



Digital Social Research: Methods Core

Academic Year	2017-18, Michaelmas Term
Day and Time	Mondays, Weeks 1-8, 13:00 – 15:00
Location	Lecture Theatre, St Cross College, Oxford, OX1 3LZ
Course Providers	Dr. Isis Hjorth Dr. Bernie Hogan Prof. Phil Howard Dr. Brent Mittelstadt Prof. Andy Przybylski (coordinator)
Teaching Assistant(s)*	Allison Mishkin MSc. Siân Brooke MRes.
Prerequisites	N/A

*Comments and enquiries are directed in the first instance to the course teaching assistant(s).

Background

Digital Social Research: Methods Core is one of the six elements that make up Digital Social Research. A summary of the structure and assessment of Digital Social Research has been included as a separate coversheet.

Overview of Digital Social Research: Methods Core

Digital Social Research: Methods Core provides students with the opportunity to engage with the basic methodological underpinnings of quantitative and qualitative social science research practices in the context of Internet studies. This includes material on research designs and the development of research questions and empirical approaches across multiple methods. Students explore traditional social research methods that can be applied to the study of the Internet and related information and communication technologies (ICTs), but with an emphasis on emerging social research tools that can be applied to social research in digital spaces. They are introduced to all steps of research in ways that they can understand the inter-relationships across all phases of the research process.

Themes developed throughout this course include:

- The relationships between theoretical expectations, research questions, and empirical observations.
- The strengths and weaknesses of different methodological approaches.
- Theories and methods of sampling along with approaches to the study of whole populations.
- Data collection and management.
- Introductions to qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods of analysis.
- Theoretical and empirical concepts in quantitative and qualitative research.
- Ethical principles and norms across disciplines and in digital social research.

- Challenges to the reliability and validity of data and methods.

Course Objectives

1. Introduce a range of methods and tools that can be applied to a wide array of social science research issues;
2. Instil a balanced view of opportunities, problems and prospects in social science research methods on the Internet and related technologies;
3. Appreciate the ethical, legal and social issues related to digital social research and more generally, the use of social research methods to study ICTs and their social implications;
4. Bring experts into the class to introduce particular methods, while using core instructors and discussion to ensure an integration of material across the course offerings.

Teaching Arrangements

The course is team taught during Michaelmas term. There is one, two hour, session each week during weeks 1-8. The normal format of the sessions will begin with a lecture, followed by student discussion or group work. All students are expected to attend all of these sessions, whether or not they anticipate the use of a particular approach to research. In addition, there will be a number of workshop sessions to address questions and help students develop their practical research skills. They will be held on the odd weeks of term (i.e. 1, 3, 5, and 7). Further details about these workshops will be provided in Week 1 of term.

Note: Over the course of the year, small changes may be made to the content, dates or teaching arrangements set out in this reading list, at the course provider's discretion. These changes will be communicated to students directly and will be noted on the internal course information website.

Assessment

In Digital Social Research: Methods Core students are assessed on the basis of one summative assignment and one formative assignment during Michaelmas term. (Please note that the assessment for this course is different for DPhil students. DPhil students should please refer to the Graduate Studies Handbook for guidance).

They are as follows:

Summative Assignment

The summative assignment is one 2,500 word piece of written coursework, the details of which will be released to students at noon on Monday week 4 (31 October) via the Assignment Submission Weblearn site. This assignment will be worth 25% of the final mark for Digital Social Research. The assignment is due by noon on Friday week 8 (2 December) of Michaelmas term.

Submission of Summative Assignment

The summative assignment for this course is due on Friday of Michaelmas Term Week 8 (2 December) by 12.00pm and should be submitted electronically via the [Assignment Submission Weblearn Site](#). The assignment should also be submitted electronically by 5:00 pm on the same day (Friday of Week 8) to teaching@oii.ox.ac.uk. If anything goes wrong with your submission, email

teaching@oii.ox.ac.uk immediately. In cases where a technical fault that is later determined to be a fault of the Weblearn system (and not a fault of your computer) prevents your submitting the assessment on time, having a time stamped email message will help the Proctors determine if your assessment will be accepted. Please note that you should not wait until the last minute to submit materials since Weblearn can run slowly at peak submission times and this is not considered a technical fault.

Full instructions on using WebLearn for electronic submissions can be found on Plato under General Information. There is also an FAQ page on the Assignment Submission WebLearn Site.

