

Introduction to Digital Media

Collaborative Digital Media

DGM 711

Lecture 7

Prepared by

Dr. Shereen Kedwany

Reminder



- **Digital media**, and **social media** platforms in particular, are important instruments through which individuals implement active strategies of **identity building**.
- **social media** are one of the “**stages**” from which individuals represent their own **identity** and perform the continuous work of **identity construction**
- The so-called “**digital afterlife**” can create a kind of “**immortality**” in which the **digital identity** of the deceased **survives** his **death** .
- The use of digital media as **social spaces** is **not neutral**, but rather influenced by **social factors** such as **age, gender, ethnicity, or class**, Like “**digital natives**” and “**digital immigrants**”.
- **Algorithms** reinforce **inequalities**.
- The “**algorithmic identity**” based on algorithmic evaluations of our **online behavior**.
- Forms of **sociality** mediated by **digital technologies** have been faced with many **critiques**.



- I. Digital Collaboration .
- II. Culture of Participation .
- III. Examples of Collaborative Digital Media.
- VI. The Dilemma of Participation.
- V. Conclusion.

- **Digital technologies** facilitate the active **participation** of **individuals** in media **production**.
- The **content** generated by internet **users** is critical to the **success** of web **corporations** and has **transformed** traditional mass media.
- **Free software, open-source applications, and Wikipedia** are examples of **digital collaboration** that rely on a **culture of participation**.
- Yet the **value** created through collaborative processes is often appropriated by **digital corporations**.



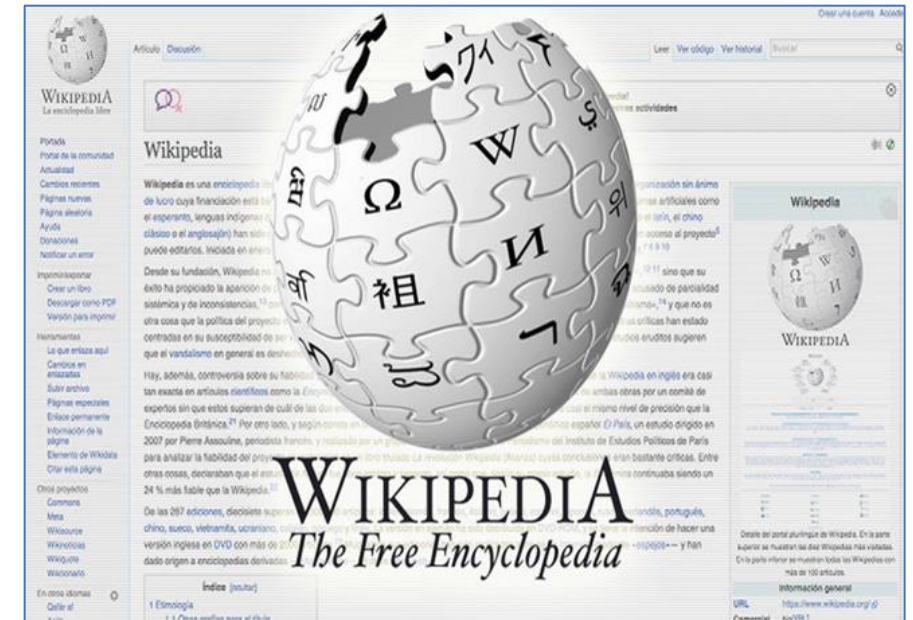
- Among the technological, economic, and organizational transformations of **information society**, an important place is occupied by the **increased user participation** and **active collaboration in content production**.
- This evolution is part of the trend toward broadening **access to information** and using it to **democratize productive and political processes**, a core element of the **information society** project.
- In its most recent incarnations, such expansion has repercussions on all areas of **cultural production** and beyond, from **journalism to science**, from **software production to marketing**.



- Most **digital services** are in fact **interactive** and allow for **public participation** or even rely **fully** on forms of **production** completely entrusted to **users**.
- **Digital platforms** offer possibilities for **users** to become **content producers** or contribute to **assessing** and **improving** the **content** provided by a service.



