
UNIT 13 PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

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13.0 INTRODUCTION

Digital media has played a crucial role in facilitating participation and engagement online. Through the widespread use of digital technologies, individuals can now create, share, and access media content in new and innovative ways, allowing them to connect with others and participate in various online communities. The internet has also made it easier for individuals to access information and share their own perspectives, providing a platform for greater democratic participation and civic engagement. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have created new spaces for dialogue and conversation, allowing individuals to connect with others who share their interests, values, and beliefs.

Moreover, digital media has opened up new opportunities for creative expression and collaboration, as individuals can now easily create and share their own media content, from blog posts and podcasts to videos and online games. This has led to the development of new forms of participatory culture, where individuals are actively involved in creating and disseminating media content rather than just consuming it.

The concept of participatory culture emerged as a response to the rapid changes that have taken place in media and technology over the past few decades. In the 1990s, the rise of digital technologies, such as the internet, personal computers, and mobile phones, fundamentally changed how people interacted with media and each other. As a result of these changes, a growing number of scholars and activists began to argue that traditional models of media consumption were no longer adequate for understanding the role of media in society. Instead, they called for a new model that recognised the

active and participatory role that individuals were now playing in creating and sharing media content.

In this Unit, we shall discuss in detail the participatory culture, the social skills and cultural competencies that individuals can partake in, and its applicability.

13.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- describe the approaches to participation;
- explain participatory culture from the media literacy perspective;
- discuss the social skills and cultural competencies; and
- apply participatory culture in real life and on social media.

13.2 APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATION

There are several approaches to online participation, including:

- **Active participation:** This approach involves actively engaging with others online, whether through comments on social media posts, participating in online forums or discussion groups, or creating and sharing one's own media content.
- **Passive participation:** This approach involves consuming media content online without actively engaging with others or contributing to the conversation. This may include watching videos, reading articles, or browsing social media without commenting or sharing content.
- **Lurking** involves observing or reading online content without actively participating or contributing to the conversation. While this approach may not involve active engagement, it can still be a valuable form of online participation as it allows individuals to learn and gather information.
- **Collaborative participation:** This approach involves actively collaborating online to create and share media content. This may include working on group projects, contributing to open-source software development, or participating in crowdsourcing initiatives.
- **Critical participation:** This approach involves engaging with media content online critically and reflectively. This may involve questioning the validity of information, examining biases or assumptions, or analysing media content's social, cultural, or political implications.

These approaches to online participation are not mutually exclusive, and individuals may engage in multiple forms of participation depending on their interests and goals. By understanding these approaches, individuals can develop a more nuanced and informed approach to online participation that allows them to engage in meaningful and impactful ways.

Therefore, online participatory media enables more people in different countries to communicate with each other more easily and directly than ever before, without depending on governments or professional media to enable and mediate this conversation. Such cross-border conversations can be channelised to bridge significant cultural and digital divides. The newness of online participatory media is its ability to perform the following functions:

- ***Fostering community and social connections:*** Online participatory media provides individuals with new ways to connect with others who share similar interests and values and can help foster a sense of community and belonging. Participatory media platforms such as social media networks, forums, and online games allow individuals to interact with each other in real-time, share information and resources, and collaborate on projects and initiatives.
- ***Facilitating learning and skill development:*** Online participatory media allows individuals to learn new skills and knowledge and develop their existing skills and knowledge in new and innovative ways. Participatory media platforms such as online tutorials, wikis, and MOOCs (massive open online courses) allow individuals to access a wealth of educational resources and to engage in self-directed learning.
- ***Enabling creative expression and innovation:*** Online participatory media provides individuals with new ways to express themselves creatively and to share their ideas and perspectives with a wider audience. Participatory media platforms such as blogs, podcasts, and video-sharing sites allow individuals to create and share their own media content and collaborate with others to produce new and innovative forms of media.
- ***Promoting civic engagement and activism:*** Online participatory media provides individuals with new ways to engage in civic and political activism and to mobilise others around social and political issues. Participatory media platforms such as online petitions, social media campaigns, and citizen journalism sites allow individuals to voice their opinions and concerns and to participate in public discourse in new and innovative ways.
- ***Promoting economic and entrepreneurial opportunities:*** Online participatory media provides individuals with new opportunities to participate in the economy and to develop their own businesses and entrepreneurial ventures. Participatory media platforms such as online marketplaces, crowdfunding sites, and e-commerce platforms allow individuals to sell goods and services, raise funds for projects, and develop their own online businesses.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. What are the approaches to participation?

