



**COMM 000: Internet, Culture, and Power
(4.0 Units)**

Location: ANN

Instructor: **Sulafa Zidani**

Email: zidani@usc.edu

Course Description

This course introduces students to key terms for analyzing power relations in global digital culture. By focusing on the concept of **participatory culture**, we will look at the impact of online participation in different spaces locally and globally. The course includes cases of cultural and political participation from India, Egypt, and China, among other countries. We will examine the challenges posed to participation for different groups based on their race, gender, and ethnicity, and the role of youth creativity and imagination in overcoming these challenges.

Learning Objectives

Students will leave this course with a deeper understanding of the power of participation in practices related to research, politics, pedagogy, and everyday life. Students will become familiar with the concept of participatory culture and how it has been used by different scholars and evolved over time. They will learn through examples and analysis how participatory culture is applied in research, political movements, and by people from different countries.

Assignments, Requirements, and Policies

Attendance, Participation, Presence (10%)

Students and instructor are both considered equal contributors. Engaging, participating, and sharing your opinions are vital for the success of this class. Therefore, all are expected to attend each session.

Participation Diary (5%)

During the first couple of weeks of the course, students are asked to keep a participation diary, taking note of the opportunities in their daily life where they get to participate and the nature of the activity (online and offline). Keep your participation diary with you every session as we will refer back to it in the weeks to come.

Unit-End Assignments (40%, 10% for each paper)

Assignments are required at the end, or sometimes before the end, of units 2, 3, 4, and 5. Each assignment consists of a 500-word reflection paper. The exact prompts and deadlines are detailed in the class schedule below.

Meme Analysis Assignment (5%)

For class session no. 5, students are asked to bring with them an analysis of five memes. Those could be memes they like, or ones they find interesting. Each meme should be accompanied with a few sentence analysis, examining the meaning behind it or why it is interesting.

Group Presentation (15%)

Group presentations will take place in lessons 25, 26, and 27. Students will deliver a 15-20 minute presentation analyzing a case study in participatory culture.

Final Project (25%)

The final project for this course is due on the exam day. Students can choose between writing a research paper which analyzes a case study in participatory culture or do their own project (presentation, an art project, recording a podcast or short clip, etc). Please communicate with the instructor about your topic or project. Your plan should be set **by session no. 20** at the latest.

Extra credit (up to 5%)

Extra credit opportunities will be given throughout the semester depending on the news and current events. Students can gain extra credit by attending a relevant event on campus and writing a reflection paper about it or analyzing a case study that is unfolding in the present. Students may also suggest events or case studies that they know about.

Late Submissions

Please communicate with me if you think you need more time to complete an assignment so we can find solutions. I understand that sometimes things happen, and opportunities arise, however, late submissions without prior communication will be penalized.

Class Schedule

This course has 30 sessions which are divided into 7 units.

Unit 1: Participation & the Internet

This unit is an introduction to the courses' key questions and concepts, and my pedagogical approach.

Key terms: Internet, participation, inclusion, engagement, pedagogy.

Session 1:

- Self-introductions, discussing the syllabus, policies, and pedagogical approach.
- **Assignment:** Keep a week-long **participation diary**. Track opportunities in your everyday life where you participate in any kind of activity, online or offline. We will be building on this assignment next week.
- **Readings:**
 - hooks, b. (2010). Engaged Pedagogy. In *Teaching Critical Thinking* (pp. 19-23). Routledge.

Session 2:

- What is the Internet? We will discuss this question after an in-class activity where each student draws what they think the Internet looks like. We will discuss *what* the internet is, *who* the Internet is, and *how* it is used.
- **Readings:**
 - Srinivasan, R., & Fish, A. (2017). Introduction. In *After the Internet*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
 - Kolitz, D. (2019, Aug 20). What would happen if the whole internet just shut down all of a sudden? In *Gizmodo*. Available at: <https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2019/08/what-would-happen-if-the-whole-internet-just-shut-down-all-of-a-sudden/>
 - Sample, I. (2018, Oct 22). What is the internet? 13 key questions answered. In *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/oct/22/what-is-the-internet-13-key-questions-answered>

Session 3:

- In this session we will discuss language and the internet. What languages does the Internet have? What is the history of these languages' digital writing systems? What challenges does Internet mediated communication pose on language? Are emojis language?
- **Readings:**
 - Danet, B., & Herring, S. C. (Eds.). (2007). Introduction. In *The multilingual Internet: Language, culture, and communication online*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

- Shirky, C. (2019, Aug 16). Emojis Are Language Too: A Linguist Says Internet-Speak Isn't Such a Bad Thing. In *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/16/books/review/because-internet-gretchen-mcculloch.html>

Unit 2: Participatory Culture & Participatory Politics

This unit is an intro to the key pieces on participatory culture and politics, as well as some examples of participatory practices.