- **Wikipedia** is written and edited by its users;
- **Instagram** would not exist without the content produced and posted by its public.
- **Hotels** are ranked on **TripAdvisor** thanks to an aggregation of their clients' reviews.



- Tools such as **social media, blogs, video streaming services, wikis**, tagging systems, and resources for information sharing represent the **technical basis of this transformation** which, however, relies on a set of **legal and cultural changes** too (Benkler 2006).
- **Legal systems** have adapted **copyright laws** to facilitate the spread of **self-publishing platforms** such as **YouTube**.



- At the same time, **collaboration** on such platforms would not be possible without the spread of a **culture of participation** that has become an integral part of processes of information and knowledge production.



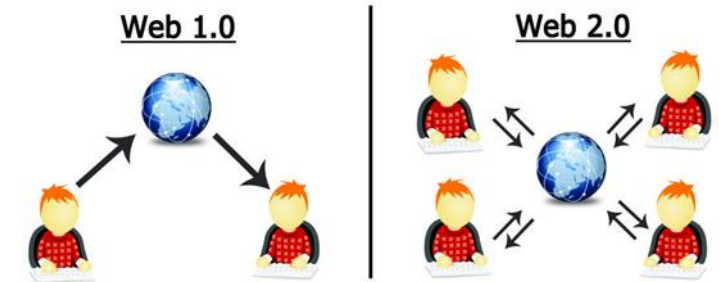
- According to theorists like **Henry Jenkins** (2006), a **culture of participation** via **digital media** is based on the **removal of barriers to the expression of creativity**, on **willingness to share content**, and on the feeling that **one's contribution is valuable to a community**.
- One of the most common definitions of the outcome of these processes is **user-generated content**.



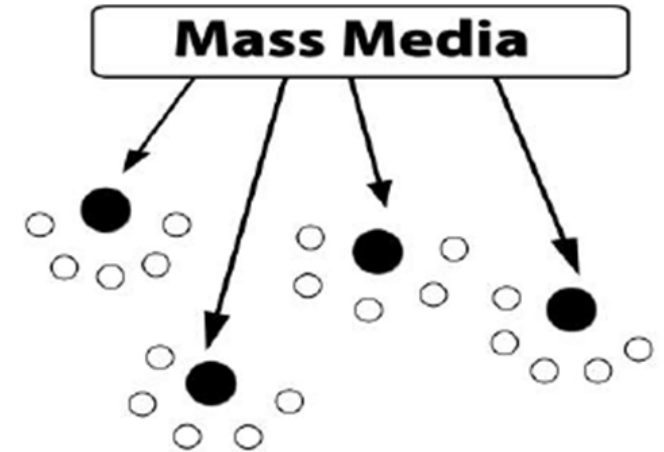
- This is **not fully new**, as **media participation** preceded **digital media**.
- For example, forms of **public participation in media production** have been at the center of **alternative media** such as **community radio stations** or **independent newspapers** for decades, as these **alternative media** saw **public participation** as a chance to establish **democratic forms of communication** and exit the sphere of **commercial mass media**.



- However, **technological and economic changes** related to **digital media** have furthered these forms of interaction with the **media industry**.
- In fact, the phenomenon has exploded since the **2000s**, with the transition from static forms of **one-way digital communication** to more **collaborative web services**, which deeply changed **the media and cultural industry** (Harrison and Barthel 2009).



- The **content** of broadcast media such as **television and press** is **directed** from a **central hub** that produces and sends the message to many peripheral **receivers**.
- The **audience** of broadcast media **can choose** what **content** to read or watch, but **cannot contribute** personally or provide direct **feedback** to content producers.



- In **the early years** of the emergence of the **commercial internet** many online services had **similar features**.
- They widened the range of **choices** available to the **public**, but **did not** provide new possibilities to **become an active part of communication processes**.
- **Today**, however, **digital applications and services** enable a **higher level** of **interaction** between **users** and the **service** itself.
- The **user** assumes a **central role**, as everyone has the opportunity not only to **enjoy** content, but to **create** and **edit** it too.



