

**Culture in a digital context
Questioning practices, categories and methods**

**International Symposium
6, 7 and 8 December 2023
University Sorbonne Paris Nord, Condorcet Campus
Centre Georges Pompidou**

<https://crn.sciencesconf.org>

[The Department of Studies, Foresight, Statistics and Documentation](#) (under the ministry of Culture), the Université Sorbonne Paris Nord ([EXPERICE](#) team), and the Centre Georges Pompidou are joining forces to organize a three-day international symposium (two scientific days and one professional day), which will be held in Paris on 6, 7 and 8 December 2023.

Even before the advent of the internet and digital technology, the rise of audiovisual consumption in the home and spread of increasingly eclectic tastes were already prompting us to rethink how we conceive of audiences. The expansion of information and communication technologies and especially of the internet have only amplified this shift: the digital transformation has allowed for works to be digitized and shared on the website of cultural institutions (museums, theaters, libraries, etc.). It has also increased the range of online offerings, which grew exponentially during the recent health crisis. Therefore, is it accurate to call both those who frequent cultural institutions in person and those who consult their offerings online as “audiences”? Attempts to define cultural contents that are marked by hybridization processes and the blurring of levels of legitimacy makes it difficult to identify what is a cultural practice, an informational practice, entertainment or a form of sociability, and thus further complicates this issue. How can we define what constitutes a digital cultural practice?

The fact that the defining traits of culture have been blurred in the digital era raises questions for researchers, individuals, and institutional actors alike. On the one hand, the way surveys are designed raises questions about how researchers view digital practices and the consumption of cultural goods in terms of categories of thought. But should we continue to examine digital cultural practices using categories of thought that were elaborated before the digital age? What has happened, for example, to the consumption of movies, television, videos, and music? In addition to the platforms used to consume content (computers, tablets, television sets, telephones, etc.), it is also necessary to consider the temporality of consumption (live versus streaming, e.g.) and the modalities of access (free or paid hosting platforms, social networks, etc.). As all these elements come into play, they generate multiple forms of consumption that make it difficult to comprehend cultural behaviors using the traditional categories — especially since these practices appear at the intersection between the formats designed and prescribed by the devices and platforms, and the varied or even subversive uses that individuals may make of them.

On the other hand, what about how users perceive and represent their cultural practices online? To what extent do different access modalities modify individual representations and lead users to (dis)qualify certain behaviors, to categorize them as cultural or informational, or not? We will look at the values that individuals attribute to their practices, as well as the ranking criteria, categories, levels of legitimacy and processes of distinction that they may use in different contexts. In particular, how are the digital practices of adolescents and children influenced by the normative effects of peer pressure, for example, and how do they relate to forms of subjectivation and the construction of individuality? This conference will focus on research that considers the practical reasoning and meaning that individuals attribute to their digital activities in order to shed light on their categories of thought and the practical processes at work.

Finally, from the point of view of institutional actors, what perspectives and definitions of digital practices can be identified through the discourse and mechanisms of cultural policy? How do institutions categorize individuals' digital practices? Which ones do they encourage or discourage? What hierarchies are these recommendations based on? How do they take into account cultural behaviors and expectations? Particular attention will be paid to work that analyzes public policies aimed at young people, without nonetheless excluding other population groups.

The objective of this international symposium will be to bring together, discuss, and make connections between different studies conducted in the various disciplines of the human and social sciences: sociology, anthropology, ethnology, information and communication science, history, philosophy, political science, economics, etc. Interdisciplinary perspectives and international comparisons are welcome. In particular, we would like to receive papers dealing with one or more of the four themes outlined below:

1. Circulation and discoverability of digital cultural content

Online cultural offerings are subject to multiple forms of reception, appropriation, re-appropriation, commentary, criticism, and assessment; they may even become the source material for new creations. How can we understand the chains of interactions that are thus formed? What forms of sociability accompany them? How should we describe what they produce? Attention will be paid to work that examines how the same cultural content circulates and is transformed through its successive uses, as well as the methodological approaches used to capture and analyze these trajectories. The circulation of cultural contents cuts across both digital and face-to-face spaces, which raises questions about the socially located accessibility of such contents and the networks of sociability that are involved.

In this context, studies on "discoverability" — which look at how likely it is for a given content to be found by a person who was not specifically looking for it, amidst a wide array of other digital cultural contents — are particularly interesting. The notion of serendipity has increasingly been mobilized to describe digital practices and internet browsing. No longer seen as merely the result of chance, serendipity appears linked to the social dispositions and skills of individuals whose development and characteristics would benefit from being further studied. In addition, how do changes in the production and distribution of cultural goods (music, movies, television shows, etc.) affect consumption, discovery, and accessibility? We must examine the role of commercial platforms and algorithms: when combined with the use of social networks, to what extent do the latter lead to social enclaves, greater conformity with the tastes of one's peer group, or on the contrary, the discovery of new contents? Here again, methodological questions will be key to addressing these questions at both the level of user data analysis and algorithms, as well as at the level of access and data quality.