Key terms: Civic engagement, participatory culture, participatory politics, user-generated content, participatory practices

Session 4:

- This session has the piece where the term “Participatory Culture” was coined. We will discuss the definition, and how *online* and *offline* are connected, and use the “participation diary” assignment from the previous week to look at examples of participatory culture.
- **Reading:**
 - Jenkins, H. (1992). Get A Life!. In *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture* (pp. 9-50). Routledge.
- **Assignment:** Choose 5 memes (your favorite memes, or ones you find interesting). Write 2-3 sentences about each memes, describing its meaning or why you find it interesting.

Session 5:

- In this session we will talk about memes and cute cats. We will discuss the meaning behind cute cats, their significance, and challenges posed to them.
- In-class activity: Students walk around the classroom and discuss their memes with one another, trying to find others with the same meme or similar ones.
- **Reading:**
 - Zuckerman, E. (2015). Cute Cats to the Rescue? Participatory Media and Political Expression. In D. Allen & J. Light (eds.) *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in the Digital Age*. (Pp. 131-155). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 - Miltner, K. M. (2014). “There’s no place for lulz on LOLCats”: The role of genre, gender, and group identity in the interpretation and enjoyment of an Internet meme. *First Monday*, 19(8).

Session 6:

- In this session, we discuss content circulating across borders, and fan groups across countries. I ask students to share stories with the class about a fan culture they are part of or have heard of.
- **Reading:**
 - Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2018). Chapter 7: Thinking Transnationally. In *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. NYU press.
 - Lyan, I., Zidani, S., & Shifman, L. (2015). When Gangnam Hits the Middle East. *Asian Communication Research*, 12(2), 10-31.
 - **Podcast:** Planet Money (2012, Oct, 16). Episode 410: Why K-Pop Is Taking Over The World. NPR Planet Money [Podcast]. <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2012/10/16/163039109/episode-410-why-k-pop-is-taking-over-the-world>

Session 7:

- This session focuses on the definition of participatory culture.
- **Silent Discussion:** We review the readings through silent discussion, where the class is divided into groups of 5. Every group receives a quote from the readings, and as the classmates pass it between themselves, each member adds a note or question about a term or sentence from the quote. Then they share with the class.
- **Reading:**
 - Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2018). Introduction. In *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. NYU press.
 - Tufekci, Z. (2017). Chapter 2: Censorship and Attention. In *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press.
- **Unit End Assignment** for Units 1+2: Now that we have covered the basic theory and some examples of participatory culture, write a 500-word reflection essay about your understanding of the topic thus far. You can discuss where you see it in your everyday life, how you think it impacts politics, or other ways that it has an impact on society. Your reflection must include a definition of participatory culture.

Unit 3: Who Gets to Participate? Challenges to Participation.

While issues related to gender, ethnic, and racial marginalization are spread out through the course, this unit zeros in on some of the key literature and case studies that focus on these issues

Key terms: Race, gender, feminism, intersectionality

Session 8:

- This session focuses on finding love online. We will discuss how technology has changed dating etiquette? And how the experience of online dating is different for different people?
- **Readings:**
 - Jenkins, H. (2006). Chapter 8: Love Online. In *Fans bloggers and gamers: Exploring participatory culture* (pp. 152 - 172). New York, NY: New York University Press.
 - Niesen, M. (2016). Chapter Nine: Love, Inc.: Toward Structural Intersectional Analysis of Online Dating Sites and Applications. In S. Noble & B. Tynes. *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*. Peter Lang.
 - **Podcast:** Code Switch (2018, June 20). Looking for Marriage in All the Wrong Places. NPR Codeswitch [podcast]. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/code-switch/id1112190608?i=1000414184916>

Session 9:

- This session focuses on representation and how participatory culture can be a way for regaining control over group representation.
- **Readings:**
 - Washington, M (2016). Chapter Three: Asian/American Masculinity: The Politics of Virility, Virality, and Visibility. . In S. Noble & B. Tynes. *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*. Peter Lang.
 - Thao, P. (2019, Aug 15). Before "Crazy Rich Asians," YouTubers Paved the Way for Better Asian Representation. *Teen Vogue*. Available at: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/youtube-asian-representation-wongfuproductions-happyslip>