- Examples of **collaborative applications** are many and very different, but all emphasize **participation, content creation, and information sharing**.
- **Blogs are online diaries or journals**, which compose what has been called the **blogosphere**, that is, an **environment** made up of blogs in communication with each other.
- This is strongly intertwined with **social media, rating systems**, and **microblogging platforms** such as **X(Twitter)**.



- Thanks to **blogging platforms** such as **WordPress**, producing a blog does not require specific technical skills.
- Therefore, **writing for a public** is no longer reserved to **journalists** and other **professional writers**.



- <https://wordpress.com/>

- **Wikis** are **collective writing softwares**, which allow multiple **users** to simultaneously work on the same text or document:
- The best-known example of a wiki-based service is **Wikipedia**, the **non-profit online encyclopedia** written collaboratively by thousands of **users** around the world.



- Commercial services like **YouTube** or **Instagram** allow **users** to **publish, tag, and share** videos and photos, respectively.



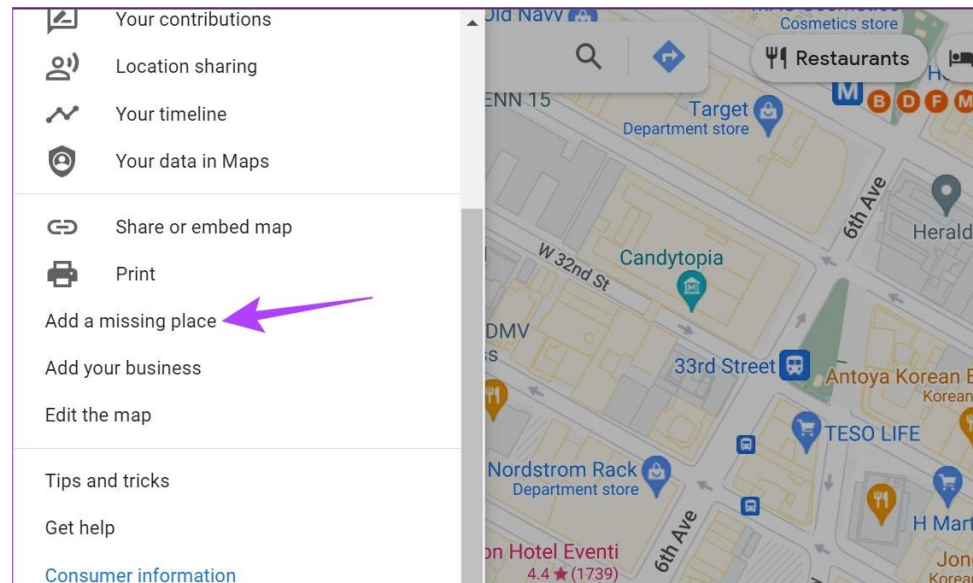
- The **success** of these **services** is due not only to the use of software for online publishing, but also to the **spread of low-cost equipment** such as **cameras**, as well as **software** for **video or photo editing**, which can be installed on most personal **computers and phones**.



