Digital Sociology: An Introduction

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A Sociologist's Adventures in Social Media Land

Like many academics, I was quite oblivious to the virtues of using digital social media for professional purposes for rather a long time. Although I used Facebook for private reasons to keep in touch with family and friends, and had signed up to Academia.edu and LinkedIn to connect with other academics, for several years these were the only social media platforms I used.

Then one day earlier this year the scales fell from my eyes. I wrote a piece for an online news and discussion site, *The Conversation*. This site was designed for academics to write accessible articles directed at the general public, who in turn are invited to comment. After only a few hours following publication of the article, more than 500 people had read it, and several had commented. A couple of days later the post had accumulated over 2,000 views and many more comments. I was amazed by the way such a forum offered instant feedback on my ideas and a large readership. This was such a different model of publishing from the one I was used to: academic journal articles and books, which took many months and often years to appear in print following completion of a manuscript and even longer for responses to appear.

I soon decided to set up my own blog so that I could engage in such public engagement under my own terms ('This Sociological Life'). I then joined Twitter, a micro-blogging social platform that I had previously thought only as a forum for celebrities to post inanities and politicians to spread propaganda (my Twitter handle is @DALupton).

Again, I was surprised at what I found. I initially had set up a Twitter account as a way to publicise my blog posts but I then found that it was a really useful way to engage with academics and others working in or interested in the same topics I was. I found that people shared links to interesting blog posts, news articles, journal articles and books. They chatted about their latest research or debated a contentious issue, and I readily joined in. Using Tweetreach, a tool to document how far one's tweets were travelling, I found that some days I was reaching up to 80,000 Twitter accounts. This is thanks to the exponential nature of the practice of retweeting, where one's followers retweet one's tweet to their followers, and so on. The power of online social networks was obvious.

I then decided that I needed a way of preserving, curating and sharing all the interesting blog posts and news articles that I had discovered via Twitter. I signed up to Delicious, a digital bookmarking site, to achieve this (my collections are here). I then discovered Pinterest, a curating platform for images, and found that it provided a fascinating way to collect images relevant to my research and share these with others: see my boards here. I set up an account with Storify to make 'social stories' using material drawn from the web (they can be viewed here), and shared my PowerPoint presentations on ShareSlide (here). I used Paper.li to start up a weekly newsletter, Health & Society, to publish some of the great information I was discovering online about one of my major research

interests. I experimented with Pearltrees to curate and bookmark websites (see these [here](#)). Using an online wizard I even made my own app providing key concepts on medical sociology (see it [here)](#). And of course I used Twitter to let other people know about these initiatives.

After using all these platforms and investigating what they could offer as part of my professional practice, I wrote a post for my blog on how sociologists can use Pinterest, another for the online forum *Crikey* on making an app for academic purposes, and a further three-part series for my blog on the topic of digital sociology.

This current publication gathers together these articles in one place as a resource for others who might be interested in using social media in their practice as an academic, as well as for those who might be interested in what the term 'digital sociology' might encompass. I have also added some additional material on using Storify, Pearltrees and infographics tools.

Does using these social media tools take time out from other academic work? Yes, of course. But I would contend that it is well worth the time and effort. You can use these tools as little or as much as you want, depending on what you find you gain from them. And judicious use of these tools both contributes to and enriches your research and teaching efforts and attracts more readers to your other more 'traditional' academic research outputs. These are surely major goals for any academic.

These are the three main reasons I use social media as part of my academic professional practice:

- **Research**: to let others know about mine, to learn about that of others and to gather material to support my research.
- **Creativity**: using social media can be a great way to create items to share with others quickly and easily and often in a pleasing visual form.
- **Engagement**: social media offer an accessible way to engage with other academics and non-academics.

1   What Is Digital Sociology?

What is digital sociology? Why is the term not commonly used, when the terms' digital anthropology', 'digital cultures' and 'digital humanities' have been employed for some years? I have not yet come across any book that uses 'digital sociology' in its title (there are, of course, several books that focus on various aspects of the digital world from a sociological perspective without using this term). The only course I have discovered thus far which uses the term 'digital sociology' to describe itself is a MA/Msc in Digital Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. The terms 'digital social research' or

'digital social sciences' tend to be used quite narrowly to refer to the use of quantitative methods ('webometrics') to analyse digital data.