Session 10:

- This session focuses on representation of women online and studying feminism and the Internet.
- **Readings:**
 - Noble, S (2017). Chapter Two: Searching for Black Girls. In *Algorithms of Oppression*. NYU Press.
 - Daniels, J. (2009). Rethinking cyberfeminism (s): Race, gender, and embodiment. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 37(1/2), 101-124
 - **Podcast:** ReplyAll podcast episode #120, INVCEL, How a shy, queer Canadian woman accidentally invented one of the internet's most toxic male communities <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/reply-all/id941907967?i=1000446430240>

Session 11:

- This session focuses on the intersection of race, class, and ethnicity online. Can we escape the “offline reality” online? Can we change it?
- **Readings:**
 - Lori Kendall (2002). Chapter 7: Class, Race, and Online Participation. In *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub: Masculinities and Relationships Online*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
 - Frazier, R. T., & Zhang, L. (2014). Ethnic identity and racial contestation in cyberspace: Deconstructing the Chineseness of Lou Jing. *China Information*, 28(2), 237-258.

Session 12:

- This session focuses on the intersection of race, class, and ethnicity online. Can we escape the “offline reality” online? Can we change it?
- **Readings:**
 - Nakamura, L. (2008). Chapter 4. Avatars and the Visual Culture of Reproduction on the Web. In *Digitizing race: Visual cultures of the Internet (Vol. 23)*. U of Minnesota Press.
 - **Podcast:** UnLadyLike Podcast (2018, Feb. 6). Episode 3: How to Get a Yoga Body with Jessamyn Stanley
<https://unladylike.co/episodes/03/yogabody>

Session 13:

- In this session, we take a step back so-to-speak in order to discuss the platforms where much of participatory practices take place. What are platforms? What power do they have in our everyday life and politics? How is this label problematic?
- Watching in class: *Hassan Minhaj's* episode of *Patriot Act* about Amazon.
- **Readings:**
 - Bulut, E. (2016). Chapter Ten: The Nation-State in Intersectional Internet: Turkey's Encounters With Facebook and Twitter. In S. Noble & B. Tynes. *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*. Peter Lang.
 - Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of platforms. *New Media & Society* 12(3): 347-364. <http://nms.sagepub.com/content/12/3/347>
- **Unit End Assignment:** 500-word reflection essay. Who participates online? Is the Internet participatory for everyone? In this unit, we talked about the tension between creating community and safe space and the hostility that people face online. Where do you stand in these two positions? Use the material from this unit to make your argument. Examples are encouraged!

Unit 4: Challenges and Revisions to Participatory Culture.

This unit goes back to the key literature to see how and why the concept of participatory culture has changed

Key terms: participatory intensities, a more participatory culture.

Session 14:

- Building on the last assignment, we discuss the challenges to participatory culture and move to talk about online activism, hacktivism, and slacktivism, and take Kony 2012 as a case example.
- **Readings:**
 - Shresthova, S. (2016). "Watch 30 Minute Video on Internet, Become Social Activist?" Kony 2012, Invisible Children, and the Paradoxes of Participatory Politics. In H. Jenkins, S. Shresthova, L. Gamber-Thompson, N. Kliger-Vilenchik, & A. M. Zimmerman (Eds.), *By any media necessary: The new youth activism* (pp. 61-101). New York: New York University Press. doi:<http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/brv15j8p>
 - Zuckerman, E. (2012, March 8). Unpacking Kony 2012 <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2012/03/08/unpacking-kony-2012/>

Session 15:

- In the next three sessions, we focus on the relationship between cultural and political participation. Class 15 uses analogy to talk about this relationship. We draw on Hajer Sharif's TED talk and apply it to online participation and discuss democratic decision-making, participatory intensities, "a more participatory culture."
- Hajer Sharif "How to use family dinner to teach politics" https://www.ted.com/talks/hajer_sharief_how_to_use_family_dinner_to_teach_politics?rss=172BB350-0207
- **Readings:**
 - Jenkins, H., & Carpentier, N. (2013). Theorizing participatory intensities: A conversation about participation and politics. *Convergence*, 19(3), 265-286.
 - Zuckerman, E. (2018, May 30). Six or seven things social media can do for democracy. <https://medium.com/trust-media-and-democracy/six-or-seven-things-social-media-can-do-for-democracy-66cee083b91a>