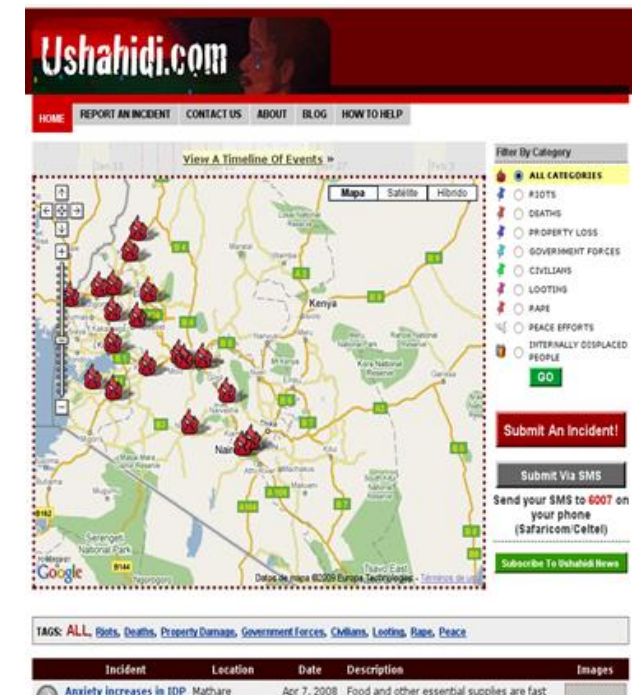
- **Online marketplaces and stores**, such as **eBay** or **Amazon**, use the **information** produced by their **users** to improve their **service**.
- On **Amazon**, customers write **reviews** or **rate** commodities, thus providing valuable **information** which the platform aggregates and uses to present its products to other clients.



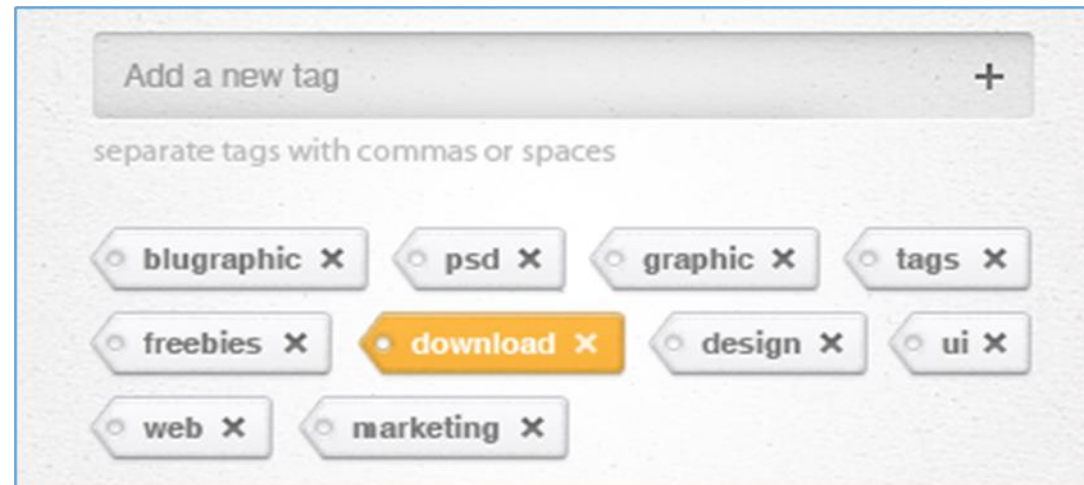
- **Mashup services** are not too different, as they facilitate **the aggregation of information** from different sources to create a site or application.
- A popular example is **Google Maps**, an **interactive map service** to which **users** can add information, thus creating customized maps that **aggregate information** from **users** and other **websites**.



- Another **mashup platform** that takes advantage of the possibilities opened up by the spread of smartphones is **Ushahidi**, a **non-profit** service that creates interactive **maps** by **aggregating information** sent via **email** and **SMS**.
- **Ushahidi** has played a crucial role in events in which **traditional media** were **blocked** or rendered inoperable by **natural events**, as in the case of the **earthquake in Haiti** in **2010**.
- In both cases, **Ushahidi** used the **information** and **evidence** provided by its **users** to create **maps** that anyone could consult and contribute to, making them evolve in real time (Okolloh 2009).



- Through **tagging technologies, users** can associate **content** with a **label** that allows other users (or software) to understand what type of **content** it is, to what it is **connected**, and so on.



- **Rating systems** permit individuals to **vote** on, or rather provide a **numerical rating** to, a certain piece of content.
- This is how **Amazon** works, but many other platforms for **reviews** have integrated **rating systems**.
- Think of how **ratings** are produced for **restaurants** on **Yelp**, or for **university teachers** on **RateMyProfessors.com**.
- **Rating systems** work when many **individuals** assess something, and therefore the overall “**grade**” attributed, for example, to a restaurant on **Yelp** is an **aggregate result** rather than a single **review**.
- The **participation** of many **users** makes **rating systems** more **reliable** and limits the effect of **incorrect or biased reviews**.