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2. Discuss the functions of online participatory media.

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13.3 HENRY JENKINS' PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Henry Jenkins, a media scholar and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), was one of the leading figures in developing the concept of participatory culture. In his 2006 book, "Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide," Jenkins argued that participatory culture was emerging as a result of the convergence of traditional and new media forms and that it represented a major shift in the way that media was produced, distributed, and consumed.

Since then, the concept of participatory culture has become widely recognised and has been used to describe a range of social, cultural, and political phenomena, from fan fiction and remix culture to online activism and citizen journalism.

According to Jenkins et al. (2009), "participatory culture is emerging as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways."

Participatory culture is often used to discuss the apparent link between more accessible digital technologies, user-generated content, and some shift in the power relations between media industries and their consumers. The new media environment is in the process of creating a new model in which information flows both ways. An essential difference between traditional and interactive participatory media is how information flows. Interactive, participatory media transforms a one-way conversation between media and "audience" into a conversation with an "information community."

The notion of participatory culture, as per Jenkins et al. (2009), stems from three core gaps:

1. Participation Gap (unequal access to opportunities, experiences, skills and knowledge)
2. Transparency Problem (difficulty to recognise how media shapes their perception)
3. Ethics Challenge (ethics to communicate and participate responsibly in online media spaces)

Therefore, the role of media education and literacy becomes imperative to make online media a dynamic environment to be engaged with up to its full

potential. Moreover, the participatory culture shifts the focus on literacy from individual expression to community involvement, especially among young people.

13.3.1 Sub-Genres of Participation

Jenkins et al. (2009) initiated the idea of participatory culture amongst young people in the context of online media from a media literacy perspective. As per Jenkins et al. (2009), young people play the role of consumers and producers in online media spaces. Ito et al. (2009) illustrate that youth participate in online media spaces for two primary purposes- driven and interest-driven.

In this context, Ito et al. (2009) identify three sub-genres of participation: hanging out (friendship-driven participation), messing around (acquiring a new skill online) and geeking out (intensive and focused participation after acquiring the skill online; hence, learning).

These sub-genres are:

1. **"Hanging Out"**: This sub-genre of participation refers to the social and recreational activities that individuals engage in online, such as chatting with friends, sharing media content, and participating in online communities. Hanging out online allows individuals to connect with others who share similar interests and to develop social networks and relationships.
2. **"Messing Around"**: This sub-genre of participation refers to the playful and exploratory activities that individuals engage in online, such as tinkering with digital media tools and experimenting with different forms of creative expression. Messing online allows individuals to develop their skills and knowledge in a fun and low-stakes environment and learn through trial and error.
3. **"Geeking Out"**: This sub-genre of participation refers to the more focused and intensive activities that individuals engage in online, such as pursuing a particular interest or passion, collaborating on a project, or developing expertise in a particular area. Geeking out online allows individuals to develop their skills and knowledge in a more formal and structured way and to participate in online communities and networks of practice.

13.3.2 Forms of Participatory Culture

There are four forms of participatory culture:

1. **Affiliations**: This refers to how individuals use online participatory media to connect with others who share similar interests, goals, and values. The development of social networks, online communities, and other forms of collective identity characterises affiliations.
2. **Expressions**: This refers to how individuals use online participatory media to express themselves creatively through the creation and sharing of media content such as blogs, videos, podcasts, and digital art.
3. **Collaborative Problem-Solving**: This refers to how individuals use online participatory media to solve problems or create new knowledge

through crowdsourcing, collective intelligence, and peer production.

