

THTR 467: Going Viral: Performance for New Media

Section: 62637

Units: 2.0

Spring 2025 | Mondays from 2pm-3:50pm

Location: SHR 105

Instructor: Dr. Justin Key

Office Hours: *Hours available upon request*

Contact Info: justindk@usc.edu / (310) 867-4298 m.*

* If non-emergency, please text before calling.

Course Description

This course explores the business, performance, and psychology of going viral in the ever-evolving landscape of 21st-century social media, focusing on creating and analyzing content for Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok while introducing students to successful creatives who have turned viral fame into profitable and sustainable careers.

Course Objectives

In an era dominated by social media, this course equips students with the tools and insights needed to thrive in the digital landscape by exploring the science and psychology of virality, mastering content creation for Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, YouTube, and analyzing successful viral sensations. Through guest lectures and case studies from industry creatives who have turned viral fame into sustainable careers, students will gain real-world insights and inspiration. Practical skills will be developed through video exercises, writing assignments, and performance tasks, culminating in creating original short-form content tailored for new media platforms.

Learning Objectives

By the end of your time with me, you should be able to:

- Understand the science and psychology behind viral content and apply these principles to your own work.
- Create and analyze content specifically for Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok, leveraging each platform's unique features and audience expectations.
- Analyze successful viral sensations to identify common elements and strategies contributing to their widespread appeal.
- Gain insights from industry creatives who have turned viral fame into profitable and sustainable careers and apply these lessons to your own content creation strategies.
- Develop practical video production, writing, and performance skills, enabling you to produce engaging and viral-ready content.
- Examine the business aspects of going viral, understanding the necessary preparation before and after achieving viral status.
- Create original short-form content and web series that reflect your personal creative vision and are tailored to the demands of new media platforms.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Students will need reliable internet access and a working digital camera, with mobile phones or tablets being desirable for easy mobility and access. Basic editing software is recommended, including platform-specific apps such as iMovie, Premiere, Movie Maker, InShot for Instagram, CapCut for TikTok, and TweetDeck for X (formerly Twitter). Access to basic sound and lighting equipment may be beneficial, though not required.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Given the digital nature of the course, coursework and assigned readings will be provided throughout the semester. Materials will include digital articles, videos, and case studies relevant to creating viral content, analyzing social media trends, and understanding the business aspects of going viral.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

*****SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS NEEDED. WILL NOTIFY OF ALL CHANGES*****

Since the work in this class can be both empirical and subjective, grading will focus on quantitative and qualitative aspects of the curriculum and assignments: proficiency of course concepts, critical thinking, assignments, class participation, collaboration, deadlines, attendance, and of course, the final project.

Grading Breakdown:

- Weekly (video or written) assignments: **60pts*****
- Final video project: **25pts**
- Class participation: **15pts †** (*see Participation Breakdown and Further Participation Notes below*)

Total: 100 points

Grading Scale:

A work of excellent quality / **A = 100-95, A- = 94-90**

B work of good quality / **B+ = 89-87, B = 86-83, B- = 82-80**

C work of average quality / **C+ = 79-77, C = 76-73, C- = 72-70**

D work of below average quality / **D+ = 69-67, D = 66-63, D- = 62-60**

F work of poor, inadequate quality / **F = 59 and below**

Further Grading Notes:

- When the GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students with excellent in-class participation. Grades will be weighted towards the negative end of the scale for those with poor in-class participation.
- I am available to discuss work and progress at any time. I encourage you to open a dialogue with me at any point during the semester.

† Participation Breakdown:

† 15pts EXCELLENT participation. Demonstrates active, everyday engagement. Shows willingness & enthusiasm in discussions, class activity, and collaborations

† 12pts GOOD participation. Frequent active participation. Engaged, willing semi-regular participation in discussions, class activity, and collaborations

† 9pts AVERAGE participation. Semi-regular, but active participation in discussions, class activity, and collaborations

† 6pts BELOW AVERAGE participation. Infrequent participation. Predominately passive and rarely demonstrates willingness to contribute to discussions, class activity, and collaborations

† 3pt POOR/INSUFFICIENT participation. Does not participate willingly. Extremely passive and lacks enthusiasm. Poor, if any, contribution to discussions, class activity, and collaborations

Further Participation Notes:

Participation is crucial to your learning experience in this course and your journey as a professional creative. You will learn not only from your own contributions but also from observing and engaging with your peers. Active engagement in discussions and class activities is essential for maximizing your learning and professional growth. Attendance is vital for your learning experience; please make every effort to attend punctually. Participation is weighted at no more than 15% as per University Guidelines, yet it remains fundamental to your success in this class.

Assignment Submission Policy

Most of the required assignments will be emailed to the instructor, posted on Brightspace or uploaded to Google Drive - provided free for all enrolled students - with the link emailed to the instructor.

Late Submission Policy

Assignments are expected to be completed by the due date & time. Late assignments will NOT BE ACCEPTED. I reserve the right to enforce this policy, however, if I do accept a late assignment for whatever reason, grades will be deducted appropriately. I am going to treat you like mature, professionals-in-training. I expect a lot from you, as you should expect from yourselves.

USC Technology Support Links

[Zoom information for students](#)

[Blackboard help for students](#)

[Software available to USC Campus](#)

Etiquette Policy

As we navigate the complexities of the Arts & Entertainment Industry together, it's essential to maintain a professional and respectful environment.

