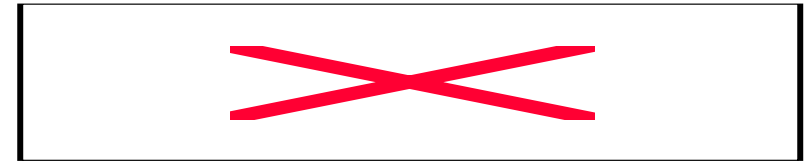


Opportunities and Challenges for the Digital Researcher



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University of the
West of England

Networks for Methodological Innovation

- Funded by National Centre for Research Methods
- Rationale: Stimulate new developments and disseminate new methodological skills
- Goal: Contribute to a step change in methodological skills and techniques in UK



Networks on Digital Media

- Digital methods as mainstream methodology
 - University of Kent, University of Surrey, University of Manchester, University of the West of England and Trilateral Research and Consulting
- Blurring the boundaries - New social media, new social science
 - NatCen Social Research, Sage Publications, Oxford Internet Institute



Rational, Aims & Objectives

Rational:

- Social life lived online – new: tools, data, questns
- Pace of change
- incorporation into methodological toolbox?

Aims & Objectives:

- Gauge the field (Hine's Virtual Methods 2001 – 3)
- Foster debate
- Build capacity
- Showcase innovation

#DMMM1: Definitions & The Field

Definitions – still no consensus!

- ‘natively digital’/virtual methods
 - Or wider, incorporating both?
- most appropriate tools

The field – boundaries and fluidities

- Innovation and boundaries of academia
- A ‘coming crisis’? (Savage & Burrows)
- Imps of collaborative work for social science
- Impact on early career researchers

#DMMM1: Affinity Mapping – Emerging Themes

Contexts and possibilities:

- Studying both mundane and extraordinary
- False distinction between digital and 'real'
- Potential for unobtrusive AND participative research
- Accessing previously inaccessible populations

Data:

- Big data vs thick data
- Access
- Archiving
- Analysis
- Data-driven research?

Dissemination:

- Research that engages with fast-changing er
- Publishing timelines
- Raw data available?



#DMMM2: The Future of Digital Research

Showcase: PechaKucha (lightning) talks:

- Jeremy Knox: *MOOCing around with learning spaces*
- Eve Stirling: *Facebook me...I'll add you: Using my (personal) Facebook profile as a research tool*
- Ibrar Bhatt: *Insights on 'e-focus groups' and 'e-interviews' as a Digital Method*

→ Need to foster!

DMMM Contacts

Network Team:

- Dr Steve Roberts – U/o Kent (*S.D.Roberts-26@kent.ac.uk*)
- Dr Christine Hine – U/o Surrey
- Dr Helene Snee – U/o Manchester
- Dr Hayley Watson – Trilateral Research
- Dr Yvette Morey – U/o West of England

Website and Social Networking

- <http://digitalmethodsni.com/>
- Twitter, Facebook, You Tube
- Video and blog content

New social media, new social science

- Outline of Challenges:
 - Very large quantities of data
 - New skill set required
 - Unfamiliar forms of data
 - Different analysis methods required
 - Sampling difficult
 - Ethical boundaries not clear



Social Media Data: Big Data

- Not strictly new:
 - Big datasets have been around for over a generation
 - Now much more common
- Definition: Datasets much larger than usual for a given research area



Social Media Data Strengths, 1

- Cheap
- Fast turnaround
- Sampling people through social media
 - Very large samples
 - No interviewer effects
 - Can control sequence of questions
 - Fewer social desirability effects
 - People can consult records at leisure



Social Media Data Strengths, 2

- Gathering quantitative social media data directly
 - Data on entire population
 - Easily collect longitudinal data
 - Observe actual behaviour
 - Unobtrusive
- Qualitative data
 - Wide scope for interactions: text, verbal, video, photos
 - Electronic data easier to gather and manipulate



Social Media Data Weaknesses, 1

- Sampling people through social media
 - Sampling frame difficult or impossible
 - Many have no or limited Internet access
 - Poor response rate
 - Who answers is uncontrolled
 - Motivation and instruction needed
 - Hard to get reliable responses for knowledge questions



Social Media Data Weaknesses, 2

- Gathering quantitative data from social media directly
 - Population characteristics usually unknown or not interesting
 - Know little about people
 - Demographics: age, gender, education, etc
 - Social settings: Community, work, etc.
 - Meaning of behaviour may be unclear
 - Attitudes unknown
- Summary: Social media data tend to be broad but shallow.



Analysis: Visualisation & Statistics

- Large datasets: Every variable becomes statistically significant
 - Identity between statistical and substantive significance breaks down
 - Partial answer: Use effect sizes
- Visualisation
 - Geography and mapping much easier
 - Difficult to use to support inferential arguments or multivariate arguments



Ethics

- Anonymisation is more difficult
 - Multiple public datasets may allow personal identification
- Privacy expectations in social media are often unclear and naïve
- Ethics committees lack expertise
- Ethical guidelines focus on market research, no coherent ethical framework for social research



Future of Social Media Data

- Even more data, even easier to collect
- No easier to find out demographic information
- Hard to reach populations remain hard to reach
- Development of theories that would benefit from social media data remains paramount



Thank You!

- Digital methods as mainstream methodology
 - <http://digitalmethods.nmi.com/>
 - <http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/NMI/2012/digitalmethods.php>
 - yvette2.morey@uwe.ac.uk
- Blurring the boundaries - New social media, new social science
 - <http://nsmnss.blogspot.co.uk/>
 - <http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/NMI/2012/socialmedia.php>
 - grant.blank@oii.ox.ac.uk