4. **Circulations:** This refers to how individuals use online participatory media to share and distribute media content, ideas, and information with others through activities such as blogging, microblogging, social networking, and other forms of digital communication. Circulations involve the creation of new forms of media and the dissemination of content across a range of different platforms and channels.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. What is participatory culture?

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2. What are the four forms of participatory culture?

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13.4 NEW MEDIA LITERACIES' (NML) FRAMEWORK

Jenkins et al. (2009) have identified 11 new media literacies comprehensively covering social skills and cultural competencies amongst young people to participate in online media spaces fully. The new media literacies' framework is based on traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills taught in the classroom and is developed through collaborations and networking. Therefore, participatory culture combines traditional literacy skills (how to search for information, evaluate the credibility of information, synthesise and make sense of information, and make a decision and action) and new media literacy (social skills or methods of interaction with larger communities).

The core media literacy skills are as follows:

1. **Play: the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving**

This skill involves a willingness to take risks, try new things, and learn through trial and error. In a participatory culture, play can take many different forms, such as experimenting with different digital tools and technologies, exploring new genres of media content, or developing creative solutions to complex problems. Through play, individuals can

develop their creativity, problem-solving abilities, and sense of agency as they learn to navigate and shape their environments in new and innovative ways.

One example of play in Jenkins' participatory culture is the phenomenon of fan fiction. Fan fiction is when fans of a particular TV show, movie, book, or video game create their own stories and characters based on the original source material. Fan fiction is a form of play because it allows individuals to engage with their favourite media playfully and creatively. Fans can exercise their imagination and develop their storytelling skills by writing their own stories and exploring new narratives and characters. In addition to fan fiction, other examples of play in participatory culture include online games, memes, and other forms of creative expression that allow individuals to experiment, tinker, and explore in a playful and low-stakes environment.

2. Simulation: the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes

In other words, simulation involves creating virtual representations of real-world phenomena, such as simulations of weather patterns, economic systems, or social interactions. Simulation is an important skill in participatory culture because it allows individuals to experiment with complex systems and explore the consequences of different actions and decisions. For example, simulations of historical events or political processes can help individuals better understand how these systems work and how they might be improved. Similarly, simulations of scientific phenomena can help individuals learn about the natural world and develop scientific literacy.

In participatory culture, simulation often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as simulation software or virtual reality environments. However, simulation can also take other forms, such as role-playing games, model building, or other forms of imaginative play that allow individuals to simulate real-world processes and systems creatively and engagingly.

3. Performance: the ability to adopt alternative identities for improvisation and discovery

Performance involves taking on different roles and engaging in different forms of self-presentation. For example, individuals might adopt different personas or avatars in online gaming communities or social media platforms or create and share videos or other media content that showcase their creative talents.

Performance is an important skill in participatory culture because it allows individuals to explore different aspects of their identity and experiment with varying forms of self-expression. Individuals can develop their empathy, creativity, and understanding of different perspectives and experiences by taking on alternative identities or exploring different social contexts.

In participatory culture, performance often involves using digital tools

and technologies, such as video editing software or social media platforms. However, performance can also take other forms, such as theatre, music, or other forms of creative expression, that allow individuals to engage in different forms of self-presentation and explore different aspects of their identity.

4. Appropriation: the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content

It refers to the ability to meaningfully remix, reuse, or repurpose existing media content and cultural artefacts to create something new. Appropriation involves taking existing cultural artefacts, such as music, images, or video, and creatively reworking them to produce something new and original. For example, individuals might create mashup videos that combine footage from different movies or TV shows to create a new narrative or meaning, or they might remix songs to create a new musical composition.