- The emergence of **collaborative media** is not just a matter of **technology**.
- Together with the birth of collaborative software and platforms we have witnessed the **emergence of a culture of participation** that leads **consumers** to contribute more directly to **information production**, breaking out from the canonical dynamics of the **cultural industry**.



- Early research on **collaborative media** and **participatory cultures**, especially in the **2000s**, tended to paint these **collective production** processes via **digital media** as forms of **democratization** of the media environment, in line with recurrent promises of the **information society**.
- However, this idealized vision was soon **criticized** for its lack of attention to the underlying **dynamics of power**.
- The very use of the word “**participation**” can be seen as **problematic**.



- In **political theory**, the concept of **participation** implies a **redistribution of power to citizens** through **democratic decision-making** processes and egalitarian social relations .
- If we accept this view, however, we must realize that **digital media users** contribute only **marginally** to **decision-making** processes.
- Indeed, the cultural industry and interactive digital services **are not fully participatory**.



- For example, **authors** who have used **democratic theory** to analyze **collaborative media** have stressed the **difference** between **access, interaction, and participation** (Carpentier 2012).
- In this model, the simple ability to **access information** through **digital media** is **different** from the opportunity to interact to **exchange or produce content**, which happens every time.



- We **rate** on **Yelp** or use a **hashtag** on **Instagram**; instead, forms of **participation** characterize services such as **Wikipedia**, whose users may at least **partially** contribute to deciding about the evolution of the encyclopedia, or decision-making platforms .
- Let us analyze more in detail some of the **organizational and political factors** that determine the **difference** between simple **content sharing** or **production and forms of collaboration** that fulfill the idea of participation in a collective project .



- 1) **Intentionality**: are participants aware of taking part in a partnership and do they share an interest in the collective goals or is the content they create simply aggregated or managed by others?
- 2) **Control of modality**: can users question the rules of participation, or must they accept them passively?
- 3) **Ownership**: who owns the result of a collaboration and derives a profit from it?
- 4) **Accessibility**: who can participate and how?
- 5) **Equality**: are there hierarchies or do all participants have equal weight in decision-making?



- Analyzing processes of **digital sharing and collaboration** according to these variables permits a distinction between **democratic participation** and cases in which the individual and collective work of users is **aggregated** for **profit purposes** by private **companies**, removing **power and decisions** from the **users**.



- The **companies** that manage services like **YouTube, Facebook, or Yelp** tend to define their services as **platforms** not only to describe them from a **technological** point of view, but also to reiterate that these services are **open for users** to **produce and share content** they have created themselves.
- Indeed, the word “**platform**” refers to a **horizontal structure** on which one can stand in order to be heard and seen.
- Through this metaphor services based on **user contributions**, such as **social media** or content sharing services, are explicitly presented as **neutral** and **democratic** spaces that facilitate **horizontal** communication.