- Be on time and treat the classroom with the same respect as a professional set or stage.
- Wear appropriate rehearsal clothes - loose-fitting, comfortable clothing suitable for movement. Avoid pajamas or anything revealing or distasteful.
- No other technology should be used during class unless otherwise instructed. Phones must be on silent and put away unless otherwise instructed. Phones may only be used during breaks.
- Except for water, no food or drinks are allowed in class.
- No pets or other distractions such as toys or video games.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality. Do not share personal class dealings and discoveries outside of class. We aim to establish trust, so communicate freely, honestly, and frequently, but always be respectful, mindful, and mature.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment:

SCampus Sec5on 11.12(B)

Distribu5on or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a viola5on of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribu5on by services publishing class notes. This restric5on on unauthorized use also applies to all informa5on, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in rela5onship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (SeeSec5on C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course evaluation

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with me to offer any feedback on the course.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

*****THIS WILL CHANGE AS NEEDED. WILL NOTIFY OF ALL CHANGES*****

	Topics/Daily Activities	Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 1/13	<p>Introduction to Course and Overview</p> <p>Introduction to the science and psychology of going viral. Discuss course objectives and expectations. Begin personal introduction video.</p>	Begin creating your personal introduction video (1 minute). Focus on the theme of your journey and brand.	Due Date: Email the video/link by Saturday, 1/18 by 12 NOON.
Week 2 1/20	MARTIN LUTHER KING JR	DAY	NO CLASS
Week 3 1/27	<p>Understanding Social Media Platforms</p> <p>Overview of Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok. Analyze the characteristics of each platform and discuss content creation strategies.</p>	Create a short-form video (1 minute) showcasing a passion or interest, tailored for the platform of your choice.	Due Date: Email the video/link by Saturday, 2/1 by 12 NOON.
Week 4 2/3	<p>Analyzing Viral Content</p> <p>Discuss and analyze viral sensations across platforms. Identify key elements that contributed to their success.</p>	Select a viral video or post to analyze. Create a 1-minute video explaining why it went viral, why you chose it, and any additional thoughts time permitted.	Due Date: Email the video/link by Saturday, 2/8 by 12 NOON

	Topics/Daily Activities	Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 5 2/10	<p>Guest Speaker: Industry Professional</p> <p>Learn from a guest influencer who has gone viral and built a sustainable career. Q&A session included.</p>	Reflect on the guest speaker's insights and prepare a 1-minute video of at least one piece of valuable content your learned.	Due Date: Email the video/link by Saturday, 2/15 by 12 NOON
Week 6 2/17	PRESIDENT'S	DAY	NO CLASS
Week 7 2/24	<p>Guest Speaker: Industry Professional</p> <p>Discussion on the psychology behind virality, audience engagement, and emotional triggers in content.</p>	Reflect on the guest speaker's insights and prepare a 1-minute video of at least one piece of valuable content your learned.	Due Date: Email the video/link by Saturday, 3/1 by 12 NOON
Week 8 3/3	<p>How to Pitch a Brand/Business</p> <p>Learn how to effectively pitch brands/companies for paid partnerships and advertisements that are mutually beneficial and that can lead to additional income.</p>	Decide on one brand you'd like to pitch. Do your research and be prepared to discuss in the next class.	Due Date: By next class.
Week 9 3/10	<p>Review Pitch Ideas and Analyzing Social Media Profiles</p> <p>Review homework from previous class and discuss social media profiles and content.</p>	Continue structuring your personal and professional brands.	Due Date: By next class.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 10 3/17	SPRING	RECESS	NO CLASS
Week 11 3/24	Entertainment Business 101 Lecture and Q&A on the business of entertainment from a performer/creative's lens. Industry insights, tips, and review.	Start reviewing your professional brand in relationship to the career you want.	Due Date: N/A
Week 12 3/31	Guest Speaker: Industry Professional Insights into monetizing viral content and turning it into a long-term career. Q&A session included.	Reflect on the guest speaker's insights and prepare a 1-minute video of at least one piece of valuable content your learned.	Due Date: Email the video/link by Saturday, 4/5 by 12 NOON
Week 13 4/7	CONTENT FILMING DAY Put into practice all you have learned thus far in class by using the "class time" to create a video summarizing what you've learned and experienced this semester.	NO CLASS This video content can be done individually or as a whole class.	Due Date: Email the video(s)/link(s) by Saturday, 4/12 by 12 NOON
Week 14 4/14	Guest Speaker: Industry Professional Learn from a guest content creator about sustaining creativity and audience engagement post-virality.	Reflect on the guest speaker's insights and prepare a 1-minute video of at least one piece of valuable content your learned.	Due Date: Email the video/link by Saturday, 4/19 by 12 NOON

	Topics/Daily Activities	Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 15 4/21	Review for the Final Brand partnerships and roles will be assigned.	No homework assigned.	Due Date: N/A
Week 16 4/28	Final Class and Course Wrap-Up Recap of key learnings and open discussion. Feedback session on the course experience.	No homework assigned.	Final Projects Due: TBA

Final Project/Review: FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2025 - 2:00PM-4:00PM

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class preparation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism - presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in Campus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/campus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in Campus and university policies on scientific misconduct,

<http://policy.usc.edu/scienafic-misconduct>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Health and Participation in Class

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used, as it can expel exhaled air, increasing the risk to others. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or

suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. To file a report, please visit:
<http://bit.ly/sdasupport>

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 - 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX - (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in

providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101 diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 - 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 - 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