Although 'digital sociology' does not yet seem to be in regular use, sociologists have engaged in research related to the internet since its inception. They have addressed many varied social issues relating to online communities, cyberspace and cyber-identities. Such research has attracted many different names, dispersed across multiple interests, whether it is entitled 'cybersociology', 'the sociology of the internet', 'the sociology of online communities', 'the sociology of social media', 'the sociology of cyberculture' or something else again. While the term 'cyber' was in vogue in the 1990s and early 2000s, reference to the 'cyber' seems to have been largely replaced by the 'digital' now that the internet has become more pervasive, moving from desktops to devices that can be worn on the body and transported to many locations, allowing the user to be constantly connected to the net. 'Digital sociology' encapsulates the concerns previously addressed by 'cybersociology' and extends into this new era of mobile digital computer use. It is a neat descriptive term that also references other disciplines and their use of the term 'digital'.

Despite the body of literature referred to above, it has been argued that in general sociologists have been slow to take up research involving social media and to personally engage in using social media for professional practice, such as blogging and Twitter (Daniels and Feagin, 2011). The sociology of digital technologies/digital sociology or whatever term is adopted must surely begin to expand as a sub-discipline in sociology, given the increasing prevalence of digital technologies. They are becoming an increasingly integral part of everyday life for many people in the developed world across the lifespan. Preschools and child care centres are now starting to advertise that they offer tablet computers as part of their facilities. At the other end of the lifespan, Wiis are used to support mobility for the residents of aged care facilities and social media devices are being introduced to older people to encourage them to engage in social connection from home.

Digital sociology can offer a means by which the impact, development and use of these technologies and their impact upon and incorporation into social worlds and concepts of selfhood may be investigated, analysed and understood. It seems to me that given the ways in which digital technologies have infiltrated everyday life and have become such an important dimension of how people gather information and connect socially with others the digital world should now be a central feature of sociological study and research. Not only should sociologists learn to use digital media for professional purposes, they should also be undertaking research that is able to explore the impact of these media in everyday life from a critical and reflexive perspective. Some sociologists have begun to do this: for examples see Gehl (2011) on the representation and management of the professional self online and Burrows (2012) on how metrics are having an impact upon academic practice and selfhood.

To summarise, here are the main activities in which digital sociologists can engage:

- **_Professional digital practice_** : using digital media tools for professional purposes: to build networks, construct an e-profile, publicise and share research and instruct students.
- **_Sociological analyses of digital media use_** : researching the ways in which people's use of digital media configures their sense of selves, their embodiment and their social relations.
- **_Digital data analysis_** : using digital data for social research, either quantitative or qualitative.
- **_Critical digital sociology_** : undertaking reflexive and critical analysis of digital media informed by social and cultural theory.

Each of these activities is discussed in more detail below.

2   Professional Digital Practice

It is clear that a revolution in how tertiary education is offered is on its way, as demonstrated by the recent decision of elite universities such as Princeton and Stanford to invest significant sums of money in massive open online courses which at the moment are provided free of charge to anyone who wishes to enrol (including, I note, an 'Introduction to Sociology' subject). The move towards open access and e-publishing of scholarly work also seems inevitable. Furthermore, creating en 'e-profile' is becoming an important part of academic work. Judicious use of social media allows you to exercise better control and manage the content of your online persona in a context in which search engines are constantly collating information about you.

For all these reasons, an understanding of how to present knowledge and promote learning in digital formats will soon become a vital part of academic practice. Here's some specific ways in which academics can use some of the digital tools now available:

Building networks

Using platforms such as Twitter and Facebook can be a highly efficient way of connecting with other academics working in a similar area as well as interested people from outside academia. These platforms allow participants to join networks arranged around topic or discipline areas and to contribute in discussions and sharing information within these networks.

Facilitating public engagement

Blogging sites such as WordPress and micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter can be used as easily accessible forums in which academics can communicate their ideas in short form. Unlike traditional journal articles that are locked behind pay-walls, these platforms are free to access and material can be instantly published, allowing academics to share some of their research findings quickly. They therefore allow academics to promote their research and share it with a far greater audience than they would usually find in the traditional forums for publication. Links can be provided to journal articles so that longer academic pieces can be followed up by readers.