Appropriation is important in participatory culture because it allows individuals to engage with and contribute to the broader cultural landscape. By remixing and repurposing existing content, individuals can add their own unique perspectives and interpretations to the cultural discourse while also building upon the work of others.

In participatory culture, appropriation often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as editing software or online sharing platforms. However, appropriation can also take other forms, such as collage, graffiti, or other forms of creative expression that involve remixing and repurposing existing materials.

5. Multitasking: the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus onto salient details on an ad hoc basis

Multitasking involves the ability to manage and process multiple forms of information and media content, such as text messages, social media notifications, video streams, and audio content, all at the same time. This skill requires individuals to switch rapidly between different forms of content and effectively manage their attention and focus.

Multitasking is an important skill in participatory culture because it allows individuals to effectively engage with and participate in the vast array of online media content and information. By mastering the skill of multitasking, individuals can stay up-to-date on current events, communicate with others, and consume a wide range of media content, all while maintaining a high level of productivity.

In participatory culture, multitasking often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as multiple screens, mobile devices, and software applications, that enable individuals to efficiently navigate and process multiple streams of information and media content.

6. Distributed Cognition: The ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand our mental capacities.

It refers to the ability to share and distribute cognitive tasks across individuals and technologies to achieve a common goal. Distributed

cognition involves using technology and social networks to distribute and share cognitive tasks and resources across individuals and groups. For example, individuals might collaborate on a shared document or project using online tools such as Google Docs or participate in online communities or social networks to share ideas and knowledge with others.

Distributed cognition is an important skill in participatory culture because it enables individuals to tap into the collective intelligence and knowledge of a larger network or community. By sharing cognitive tasks and resources, individuals can achieve more complex and ambitious goals than they could accomplish alone.

In participatory culture, distributed cognition often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as collaborative platforms, social media networks, and online communities. However, distributed cognition can also take other forms, such as face-to-face collaborations and group projects that rely on shared cognitive resources and knowledge.

7. Collective Intelligence: the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others towards a common goal

Collective intelligence involves using technology and social networks to harness the collective knowledge and expertise of a larger group or community. For example, individuals might collaborate on a shared document or project using online tools such as Google Docs or participate in online communities or social networks to share ideas and knowledge with others.

Collective intelligence is important in participatory culture because it enables individuals to tap into a larger network or community's diverse perspectives, skills, and knowledge. By pooling resources and knowledge, individuals can solve more complex and difficult problems than they can on their own.

In participatory culture, collective intelligence often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as collaborative platforms, social media networks, and online communities. However, collective intelligence can also take other forms, such as face-to-face collaborations and group projects that rely on shared knowledge and expertise.

8. Judgment: the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources

It refers to the ability to evaluate and critically assess the quality, accuracy, and credibility of information and media content. Judgment involves using critical thinking skills to assess the reliability and validity of information and media content. This includes evaluating sources, assessing bias, and fact-checking information before accepting it as true. Individuals with strong judgment skills can distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information. They can assess the accuracy and credibility of media content before sharing it with others.

Judgment is an important skill in participatory culture because of the vast amount of information and media content that is available online. With

so much information and media content being produced and shared daily, individuals must be able to critically assess and evaluate the quality and accuracy of this content to avoid spreading misinformation or false information.

In participatory culture, judgment often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as fact-checking websites and online research tools. However, the judgment also relies on strong critical thinking skills and a healthy dose of scepticism to ensure that individuals can make informed decisions and evaluate information and media content responsibly and effectively.

9. Transmedia Navigation: the ability to deal with the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities

Transmedia navigation involves moving fluidly across different media platforms, such as social media networks, video-sharing sites, and online communities, and understanding how information is presented and consumed across these different platforms. This includes following and understanding multiplatform storytelling, identifying and navigating different distribution channels, and interpreting and evaluating information across different media formats.