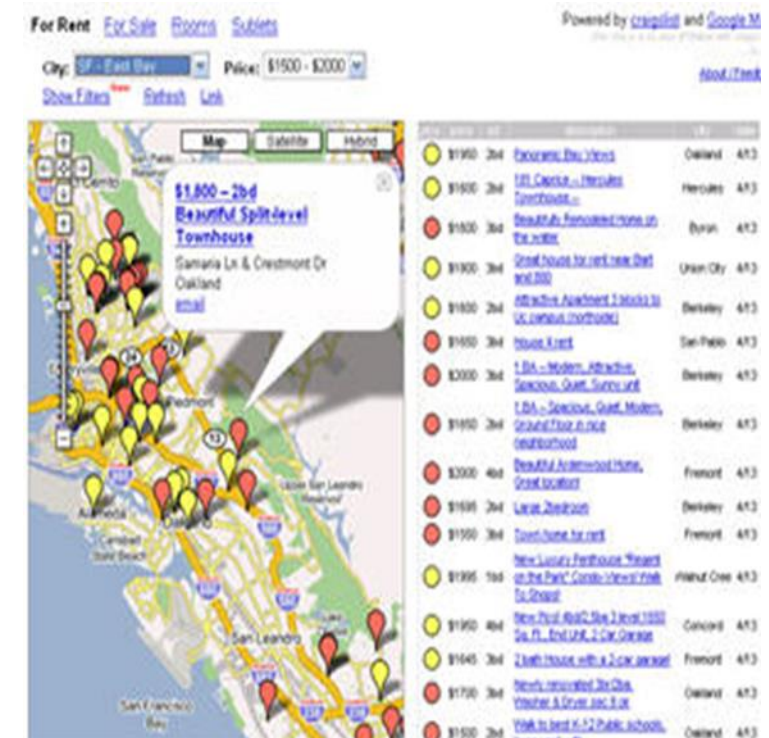
- Creativity and participation in **collective digital production** processes, however, are part of an ideology that is geared toward specific **commercial purposes**.
- In fact, most **social media companies** are based on the exploitation of **user-generated content**, such as **photos** (Instagram), **videos** (YouTube), or **reviews** (Yelp).
- Presenting themselves as **platforms for free expression and communication** is therefore functional to the **economic goals** of the companies that run these services.
- In addition, these services use this rhetoric of **neutrality** to avoid being held responsible for any **illegal content** published by **users**, such as **pirated movies or hate speech** (Gillespie 2010).



- **Platforms** based on **users' collective participation** thus allow the emergence of new forms of collaboration among masses of **users** for **non-commercial** purposes, but the latter can also be used by **corporations** within their **business model**.
- In the case of a **commercial service** such as **YouTube**, **users** may retain **ownership** over a piece of **content** they produced, but the **company** has specific **rights**, for example the ability to **couple** a user-produced video with a **commercial**.



- In a **mashup map** such as **Google Maps**, users of **Android phones** generate the **data** used to update the map and make it relevant for other users, but their contributions are merely **aggregated algorithmically**: **users have little power** over the processes underpinning Google Maps.
- Processes of **data capture** and **surveillance** engendered in **social media** services mean that **users passively participate** in improving a platform but **do not have the power to decide on the purpose** of their role.



- Furthermore, researchers who have focused on other factors, such as **gender, language, or ethnicity**, have questioned the accessibility and equality of **collaborative media**.
- Anyone can write or correct a **Wikipedia** entry or become an editor, but this does **not** mean that the online encyclopedia is perfectly **democratic**.
- On the contrary, it is **gendered** so as to **favor male participation** (Ford and Wajcman 2017).



- For example, the majority of its **editors**, who have veto power on new entries and can ban a participant or remove a piece of content, are **white men**.
- Because of this **imbalance**, **Wikipedia** has proved relatively adverse to such topics as **feminism** (Reagle and Rhue 2011).



- These examples call into question the idea that **open technologies and collaborative media** per se ensure the development of **democratic forms of mediated collaboration**.
- Finally, **participation** entails a tension between the idea of increased **individual autonomy** on the one hand, and belonging to a **collective process** on the other (Kelty 2016).



Conclusion



- **Digital technologies** facilitate the active **participation** of **individuals** in media **production**.
- **Digital collaborations** rely on the **culture of participation**.
- **Digital platforms** offer possibilities for **users** to become **content producers** or contribute to **assessing** and **improving** the **content** provided by a service.
- **Wikipedia, social media and mashup services** are examples of **digital collaboration**.
- **Legal systems** have adapted **copyright laws** to facilitate the spread of **self-publishing platforms** such as **YouTube**.
- **Digital media users** contribute only **marginally** to **decision-making** processes.
- The work of users is **aggregated** for **profit purposes** by private **companies**, removing **power and decisions** from the **users**.



Thank You