

HS7.301 Science, Technology and Society

Quiz 1

Discuss the smartphone in the light of Jacques Ellul's idea of 'technique'. Do you think Ellul's understanding of technique (and technology) holds good in the case of the smartphone?

Word count: 300 words

Ans:

Ellul defined 'technique' as "*In our technological society, the technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity*". Ellul believed that no matter how hard we try to govern individual technologies, they will end up outgrowing human control. The 'technique' would force the human population to adapt to technological advancement. Moreover, he argued that the technical complex would eventually threaten human freedom and responsibilities.

As per the characteristics of a technique defined by Ellul, let's consider a smartphone, such as rationality, artificiality, automatism, self-augmentation, wholeness, universalism, and autonomy. A smartphone correlates with Jacques Ellul's idea of technique, where the whole human population globally uses a smartphone to perform various tasks efficiently. On a positive note, the smartphone has helped many positive effects where it has reduced human effort in various departments.

But if we talk about the dark side of the technique, which was a critical factor in Ellul's definition. Since its rapid and exponential expansion in the last decade, the usage of smartphones and how it is used has reached a level beyond the control of any ethical organization, or we can frame it as the unethical usage of a smartphone has increased manifolds. Now, the social condition of any community is controlled by the algorithms running in a smartphone where a trending negative social media post can create riots, phishing scams are pretty often now, and smartphones led to polarization of the population in various fields based on their opinions. Moreover, smartphones have also led to various adverse psychological effects. And this led to a situation where life without a smartphone seemed impossible. As Ellul predicted, the smartphone has eventually become a controlling agency over humans with tremendous cultural, social, political, and economic control.