Transmedia navigation is an important skill in participatory culture because of the vast amount of information and media content that is available across different platforms and formats. With so many different media sources and channels available, it is critical that individuals can navigate and make sense of this information coherently and effectively.

In participatory culture, transmedia navigation often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as social media monitoring tools and content aggregation platforms. However, transmedia navigation also relies on strong media literacy skills and an understanding of how media content is created, distributed, and consumed across different platforms and formats.

10. Networking: the ability to search for, synthesise, and disseminate information

It refers to the ability to build and maintain social connections and communities online. Networking involves connecting with others, building relationships, and collaborating with people across different geographical and cultural boundaries. This includes the ability to use social media platforms and online communities to establish and maintain connections and to communicate and collaborate with others on shared interests and goals.

Networking is an important skill in participatory culture because of the collaborative and social nature of many online communities and platforms. With the ability to connect with others online, individuals can participate in global conversations, share their ideas and perspectives, and work together to achieve common goals.

In participatory culture, networking often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as social media platforms and online communication

tools. However, networking also relies on strong interpersonal skills and building and maintaining meaningful relationships with others. By developing strong networking skills, individuals can build supportive and productive communities online and contribute to the growth and development of a participatory culture.

11. Negotiation: the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative sets of norms

Negotiation involves engaging in constructive dialogue, listening to other's perspectives, and working towards finding solutions that benefit all parties involved. This can involve negotiating differences in opinion or values and finding ways to reconcile conflicting interests.

Negotiation is an important skill in participatory culture because of the collaborative and cooperative nature of many online communities and platforms. With the ability to negotiate effectively, individuals can work together to achieve common goals, share resources and knowledge, and build sustainable and productive relationships.

In participatory culture, negotiation often involves using digital tools and technologies, such as online forums, chat rooms, and video conferencing. However, negotiation also relies on strong interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate effectively with others. By developing strong negotiation skills, individuals can contribute to the growth and development of participatory culture and work towards building more inclusive and equitable communities online.

Therefore, as highlighted by Jenkins et al. (2009), the core media literacy skills combine social skills and cultural competencies in and out of school for young people to adapt and learn virtually about the dynamic environment through the available tools. Apart from school, parents become another agency that can help shape young people's relationships with online tools for enhancing their mental capacities to be media and information-literate, from communication to effective participation in online media spaces.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. Discuss the concept of play from the NML framework.

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2. What do you understand by Collective Intelligence?

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13.5 APPLICABILITY OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

13.5.1 In Real Life

Participatory culture has many practical applications in real life, both online and offline. Examples of some domains are:

1. **Civic engagement:** Participatory culture can be applied to civic engagement by encouraging individuals to actively participate in their communities and have a voice in the decisions that affect them. Through online platforms and tools, individuals can engage in public discussions, participate in online petitions, and collaborate with others to effect change in their communities.
2. **Education:** Participatory culture can be used to enhance learning by promoting active and collaborative learning. Teachers can encourage students to use digital tools and technologies to create and share their own media, engage in online discussions, and collaborate with their peers.
3. **Entertainment:** Participatory culture can be applied to entertainment by allowing individuals to engage with and contribute to their favourite media and cultural productions. Fans can participate in online forums, create fan art, and remix existing media to create their own content.
4. **Business:** Participatory culture can be applied to business by allowing customers to engage with brands and products, provide feedback, and collaborate on product development. Brands can leverage online communities and platforms to engage with customers, build loyalty, and develop new products and services.

Participatory culture can be applied in many different contexts and industries to promote collaboration, creativity, and community building. By encouraging individuals to participate in their communities actively and to have a voice in the decisions that affect them, participatory culture can help build more inclusive and equitable societies.

