Seismo

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Research Exposed. How Empirical Social Science Gets Done in the Digital Age is an edited volume with 12 chapters that individually and as a collection have the ability to draw the reader in – like the stories of a cook in a kitchen would do, who is narrating how they came to concoct a particular recipe, how approaches failed, what worked, how they found out, and which turn led to the final recipe. Analogously, this edited volume by Eszter Hargittai allows us to look behind the scenes of how empirical social science is being done. Adding to previous edited collections *Research Confidential* (Hargittai, 2009) and *Digital Research Confidential* (Hargittai & Sandvig, 2015), this book provides honest insights from researchers who have done the work, with information on lots of trial-and-error processes that are typically hidden behind "Method and Data" sections of finished publications.

So much of our social activities take place online and are conducted using digital devices. The book addresses methodological challenges researchers face when working with digital data and offers invaluable insights for social science and communication researchers collecting qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method data. While other books, e.g., *Bit by Bit* (Salganik, 2017) have been instructive for working with large-scale digital data, pointing out advantages and challenges, and providing solutions to some of the pitfalls, this book peels away a particular layer of mysteriousness: the oft-undisclosed activities of collecting and analyzing data that take place behind the scenes, yet are foundational for *doing* research.

Moreover, as new digital or digitized data become available and methods using digital data for analyses proliferate, insights into the how-to and what-to-avoid are much needed. Throughout the chapters and with no simple answers, the book illustrates how digital researchers do their research beyond standard methods, especially when things do not work according to the original, proposed plan, e. g., when data have disappeared, when recruitment of interviewees is difficult, when too much data exists and it is unclear what the relevant digital data are. All chapters share reflections on research ethics and learnings, which are also highly instructive.

Since this is an edited volume, let us look at the breadth of questions the chapters ask and peek behind the scenes to see how research in the digital age gets done.

How to cope with absent data? In Chapter 1, "When social media data disappear," Deen Freelon introduces the term "absent data" (p. 6) for data that have been removed from their primary posting location, yet that are nevertheless meaningful for empirical research, e. g., deleted Twitter posts from political candidates, or, in Freelon's case, posts from accounts Twitter suspended, thus removing their tweets for public purview. Chapter 1 discusses possibilities how to remedy that situation of absent Twitter data and illustrates that researchers should not make assumptions about the possibility to collect online data in the future.

How to find bots on Twitter? Social bots are online accounts that mimic humans and human behavior, yet are algorithmically controlled. As anyone who is studying public opinion online and particularly on Twitter knows, social bots have a powerful presence that challenges analyses of reach and popularity of politicians, po-

tentially influencing opinion and election results. In Chapter 2, "The needle in the haystack: Finding social bots on Twitter," Tobias R. Keller and Ulrike Keller describe two communication science researchers' journey to detect bots on Twitter using commonly used software tools.

How to recruit teens via social media platforms for collecting survey data? In Chapter 3, "Meeting youth where they are: Challenges and lessons learned from social media recruitment for sexual and gender minority youth," Erin Fordyce, Michael J. Stern, and Melissa Heim Viox describe the many decisions taken for recruitment via targeted ads on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. It also discusses the internal review board approval process, security and consent measure, and the arduous task of obtaining the companies' approval to post ads.

How to conduct sampling within qualitative online research? In Chapter 4, "Qualitative sampling and Internet research," Lee Humphreys highlights the thoughtful and reflective choices about sampling, access, and recruitment that can enhance the validity of qualitative digital research. It discusses varieties of sampling methods, their advantages and limitations. I highly recommend this chapter to all researchers who either conduct qualitative research or who would like to better understand its underlying ideas and considerations.

How to recruit populations with high-risk jobs online and offline for interviews? And how to conduct such interviews? In Chapter 5, "Behind the red lights: Methods for investigating the digital security and privacy experiences of sex workers," Elissa M. Redmiles provides a look behind the scenes when conducting interview research on sex workers, who are at high risks, e. g., for stalking, harassment, physical violence, and identity breaches. The chapter outlines many careful considerations and participatory elements for conducting chat, audio, or video interviews with understudied populations.

How to conduct qualitative research on a population that holds more institutional and social power than the research-ers? In Chapter 6, "Using unexpected data to study up: Washington political journalism (and the case of the missing press pass)," Nikki Usher shows how "studying up" people in powerful places can be achieved using digital trace data, especially tweets and photos, "unexpected data," including material objects as the ephemera of everyday life, as well as a focused ethnography in lieu of impossible lengthy observations.

How to use ethnography to examine social media context in the context of a person's life? In Chapter 7, "Social media and ethnographic relationships," Jeffrey Lane takes a deep dive into one Facebook post to show how the digital and the offline intersect and can be studied interrelatedly.

How do researchers meet people living on and off the street and how can they collect observational data over the long-term on marginalized communities? In Chapter 8, "Ethnographic research with people experiencing homelessness in the digital age," Will Marler illustrates the digital potential for ethnography with hard-to-reach populations such as people experiencing homelessness. In reflecting upon the process of doing research face-to-face and using digital platforms, Chapters 7 and 8 spell out many learnings and offer very valuable accounts of digital-age ethnography.

How to design a multimethod project and cope with unexpected detours while conducting research? In Chapter 9, "Going rural: Personal notes from a mixed-methods project on digital media in remote communities," Teresa Correa and Isabel Pavez take the readers behind the scenes of the to-and-fros when developing initial ideas and then conducting a mixed-methods research project on the adoption and use of digital technologies in rural, isolated communities. This exposes us to a fascinating, much needed perspective.

How to study a population of independent artists for whom no directory and no data exist? In Chapter 10, "Stitching data: A multimodal approach to learning about independent artists' social media use," Erin Flynn Klawitter shows us how to stitch together different data sources

to study a formerly unknown population. Moreover, using a mix of survey questionnaires, qualitative fieldwork, interviews and digital data collection the chapter shows how independent artists use social media for their sales and reputation in interaction with in-person sales and arts and crafts fairs.

How to collect data on older adults' media use and well-being? In Chapter 11, "A measurement burst study of media use and well-being among older adults: Logistically challenging at best," Matthias Hofer introduces us to a set of methods to collect data in a combination of passive recording devices and questionnaires, about recruitment of older adults for communication science study, and about the level of involvement of those studied.

How to narrow the digital skills divide in community-based research? Step-by-step, in Chapter 12, "Community-based intervention research strategies: Digital inclusion for marginalized populations," Hyunjin Seo allows us to peek behind the scenes of a multistage, mixed-methods research and intervention program for digital inclusion among underserved populations. In discussing lessons learned, the chapter particularly points to the necessity to conduct thorough research to understand participants' needs and interests, the time such efforts take but also to the many rewards such a process brings.

This book presents an extremely useful collection of chapters for anyone who is doing research on digital data or on digital devices, regardless of the level of analysis or the methods used in analyzing the data. The book is highly accessible and offers a wealth of information for a range of empirical social science research interests and research methods. In particular, researchers who primarily conduct large-scale quantitative studies using digital data will find this book very useful to understand and appreciate the many methodological considerations that are necessary when conducting qualitative research.

References

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