Receiving feedback

Blogs and micro-blogging platforms also allow interested readers to comment and engage with authors, thus facilitating public engagement. You can ask a question in a blog or Twitter post and receive responses, or readers may simply chose to use the comments box to make remarks on something you have published. Quora is a social media platform designed specifically to ask questions of anyone who uses it. Once you have set up an account you can publish a question or answer other people's questions, as well as follow others' questions to see what the responses are. You can also follow topics or people.

Establishing an e-profile

Sites such as Academia.edu and LinkedIn as well as your university profile webpage are ways of providing information about yourself. In Academia.edu, designed specifically for academics, you can list and upload your articles, conference papers and books and you can follow other individuals and topic areas and be followed in turn.

Curation and sharing of content

Curation and sharing platforms such as Delicious, SlideShare, Pinterest, Scoop.it, Pearltrees, Bundlr, Paper.li and Storify, as well as referencing tools such as Mendeley, Citeulike and Zotero, allow academics to easily gather and present information and, importantly, to then make the information public and share it with others online. On SlideShare you can share your PowerPoint presentations and the referencing tools allow you to gather lists of references on specific topics and then share these with others. Several of these tools, including Pinterest, Bundlr and Storify, allow you to insert your own comments or analysis on the material you have gathered.

Teaching

The platforms listed above can also be used as teaching tools, providing new ways of engaging students both through classroom teaching and in student assignments, where

students can use the tools themselves to collect, curate and present information. Students in any area of study need to be trained in using social media and other digital technologies as part of preparing them for their future careers, as these technologies are increasingly becoming part of the working world.

Some examples of using digital and social media in sociology

This section is itself is an example of professional digital practice in action. It is an edited version of a longer Storify presentation, and I was first inspired to write on this topic by an exchange I had on Twitter (for the Storify presentation, which contains additional information on digital sociology including hyperlinks to relevant courses, books, articles and blog posts, see [here](#)).

Digital media are being increasingly used as part of academic conferences. For example, academics often tweet about the content of the presentations they attend, providing a 'back-channel' of communication that can be shared with both those participating and those who cannot attend. These tweets can then be presented and preserved in Storify as a record of the conference to which anyone can have access.

See section 4 below for a detailed explanation of how Pinterest can be used for sociological research. This curation platform is a wonderful way of collecting images related to one's research interests. It also offers various possibilities for teaching, allowing students to curate and comment on their own image collections.

Paper.li provides a platform to create online newsletters by collating material downloaded from other sites. It can be used by academics to collect recent blog posts, the abstracts from newly published journal articles or online news articles relevant to a specific topic which they then share with their social networks on a daily or weekly basis.

Sociologists may also like to think about making their own apps for teaching purposes. It is possible to access app maker wizards online that are easy to use and inexpensive. See section 5 below for my account of how I made my own app.

3   Analysing Digital Data

Titles such as 'digital social research' or 'digital social science' tend to be used to refer to conducting 'e-research' using digitalised data sets that may be shared collaboratively using digital platforms. The focus, therefore, is on the collection and use of data and the tools to analyse these data rather than on the ways in which users of digital technologies are engaging with these tools and devices as part of their everyday lives.

This approach is interested in the most efficient use of tools to store and analyse digital data and the ways of dealing with the constant churn of information on the web as well as the ethical issues around using such data such as copyright, privacy and data protection concerns. Research also includes investigation into how researchers engage with web archives as research tools and the reasons why they may choose not to do so. 'Naturally' or incidentally generated data that are already collected by various web platforms (for example Facebook and Twitter posts, search engines, SMS messages and even GPS data) are used for analysis. Researchers may also elicit data for their own concerns, including using web-based surveys. This approach to digital data analysis is also interested in ways of recording and analysing data for qualitative analysis, including images, videos and audio data.

The terms 'webometrics' or 'cybermetrics' have been used to describe quantitative social research using digital data sets drawn from network websites and social media sites. While these approaches seem quite widely used in such fields as information science and technology, thus far they seem little used by sociologists.

Research into how people use digital and social media

As I commented above, people are now using digital and social media platforms and devices across the life span, from infancy to old age. Many of the consumers of media have also become content producers through the use of social media such as micro-blogging and blogging platforms and sharing platforms for visual media such as YouTube and Flickr.

Since the advent of the internet, many sociologists and other researchers have used data from online communities to research many varied social issues, from the use of health-related websites for patient support and information sharing to the ways in which people with anorexia support each other in their 'thinspiration' quest, how people of ethnic minority groups represent themselves online, the articulation and organisation of online activism, self-presentation, self-identity and patterns of sociability on social networking sites such as Facebook and how 'mummy bloggers' share their experiences with other mothers on the web, to name but a few topics.