Please note that work submitted after the deadline will be processed in the standard manner and, in addition, the late submission will be reported to the Proctors' Office. If a student is concerned that they will not meet the deadline they must contact their college office or examinations school for advice. For details on the regulations for late and non-submissions please refer to the Proctors website at <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/examinations/candidates/>.

Any student failing this assessment will need to follow the rules set out in the OII *Examining Conventions* regarding re-submitting failed work.

Key Readings

A reading list is given below, those items marked with an asterisk (*) are essential reading and MUST be read by all students in preparation for the class. Items that are not marked with an asterisk are additional supplementary readings. There are four key texts used throughout the course. They are:

Ackland, R. (2013). *Web Social Science: Concepts, Data and Tools for Social Scientists in the Digital Age*. London: Sage Publications.

Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

Dutton, W.H & Jeffreys P.W. (2010). *World Wide Research: Reshaping the Sciences and Humanities*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Fielding N.G., Lee, R.M., & Blank, G. (2008). *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Robson, C. (2011). *Real World Research, Third Edition*. London: Blackwell.

The two general social research methods texts (Bryman 2008; Robson 2011) have much overlap and cover topics beyond those specifically discussed in course sessions. We recommend that you use these texts to fill in topics not covered in class, and gaps in your previous training, but which can be of value to this course, such as in preparing your research paper.

Course Topics

Week 1: Introduction to Methods in Internet Research

Tutor: Prof. Andy Przybylski

Most mainstream approaches to social research can be used in the study of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). However, the Internet and related technologies are changing the ways in which we approach research, and raising new methodological issues. This first session of the seminar will outline 1) the subject matter of the course; 2) introduce examples of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method research; and 3) discuss the challenges of studying emerging

technologies, and conducting digital social research, providing an overview of new problems and opportunities.

(* Fielding N.G., Lee, R.M., & Blank, G. (2008). *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*. London: Sage.

(Chapter 1: The Internet as a Research Medium)

(* Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Introduction & Chapter 1)

Hargittai, E. (Ed.). (2009). *Research confidential: solutions to problems most social scientists pretend they never have*. University of Michigan Press. (any they like)

Dutton, W. H. (2013). Internet studies: The foundations of a transformative field. In the Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies. Oxford University Press.

(Chapter 1)

Jensen, K. B. (2011). New Media, Old Methods—Internet Methodologies and the Online/Offline Divide. In *The handbook of Internet studies*. Blackwell.

(Chapter 3)

Week 2: Asking & Developing Research Questions

Tutor: Prof. Andy Przybylski

The more immediate introduction to field research in the social sciences is to begin asking questions from a social scientific perspective. It is a core strategy of social researchers on and offline and in qualitative and quantitative methods in the social sciences. This session explores the issues of framing your research questions and carrying out qualitative interviews in face-to-face and online contexts. It enables students to gain a familiarity with important concepts such as reflexivity, interviewer effects and different kinds of interviews, including structured and unstructured approaches and interviewing experts. While the research process is often iterative, the question should guide other choices about methods. Differences between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews and focus groups will be discussed as well as their analysis and we will discuss different types of research questions and how well your own research interests can be framed by a strong and 'interesting' set of research questions.

(* Ackland, R. (2013). *Web Social Science: Concepts, Data and Tools for Social Scientists in the Digital Age*. London: Sage Publications. (pp. 31-34).

(* Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Chapter 2)

(* Fielding N.G., Lee, R.M., & Blank, G. (2008). *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*. London: Sage.

(Chapter 15: Internet-based interviewing)

(* Robson, C. (2011). *Real World Research, Third Edition*. London: Blackwell.

(Chapter 3: Developing Your Ideas; Chapter 11: Interviews and Focus Groups)

Davis, M.S. (1971). That's Interesting! Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1, 309-344. Available from: http://www.mang.canterbury.ac.nz/writing_guide/marketing/index.shtml

Berry, J.M. (2002). Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing. *Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), 679-682.

Elliot M., Purdam, K., & Mackey E. (2013). Data Horizons: New Forms of Data for Social Research. CCSR Report 2013-3 12/6/2013 Manchester: School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester.

Andrews, R. (2003). *Research Questions*. London: Continuum.

Week 3: Qualitative Approaches

Tutor: Dr Isis Hjorth

In this session students will be introduced to some of the philosophical foundations that inform the qualitative approach and outline some of the most common methodological approaches and methods that typically fit within this framework. Taking a critical approach, using current examples from Internet Studies, this session will examine the important role that qualitative research plays within the field and the opportunities and common problems that work in this area typically encounters. The initial themes identified in this session will be developed and expanded in the qualitative courses in HT.

