on 19 March 2018
- Information about central examinations (examination-aid rule, examination content, examination relevant literature): from the start of the enrolment period for the examinations on 09 April 2018

Please look at the fact sheet once more after these deadlines have expired.