Another topic of research has featured how people interact with their technologies: how they deal with the plethora of information streaming forth from the internet, what they use their digital devices for, how these devices are employed at home and in the workplace and so on. Children and young people's use of digital technologies has come under quite a deal of scrutiny as well in a social context in which there is continuing concern about their 'addiction' to these technologies, their access to online pornography, cyber bullying or online sexual predation.

This kind of digital sociological research has clear overlaps with research in digital anthropology, digital cultures and cultural geographies of digital technologies, much of

which is also directed at exploring the ways in which people interact with and use digital media using both qualitative methodologies (such as interviews, focus groups and ethnographic research) and quantitative approaches such as surveys and content analysis of digital material.

Critical digital sociology

A further topic of digital sociology research is that which directs critical attention at the ways in which sociologists and other academics themselves use digital media. This is a reflexive approach that draws on contemporary social and cultural theory to analyse and interrogate the kinds of subject positions or assemblages that are configured via digital technology use as part of professional practice. While such a critical approach does not preclude professional digital use, it opens up a space for reflection upon the implications and unintended consequences of such practices.

Burrows (2012), for example, has written on the ways in which metrics such as the' h-index' and 'impact factor' constructed via digital citation indices contributes to 'a complex data assemblage that confronts the individual academic' (p. 359). These metrics have become integral to the ways in which academics, academic units and universities receive funding and are ranked against others, and in the case of individual academics, to their prospects for employment and promotion. Uprichard (2012) has commented critically on the call for sociologists to use digital data in their research, focusing in particular on data-mining of the transactional data that is produced through live-stream interactions on the web such as Twitter and Facebook posts and updates. She argues that approaches to such data are often ahistorical and thus lack the richness of context. Further, they tend to be preoccupied with questions of method over sociologically imaginative ways of analysing the digital data that are collected. Other sociologists have addressed the ethical issues of using data from online communities and forums for research, including consideration of such questions as whether or not such communities constitute public or private space or whether researchers should make themselves known to communities when studying their interactions.

Very few sociologists (or other academics) have published critiques like these thus far. However the role played by digital technologies in the academic workplace looks to increase in importance as universities are moving (very quickly in some cases, more slowly in others) towards more extensive incorporation of online teaching as part of their credentialed courses. As an academic discipline sociology has traditionally played an important role in identifying and commenting upon the social and economic inequities underpinning the workplace and other social spheres. In this spirit, as digital technologies increasingly become part of the academic world, continuing critical and reflexive examination of these technologies and their implications for academic practice and selfhood should be an integral dimension of digital sociological research.

4   How Sociologists (and Other Social Scientists) Can Use Pinterest

Pinterest is a social media platform which has recently become very popular. The concept of Pinterest is overwhelmingly visual and draws upon the idea of older techniques of collage or scrapbooking: collecting interesting images, grouping them together under a theme and displaying them to others. As a visual bookmarking site, self-described as a 'virtual pinboard', Pinterest allows users to 'pin', or transfer digital images to an interest 'board', or webpage that they make themselves and give a title to. The images are then collected together on this board and made available for others to see. Users may 'repin' images from other people's boards, pin images they have found on other websites or use images of their own (their own photographs or infographics, for example). A wealth of high-quality and diverse images are available to use for Pinterest purposes.

One important feature of the site is that each pinned image has a commentary box below it which allows the user to provide details of the image or comment on it. There is quite a bit of space provided for such commentary: up to 500 characters. The website is set up so that pinning or repining is extremely quick and easy. Users can install a 'Pin It' button (bookmarklet) on their computer so that when they come across an image they wish to use it is simply a matter of clicking on the button and the image is added to one of their specified boards. Other people may 'follow' boards, comment on them and may be invited to contribute pins to them.

When I first investigated Pinterest it seemed that it was simply a forum for people to collect and post images of cute children or animals, fashion outfits, holiday options, objects they would like to buy, home décor, wedding ideas, recipes and so on. These do indeed seem to be among the most popular of board topics and the website's own description of what it offers focuses on these kinds of uses. However the platform is becomingly increasingly used not only used for private purposes, but also to publicise commercial enterprises or sell goods, create employment resumes and even for political campaigning. I notice that school teachers have also begun using Pinterest to display lesson plans and collect relevant material for their work to share with other teachers or with their students.