(* Bakardjieva, M. (2013). The Internet in Everyday life: Exploring the Tenets and Contributions of Diverse Approaches. *The Handbook of Internet Studies*. Blackwell. (Chapter 4)

(* Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Chapter 3)

James, N., & Busher, H. (2009). Epistemological Dimensions in Qualitative Research: the Construction of Knowledge Online. *Online Interviewing*. Sage.

(Chapter 1)

(*Markham, A. (2017). Troubling the concept of data in qualitative digital research. *Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*. Sage.

(<http://www.forskningssdatabasen.dk/en/catalog/2351817583>)

Orgad, S. (2009). How can researchers make sense of the issues involved in collecting and interpreting online and offline data? *Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method*. Sage. (Chapter 2, p. 33-53)

Sandelowski, M., Voils, C. I., & Knaf, G. (2009). On quantizing. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 3(3), 208-222.

Willis. J. (2007). *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. Sage. (Chapter 4)

Week 4: Survey Research

Tutor(s): Dr Bernie Hogan

Survey research is one of the most prevalent quantitative techniques used in the social sciences. This session will discuss the steps that need to be taken to construct and conduct high quality academic survey research both on and offline. Specific attention will be paid to pitfalls in relation to sampling, questionnaire design and item construction. Links are made between this methodology course and the statistics course that runs in parallel to understand the implications of questionnaire design and on

the possibilities of statistical analysis. The Oxford Internet Surveys and the Me, My Spouse and the Internet Surveys are used as examples throughout the session.

(*) Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Chapter 4)

(*) Dillman, Don A. *Mail and Internet Surveys: the tailored design method* (2nd edition). New York: Wiley.

(Chapter 11: Internet and Interactive Voice Response Surveys)

(*) Fink, A.G. *How to Conduct Surveys*. 2006. London: Sage.

(Chapters 2; Chapter 4)

(*) Robson, C. (2011). *Real World Research, Third Edition*. London: Blackwell.

(Chapter 10: Surveys and Questionnaires)

Hall, L., Johansson, P., & Strandberg, T. (2012). Lifting the veil of morality: Choice blindness and attitude reversals on a self-transforming survey. *PLoS one*, 7(9), e45457.

Ackland, R. (2013). *Web Social Science: Concepts, Data and Tools for Social Scientists in the Digital Age*. London: Sage Publications. (pp. 25-31).

Couper, M. (2000). Web surveys: a review of issues and approaches. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64(4), 464-494.

Alwin, D.F. & Krosnick, J.A. (1991). The Reliability of Survey Attitude Measurement. The Influence of Questions and Respondent Attributes. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 20(1), 139-181.

Week 5: Causal Inference in Computational Social Science

Tutor: Prof. Phil Howard

This session will cover (1) what causal inference is and how it is practiced in computational social science; (2) the modes of generalization that allow for generating transportable theory and; and (3) the practice of triangulating and integrating established scholarly expectations for rigor in the social sciences with the opportunities of computational research. Readings provide background in the rationale for modeling in the social sciences, as well as strong examples of the application of modeling in computational social science.

(*) Borgman, C. (2015). *Big data, little data, no data: Scholarship in the networked world*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Chapters 1-4.

(*) Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Chapter 5)

(*) Shah, D. V., Cappella, J. N., & Neuman, W. R. (2015). Big Data, Digital Media, and Computational Social Science: Possibilities and Perils. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 659(1), 6-13. doi: 10.1177/0002716215572084

Brayne, S. (2017). Big Data Surveillance: The Case of Policing. *American Sociological Review*, 0003122417725865.

boyd, d., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 662-679.

Kitchin, R. (2014). *The data revolution: Big data, open data, data infrastructures and their consequences*. London, UK: SAGE.

Paluck, L. (2010). The Promising Integration of Qualitative Methods and Field Experiments. *Annals of the American Academy of Politics and Social Sciences*, 628(1), 59-71.

Other data sources available from: <http://www.webuse.umd.edu/> and <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>.

Don Dillman's papers available from: <http://survey.sesrc.wsu.edu/dillman/papers.htm>.

OxIS and WIP data available from: <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis>.

'Me, My Spouse and the Internet' study available from:

<http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/project.cfm?id=47>.

