

Minitrack on Critical and Ethical Studies of Digital and Social Media

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Abstract

This minitrack hosts the best emerging scholarship from sociology, anthropology, communication, information studies, and science & technology studies addressing the most pressing critical and ethical concerns around DSM. Papers interrogate how DSM support existing power structures or realign power for marginalized groups, and illuminate the ethical issues in doing research with and on DSM. Papers explore new ways of thinking about information exchange in communities and societies, in periods of rapid sociotechnical change.

The challenge for our field is, at the same time, to move analytically closer to the technology to divine the assumptions that animate it, and step back to recognize how DSM technologies and institutions exert influence over public participation, culture, and knowledge.

1.1. Keeping it Real: From Faces and Features to Social Values in Deep Learning Algorithms on Social Media Images

Deep learning vision algorithms must meet computational performance tests, but rarely do they face sociological ones. This paper imagines a sociologically grounded performance test and runs three widely used vision algorithms through it. The algorithms fare poorly. So the paper goes on to suggest a two-level labeling model that combines image features with theoretically inspired accounts of the social value of pictures for those who post them.

1.2. HIV Risk on Twitter: The Ethical Dimension of Social Media Evidence-based Prevention for Vulnerable Populations

Despite technological improvements, we are not yet able to identify the populations most susceptible to HIV infections. In this paper we examine exploiting Twitter posts as a monitoring tool for HIV-related risk at the demographic, geographical, and social network level. However, this approach faces serious ethical dilemmas: in data collection and analysis, risk inference through imperfect probabilistic approaches, and data-driven prevention.

1.3. Expanding Imagined Affordance with Futuretypes: Challenging Algorithmic Power with Collective 2040 Imagination

This paper begins with an empirical exercise: asking a group of working class, ethnically diverse range of students to re-imagine alternative forms of digital platforms for 2040. Student stories and our analysis of them comprise a hybrid of evidence interweaving design thinking with textual analysis and future studies. These “futuretypes,” signals of platform alternatives, reveal an expanded range of citizen emotions, feelings, and desires.

2.1. The Political Economy of New Media Revisited

This paper defines media platforms in terms of the economic theory of traditional two-sided media markets, then goes on to develop the theory to include content providers as a third side of the market, the widespread introduction of sellable meta-information about the platform network, and the importance of social networking technologies to the media platform.

2.2. Managing Online Trolling: From Deviant to Social and Political Trolls

Trolling has emerged as an ethical challenge for DSM, often provoking concern and calls for regulation. But trolling behaviors are in fact diverse, by context, tactics, motivations, and impact; these require context sensitive strategies. This paper investigates perceptions of trolling among U.S. students to identify responses to different types of trolling. This paper highlights the complexity of trolling that is socially and politically motivated.

2.3. Incidental News: How Young People Consume News on Social Media

This paper examines news consumption on social media by interviewing young users from Argentina. These reveal that young users consume news on social media “incidentally”: most get the news on their mobile devices as part of their constant connection to platforms; encountering the news all the time rather than seeking it, they spend little time engaging with the content. This significant discontinuity raises major editorial and political implications.