2. Social, gender- and age-based differences in the practices, uses, and appropriation of digital cultural content

While digital technologies may have transformed cultural practices, generational divides and social cleavages are still quite relevant when looking at the types of content consulted, and what sort of logic dictates their accumulation. The surveys conducted during the lockdown period of the pandemic revealed an increase in the digital practices (viewing videos online, playing video games, using social networks) of seniors and working-class individuals, populations who had been less likely to engage in these activities in the past. Nevertheless, is this a temporary response to modified work contexts and a lack of opportunities for in-person socialization, or is it a more permanent change? Did this period really allow for reticent individuals to be socialized to digital cultural practices? In particular, we are interested in the work on the relationships that older adults — whose cultural outings are more likely to be limited due to mobility deficits — develop with regard to digital culture. Beyond practices, the question of how modalities of use and appropriation change according to age, social origin, and gender remains pertinent, and particular attention will be paid to qualitative and comprehensive studies of these processes. The particular case of book reading is also interesting, given the weak popularity of digital books and the fact that many readers remain attached to the physical book object. What are the different ways that books are used, depending on who is reading them and the nature of their digital practices?

Finally, we will look at how different media devices (such as social networks and platforms) are represented and used depending on an individual's social class, gender, age and generational cohort. How do these representations contribute to family or peer-to-peer transmission, and what effects do they have on the use or rejection of devices by children and adolescents? The benefits, gains, or potential for harm projected onto these devices (in terms of relationship to the world, social integration, trustworthiness of information, etc.) generate differentiated modes of reception and even cleavages in terms of use: their investigation will shed light on both digital sociability and individual investments. In addition, to what extent do the different devices produce and maintain, via the content they disseminate (videos, photos, articles, etc.) social, gender, age and generational stereotypes, through various forms such as humor, subversion, advocacy, etc.?

3. The experience of the amateur and digital self-education

As many studies have shown, amateur cultural practices (in music, dance, photography, video, visual arts, writing, etc.) have benefited from the digitization of production and dissemination tools, leading to an increase in the number of practitioners and the greater visibility of amateur productions. While all amateur practices are of interest to us, the creation of online videos and podcasts, whose growth has only increased in recent years, is a particularly fruitful avenue for research. In what ways does the creation of online videos and podcasts renew the amateur experience? How are these productions made? What resources, models, and forms of expression do they use? Who are these amateurs and how do they negotiate with platforms and other intermediaries to spotlight their creations? Here again, while digital technology may blur the distinction between amateurs and professionals, we will not focus on the professionalization of amateurs, which has already been discussed by many. Instead, we will concentrate on non-professional amateurs and their practices.

Moreover, the amateur experience can also be analyzed by looking at the consumption of videos that transmit knowledge and know-how, and thus constitute a form of online self-education. This self-education occurs in many ways, ranging from the acquisition of cultural knowledge (of historical events, science, art history, etc.), to the development of artistic skills (learning how to play a musical instrument,

dance, draw, paint, or sculpt, for instance) or technical skills to in turn create and diffuse more digital content (video games, social media content, etc.). How are these videos consumed? How does this consumption relate to the more traditional forms of artistic and cultural socialization? To what extent is it similar to, or exhibit linkages with auto-didactic approaches such as those that are normally observed in libraries and media libraries? Which channels are preferred, and by whom? To what outcomes do these lead? Particular attention will be paid to the development of artistic practices via the internet, and the extent to which lockdown periods increased the use and range of digital resources in a durable manner.

Finally, the policies of the platforms that host these types of videos is an important area of investigation. How do platforms position themselves in a competitive market? Which populations do they target both as producers and consumers of videos? In a recreational context, some platforms can also offer certifications, for example MOOCs in art history: who are the targeted and real users of such certifications, and what is objective do they serve?

4. Public policies and cultural institutions

We will also look at cultural policies and how they exploit new online possibilities and can integrate the changes in access to cultural content that are often driven by private platforms and actors. Attention will be paid to the elaboration within public policies of online cultural offerings , as well as to the inherent modalities of such offerings when taking into account (or not) individual practices. In addition, these devices generate data (information, algorithms) whose collection, retrieval, access and scientific and commercial uses are not clearly defined. What economic and legal models can be identified? What analyses are performed? We welcome international comparisons on these topics.

Cultural institutions (museums, monuments, theater, live performance venues, libraries) are increasingly investing in the development of online resources and offerings; such efforts expanded during the pandemic as mentioned above and raise many questions about how these offerings are received. If consulting these digital cultural resources has replaced a number of physical practices during the pandemic, will these changes become permanent and lead establishments to adapt accordingly? Areas of investigation can examine both the relationships between cultural outings and the online offerings of cultural facilities (from segmentation to cumulation, from competition to substitution or complementarity), and the different values that individuals attribute to these practices. Attention can also be paid to the prescriptions surrounding cultural excursions — issued by institutional or private intermediaries, by mediators who have become influencers and vice versa, by public-private partnership communication strategies — and their effects.

The symposium invites researchers to submit papers that connect theoretical and epistemological reflections with qualitative and/or quantitative field data and which relate to one or more of the four subjects outlined above.

Papers may be submitted in either English or French, should be **500 words maximum** and specify the theoretical framework and data mobilized.

The proposals of communications **are to be deposited** [on the Sciencesconf webpage](#).

Keywords: cultural participation – digital – uses of cultural content – discoverability – amateurs – publics – social networks – cultural institutions – algorithms – platforms

Schedule

- Call for papers is published: January 2023
- Deadline for submitting proposals: **15 April 2023**
- Proposals are selected: May 2023
- Conference takes place: 6, 7, and 8 December 2023

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