Week 6: Comparative Methods

Tutor(s): Prof. Phil Howard

Comparative research is the process of asking and answering questions with evidence from carefully chosen cases. Comparative research is exciting because defining cases is tough analytical work, and they can be people, artifacts, communities, field sites, organizations, countries, focus groups, periods of time, or texts. This session is designed help students make definitional decisions in their own work and look at how other scholars do comparative research. This session will cover the process of case selection and the stages of analyzing people, artifacts, or events in a comparative context.

(*) Byrne, D. 2005. "Complexity, configurations and cases." *Theory, Culture & Society* 22(5): 95.

(*) Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Chapter 6)

(*) Collier, David, LaPorte, Jody and Seawright, Jason, Putting Typologies to Work: Concept-Formation, Measurement, and Analytic Rigor (January 1, 2011). *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2, June 2012.

(*) Ragin, C. and Lisa Amoroso. 2010. *Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method*. Pine Forge Press.

Mahoney, J. and Goertz, Gary. 2006 "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." *Political Analysis* (2006) 14:227-249.

Shalev, M. 2007. "Limits and alternatives to multiple regression in comparative research." *Comparative Social Research* 24: 261-308.

Week 7: Ethics of Internet Research

Tutor(s): Prof. Andy Przybylski & Dr Brent Mittelstadt

This session will consider some of the main ethical issues that researchers are likely to encounter in Internet-related research. These issues have been discussed now for some time and some guidelines for researchers have been established (AoIR ethics working group 2012). Yet there is still considerable debate about the ethics of Internet research – not least because the Internet and digital social research methods are continuing to evolve rapidly. In this session we will discuss some of the major issues that have been debated - as well as some that have only recently come to the fore - and discuss how to go about addressing them. This session will also provide an overview of the CUREC procedures that need to be followed prior to carrying out the dissertation.

(*) Buchanan, E. (2011). Internet Research Ethics: Past, Present, and Future. in Consalvo, M., and

Ess, C. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Internet Studies*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. (pp. 83-108).

(* Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Chapter 7)

(* Eynon, R., Fry, J., & Schroeder, R. (2008). The Ethics of Internet Research. in Blank, G., Lee, R. and Fielding, N (Eds). *Handbook of Online Research Methods*. Sage. London.

(Chapter 2, pp. 23-41).

Basset, E.H. & O'Riordan, K. (2002). Ethics of Internet research: contesting the human subjects research model. *Journal of Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 233- 247.

Dutton, W.H & Jeffreys P.W. (2010). *World Wide Research: Reshaping the Sciences and Humanities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

(Chapter 8: The Politics of Privacy, Confidentiality, and Ethics: Opening Research Methods).

Kramer, A. D., Guillory, J. E., & Hancock, J. T. (2014). Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 201320040.

Varnhagen, C. et al. (2005). How informed is online consent? *Ethics and Behaviour*, (15)1, 37-48.

Zimmer, M. (2010) "But the data is already public": on the ethics of research in Facebook. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 12(4), 313-325.

Basset, E.H. & O'Riordan, K. (2002). Ethics of Internet research: contesting the human subjects research model. *Journal of Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 233- 247.

Varnhagen, C. et al. (2005). How informed is online consent? *Ethics and Behaviour*, (15)1, 37-48.

Week 8: Ways of Knowing in the Social Sciences

Tutor: Prof. Andy Przybylski & Dr Brent Mittelstadt

This session will provide an overview of debates about the scientific status of the social sciences, particularly in relation to the main methods covered on this course: statistics, network theory, experiments, and qualitative research. What are the epistemological bases for different ways of tackling the social world? What are the bases for the scientificity of qualitative, 'small n', studies? In what sense do big data, 'large n' studies, contribute to the scientific quality of research? What are the implications of different goals of research - whether research is more theoretically or practically oriented, for example - for its validity as knowledge and its contribution to social science? In conclusion, we shall consider how the use of online research tools might change the scientific nature of social enquiry.

(* Chambers, C. (2017). *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press.

(Chapter 8)

(* Collins, R. (1994). Why the Social Sciences Won't Become High-Consensus, Rapid-Discovery Science." 1994. *Sociological Forum*, 9(2), 155-77.

Rule, James B. (1997). *Theory and Progress in Social Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 5: Network Analysis; Part 1 & 3)

Gellner, E. (1985). *Relativism and the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(Chapter 4: The scientific status of the social sciences

Collins, R. (1988). What is Statistics: Method or Theory? *Theoretical Sociology*, 494-511.