13.5.2 On Social Media

Participatory culture has significant applicability in social media, as social media platforms are built upon user participation and collaboration

principles. Here are some examples of how participatory culture can be applied in social media:

- **User-generated content:** Participatory culture in social media involves encouraging users to create and share their own content. Social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram allow users to create and share videos, images, and other forms of media. By allowing users to create their own content, social media platforms promote creativity and collaboration and give users a sense of ownership and agency.
- **Collaborative communities:** Participatory culture in social media also involves the creation of collaborative communities where users can connect with others who share similar interests or goals. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter allow users to join groups, follow hashtags, and engage in public discussions. By creating collaborative communities, social media platforms foster a sense of belonging and provide opportunities for users to collaborate and work together.
- **User feedback:** Participatory culture in social media also allows users to provide feedback on products, services, and content. Social media platforms like Yelp and TripAdvisor allow users to leave reviews and ratings for businesses and services. In contrast, YouTube and Instagram allow users to leave comments and feedback on videos and images. By providing a platform for user feedback, social media platforms promote transparency and accountability and give users a sense of agency and influence.
- **Citizen journalism:** Participatory culture in social media also involves citizen journalism, where users can report news and events in real time. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have been used to report on breaking news and events and have provided a platform for citizen journalists to share their perspectives and experiences. By allowing users to participate in news reporting, social media platforms promote citizen engagement and empower individuals to have a voice in the public sphere.

Therefore, participatory culture has significant applicability in social media and can promote collaboration, creativity, and community building in online spaces. By encouraging users to participate and engage with one another, social media platforms can help build more inclusive and equitable societies.

13.6 LET US SUM UP

We have learned in this Unit that the scope for new media to be more participatory arose from its apparent structural differences from the forms of mass communication that had been predominant media models in 20th-century societies. The rise of interactive media platforms has made it possible for untrained news professionals to be more directly engaged with news events than ever before.

We also learned that online space is both a space of participation on the one hand and a space for commodification. Lastly, participatory culture can promote empowerment, collaboration, diversity, learning, and civic engagement. By encouraging individuals to participate in creating and disseminating content actively, participatory culture can help build more inclusive, equitable, and democratic societies.

13.7 KEYWORDS

Participatory Culture: Participatory culture is emerging as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways

New Media Literacies' (NML) Framework: The new media literacies' framework is based on traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills taught in the classroom and is developed through collaborations and networking.

13.8 FURTHER READINGS

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13.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. The approaches to participation are:
 - Active participation
 - Passive participation
 - Lurking
 - Collaborative participation
 - Critical participation
2. Functions of online participatory media:
 - Fostering community and social connections
 - Facilitating learning and skill development
 - Enabling creative expression and innovation
 - Promoting civic engagement and activism
 - Promoting economic and entrepreneurial opportunities

Check Your Progress 2

1. According to Jenkins et al. (2009), “participatory culture is emerging as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways.”
2. There are four forms of participatory culture:
 - **Affiliations** – forming formal and informal memberships in online communities centred around various forms of online media such as Friendster, Facebook, message boards, metagaming, game clans, etc.
 - **Expressions** – producing new forms such as digital sampling, skinning and modding, fan videomaking, fan fiction writing, zines, mash-ups, etc.
 - **Collaborative Problem-Solving** – working in formal and informal teams to complete tasks and develop new knowledge through Wikipedia, alternative reality gaming, spoiling, etc.
 - **Circulations** – shaping the flow of media through podcasting and blogging.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Play as a skill involves a willingness to take risks, try new things, and learn through trial and error. In a participatory culture, play can take many forms, such as experimenting with different digital tools and technologies, exploring new genres of media content, or developing creative solutions to complex problems. Through play, individuals can

develop their creativity, problem-solving abilities, and sense of agency as they learn to navigate and shape their environments in new and innovative ways.

2. Collective intelligence involves using technology and social networks to harness the collective knowledge and expertise of a larger group or community. For example, individuals might collaborate on a shared document or project using online tools such as Google Docs or participate in online communities or social networks to share ideas and knowledge with others.

