**Discovering Online Communities: Challenges and Opportunities**

In the Introduction from *Spreadable Media*, the authors cite a number of examples of digital communities that will help us understand the idea of participatory culture more effectively.

Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013) *Spreadable media: creating value and meaning in a networked culture.* New York; London: New York University Press, c2013.

As we have previously learned, traditional boundaries between producers/consumers, fans/activists, and niche/mainstream content are being called into question. See full conversation on pages 28-29 for more insight.

Sharing online can be done for a variety of reasons: personal, cultural, political and even in some cases, economic. As a result, Jenkins argues that the internet provides a platform for “a range of groups who are strongly motivated to produce and circulate media materials as parts of their ongoing social interactions, among them activists who seek to change public perceptions of an issue of concern to the group” (p. 29).

Some examples as discussed by Jenkins, Ford, and Green in the Introduction from *Spreadable Media*.

* Social/Political/Religious/Humanitarian Groups: Users seek to connect, share and spread awareness about causes and issues.
* Creative Groups: Users seek to bolster or share alternative forms of expression and connect with like-minded creatives.
* Brand Ambassadors: Enthusiasts of particular brands that relate to people’s identities and lifestyles.
* Lifestyle subcultures: Users connect and share information about topics related to their particular activities (i.e., tattooing, bodybuilding, CrossFit training, etc.).
* Entertainment Fandom: Use platforms to organize and respond to developments around particular media of shared interest. (i.e., comic book fans, video game players, etc.).

These are just some of the ways people are making use of digital platforms for engaging and sharing information with other like-minded individuals.

In summary, there are good and bad aspects to digital participatory cultures. For example, it is often cited as good that we see an increase in the number of media producers and content creators available to citizens. In addition, many contend that it also provides individuals with an unprecedented opportunity to share their perspective and/or story as it relates to particular cultural conversations. Digital platforms offer us a remarkable opportunity to generate a platform for our ideas that correspond and/or challenge dominant forms of news and information made available by traditional forms of mass media.

On the other hand, participatory culture does have its critics and drawbacks. For example, Jenkins and his team of researchers suggest that participation is also dependent on access to technology –hence there is a certain amount of economic privilege that comes from the ability to participate. As well, concerns with truth and accuracy of information require greater media literacy for consumers and personal responsibility for its content producers. This is the transition we are living through and participating in.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

**Your Task:**

In order to better understand some current trends in digital communities, review Jenkins’s discussion and examples on pages 28-30. Once you’ve finished, explore the web and provide two examples of online communities that correspond to a range of different interest categories.

When you have completed this chart, answer the response questions below. (A Microsoft Word version is linked at the end of this activity.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Community Type:** | **Digital Community Example** |
| **1. Social/Political Groups** |  |
| **2. Creative/Arts Groups** |  |
| **3. Brand Ambassadors** |  |
| **4. Lifestyle Subcultures** |  |
| **5. Entertainment Fandom** |  |

**Engagement Questions\*:**

1. Which category to you have the *most* familiarity with?
2. What category to you have the *least* familiarity with?
3. Was there anything that surprised you about the kinds of examples you discovered?
4. Based on your discovery of different types of community, what are the strengths and weaknesses of digital communities for today’s participants?
5. Lastly, based on your discovery of different types of community, what do you think is noticeably different about face-to-face communities and today’s digital communities?