Session 16:

- How is participation different on different media or different platforms? What is the relationship between online participation and democracy?
- Watching in class: *Black Mirror* “Nosedive” (about social credit).
- **Readings:**
 - Kelty, C. (2012). From participation to power. In A. Delwiche & J.J. Henderson, *The participatory cultures handbook* (pp. 3-9). New York: Routledge <https://recursivepublic.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Kelty-Hdbk-Participation-0.3.pdf>
 - Gerbaudo, P. (2019, Feb 13). One person, one click: is this the way to save democracy?. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/13/digital-political-parties-democratic-m5s>

Session 17:

- In continuation of the discussion from the previous class session, is the rise of "horizontal networks" and "mass self communication" a threat to democracy or does it enhance democracy?
- Watch in class: “Teen Boss” (an episode of *Follow This* on Netflix) OR *The American Meme* (also about social media celebrities, on Netflix).
- **Readings:**
 - Castells, Manuel (2007) "Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society." *International Journal of Communication*, 1(1): 238- 266.
 - Parkin, S. (2019, June 22). The rise of the deepfake and the threat to democracy. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/ng-interactive/2019/jun/22/the-rise-of-the-deepfake-and-the-threat-to-democracy>
- **Unit End Assignment:** Using the readings from this unit (including next lesson's reading), choose 5 of the following terms, and give s short definitions for each term as you understand it. Be prepared to share your definitions in the class. Each definition should be 2-5 sentences long, adding examples is encouraged.
 - Participatory Culture, Participatory Politics, Counter-Power, Horizontal Networks, Mass Self Communication, Participatory Intensities, Paradoxes of Participatory Politics.

Session 18:

- This session is meant for reviewing what we have learnt thus far. We will go over key definitions from the beginning of the semester until now, using the assignment from the previous session. Students have the opportunity to raise questions on any unclear terms. We reexamine the syllabus together and draw a map of terms on the board.

- **Readings:**
 - Jenkins, H. (2016). Youth Voice, Media, and Political Engagement: Introducing the Core Concepts. In H. Jenkins, S. Shresthova, L. Gamber-Thompson, N. Kliger-Vilenchik, & A. M. Zimmerman (Eds.), *By any media necessary: The new youth activism* (pp. 1-60). New York: New York University Press. doi:<http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/brv15j8p>

Unit 5: Participatory Research

This unit looks at participation in research and how community engaged research is different - its challenges and benefits.

Key terms: Participatory Methodology, Participatory Research, Community Engaged Research

Session 19:

- How do we research participatory culture? How were the studies we read thus far conducted? What does participation *in* research look like? How does it change the research itself? What is the importance for including community in research?
- **Readings:**
 - Srinivasan, R. (2006). Indigenous, Ethnic, and Cultural Articulations of New Media, 497 – 518. Retrieved from <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/40p4k54t>
 - Srinivasan, R. (2017). Introduction, In *Whose Global Village. Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World*. NYU Press.

Session 20:

- Taking the VozMob (Mobile Voices) Project as an example. What was the research topic? How was it conducted? What were the main challenges for finishing the project? What were the benefits of using this method? If we were to imagine that this system was designed without including the community, how would the results be different?
- **Readings:**
 - VozMob Project (2011). Mobile Voices: Projecting the Voices of Immigrant Workers by Appropriating Mobile Phones for Popular Communication. In P. M. Napoli & M. Aslama (Eds.), *Communication Research in Action* (pp.177-197). Fordham University Press.

Session 21:

- **In-class debate:** The class comes up with a project idea, and we debate pro and against participatory research based on the articles we have read in unit 5.

- **Readings:**
 - Colom, A. (2013, April 4). How to avoid pitfalls in participatory development. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/apr/04/how-to-design-participatory-projects>
 - Katapally, T. (2019, March 21). Citizen science can help solve our data crisis. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/citizen-science-can-help-solve-our-data-crisis-112669>
- **Unit End Assignment:** You have 2 choices for this assignment: (1) plan a fictional research project and write how you would execute it, would you use participatory methods? Why or why not? (2) pick one of the readings we have done thus far and write about their method, what were the benefits of that method, what worked and what didn't? Did they use participatory methods? What would it have looked like if they had? Your answer should be around 400 words.

Unit 6: Analyzing Participatory Culture

This unit focuses on case studies, some from literature, and some from students. It is an opportunity to integrate more global examples and let students practice analyzing participatory culture and practices themselves. Although we have examples from different countries spread across the syllabus, in this unit we focus on three particular countries. India, for its great ethnic and linguistic diversity, Egypt, for its association with having a “social media revolution”, and China, where the Internet operates in a way that combines control with great innovation.

Key terms: Participatory Culture, Participatory Politics, Humor, Creativity, Civic Engagement, Activism

Session 22:

- Analyzing case studies I: India
- **Readings:**
 - Punathambekar, A. (2012). On the ordinariness of participatory culture. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10. doi:10.3983/twc.2012.0378
 - Punathambekar, A., & Mohan, S. (2017). A Sound Bridge: Listening for the Political in a Digital Age. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 20.
 - **Watch/Listen:** Why This Kolaveri Di <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YR12Z8f1Dh8>

Session 23:

- Analyzing case studies II: Egypt
- **Readings:**
 - Elsayed, Y. (2016). Laughing Through Change: Subversive Humor in Online Videos of Arab Youth. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 20.

- Youssef, B. (2017). America: We Love to Hate You. In *Revolution for Dummies: Laughing Through the Arab Spring* (pp. 29-33). Harper Collins.

Session 24:

- Analyzing case studies III: China
- **Readings:**
 - Szablewicz, M. (2014). The ‘losers’ of China’s Internet: Memes as ‘structures of feeling’ for disillusioned young netizens. *China Information*, 28(2), 259-275.
 - Rauchfleisch, A., & Schäfer, M. S. (2015). Multiple public spheres of Weibo: A typology of forms and potentials of online public spheres in China. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(2), 139-155.

Sessions 25, 26, 27:

- Group Presentations: Students present their own analysis of a case study.
- There is no “Unit End Assignment” for this unit because of the group projects.

Unit 7: The Future of Participatory Culture/Participatory Culture and Our Future

For the last two weeks of class we will talk about the future of participatory culture as a concept, its role in the issues that are of global concern (climate change, discrimination, corporate control), and in potential solutions for those issues.

Key terms: Participatory Methodology, Participatory Research, Community Engaged Research

Session 28:

- What role does participatory culture play in the climate crisis? And in its solutions? We will discuss youth activist movements for climate justice (Greta Thunberg for example)
- **Readings:**
 - Billard, T. J., & Moran, R. E. (2019). Networked political brands: consumption, community and political expression in contemporary brand culture. *Media, Culture & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719867301>
 - Uldam, J., & Askanius, T. (2013). Online civic cultures? Debating climate change activism on YouTube. *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 20.
 - Kearns, F. (2016, July 12). Loss for words: Art, language and the challenges of living on a changing planet. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/loss-for-words-art-language-and-the-challenges-of-living-on-a-changing-planet-61844>

Session 29:

- How global is the Internet? Do we all surf the same Internet? What is different in the experience of the Internet in different countries? (For examples, we can look at censorship in China, or privacy regulation in Europe.)
- **Readings:**
 - Noble, S. U. (2018). Introduction. In *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. NYU Press.
 - Adey, S. (2019, May 15). The Global Internet is Disintegrating, What's Next? *BBC*. www.bbc.com/future/story/20190514-the-global-internet-is-disintegrating-what-comes-next?xtor=AL-%5B73%5D-%5Bpartner%5D-%5Bacento.com.do%5D-%5Blink%5D-%5Bmundo%5D-%5Bbizdev%5D-%5Bisapi%5D

Session 30:

- How do we make “good” Internet? What role can participatory culture play in creating a better world? What do we want the role of the Internet in our lives and politics to look like in 2060? If you look back at your participation diary from the first week, what would you want that to look like in 2060?
- **Readings:**
 - Jenkins, H. (2018). Do we still believe that networked youth can change the world? An interview with Esra’a Al Shafei. And James Gee’s response. *Papeles de Trabajo sobre Cultura, Educación y Desarrollo Humano*, 14(3), 1-10 (spanish version pp. 11-20).
<http://psicologia.udg.edu/PTCEDH/admin/publicacions/14.pdf>
 - Srinivasan, R. (2017). Chapter 5: Taking Back Our Media, In *Whose Global Village. Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World*. NYU Press.
 - Monbiot, G. (2016, Dec 13). The case for despair is made. Now let’s start to get out of the mess we’re in. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/13/despair-mess-commons-transform-society>