It seems that few academics are using Pinterest at the moment, or have even heard of it. But closer inspection and reflection on the capacities of the platform led me to think that Pinterest had the potential to be a very useful tool for sociological research and teaching (as well as for other academics in the humanities and social sciences).

Because of its emphasis on the visual, it is most relevant for the purposes of curating and displaying images that are related to the subject matter one is researching or teaching about. Pinterest boards can be used by sociologists for the following purposes:

- To display images which are related to the topic of a book or research article you have published. The hyperlink for the relevant board can be given in the article or book so that interested readers can view the images which you have collected on that topic. The commentary box allows you to provide some analysis or contextualising material under each image.
- To display infographics: data represented as graphs, tables, social maps, flow-charts and figures relevant to the board topic.
- As a repository for images you have collected that can be used and analysed as part of a current or planned research project.
- To display images of book covers written by others on topics related to your boards that you have found especially useful or interesting.
- Boards can be used to publicise and promote your own academic writing. This only really works with books and blog posts or website pages, given that Pinterest is overwhelmingly a visual medium and has limited space for text. However if you wanted to promote your research article, you could include an image of the journal's cover and give the title of your article in the commentary box below, along with a link to its online version.
- Universities or individual academic departments or research groups can set up their own Pinterest sites and use boards to promote research and teaching initiatives.

Some ideas for university teaching include:

- Giving your students access to a set of images that are related to the unit subject are teaching. The images can be displayed on your computer during class-time, or the link can be provided to students for them to view the boards out of class time. You can use your own boards or others' boards. (If there is a good board already existing on a particular topic there is probably no point replicating yourself unless you curate a substantially different set of images or one specifically tailored to the content of the subjects you are teaching.)
- Engaging students and promoting their understanding of the visual and cultural dimensions of a topic by asking them to make their own boards and curate images relevant to a topic, or together contribute to one big shared board. Part of this activity could be asking students to provide analytical commentary for images, or to write an accompanying essay that analyses the images or contextualises them in relation to academic scholarship on the topic.
- Collaborating with other academics to share ideas and resources for teaching.

Last, there is the opportunity for sociologists and other social scientists who are interested in researching digital cultures or commodity culture to use Pinterest boards

that others put together as a source of research data. The questions of why Pinterest is currently so popular, what types of photographs and topics are selected by users and what all this may imply for concepts of identity and the presentation of the self, media use, social relations and so on offer great potential for academic research.

Some commentators on blog sites and newspaper opinion pages have already begun to speculate about how and why users are using Pinterest. One commentator has argued that using Pinterest to display commodities one would like to buy is a kind of ersatz consumption, satisfying the desire for the real thing and therefore replacing consumption ('[Can Pinterest and Svpply help you reduce your consumption?](#)'). Others have commented on the representation of women's bodies on Pinterest boards ('[Pinterest's Thinspiration problem'](#):) and how women use Pinterest ('[Pinterest and feminism](#)'). It has been suggested that Pinterest allows users to display their taste to others ('[The real reason Pinterest is so popular'](#):) and engage in creative pursuits involving the collection of striking or beautiful images, just as people once enjoyed making collages, photo albums, scrapbooks or collecting and displaying stamps ('[A picture gets a thousand likes](#)').

Thus far I have made seven boards of my own on Pinterest. Each of them is related to a recent or current research topic. For example, the third edition of one of my books, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease and the Body,* was recently published. The book discusses the ways in which medicine, health and illness are understood, represented and experienced via social and cultural processes. There are many examples in the book of the ways in which medical practitioners, patients and particular illnesses or diseases have been represented in popular culture. I have created a virtual pinboard that I have entitled 'Medicine as Culture' and collected images there that are relevant to the subject matter discussed in the book (see it [here](#)). Images on this board include an 18th century wax anatomical model of a skull, doctors from medical television shows, doctors working in a surgical theatre in different historical eras, contemporary and historical anatomical drawings, plastinated bodies from the BodyWorlds exhibition, digital m-health technologies, artistic representations of the body, anatomy and illness, health promotion campaign materials and the pages from a latter-day doctor's journal. I also included images of the cover of my *Medicine as Culture* book and other related books I have published, as well as books by others which were seminal to my own work in this area (see a screenshot of this board below).
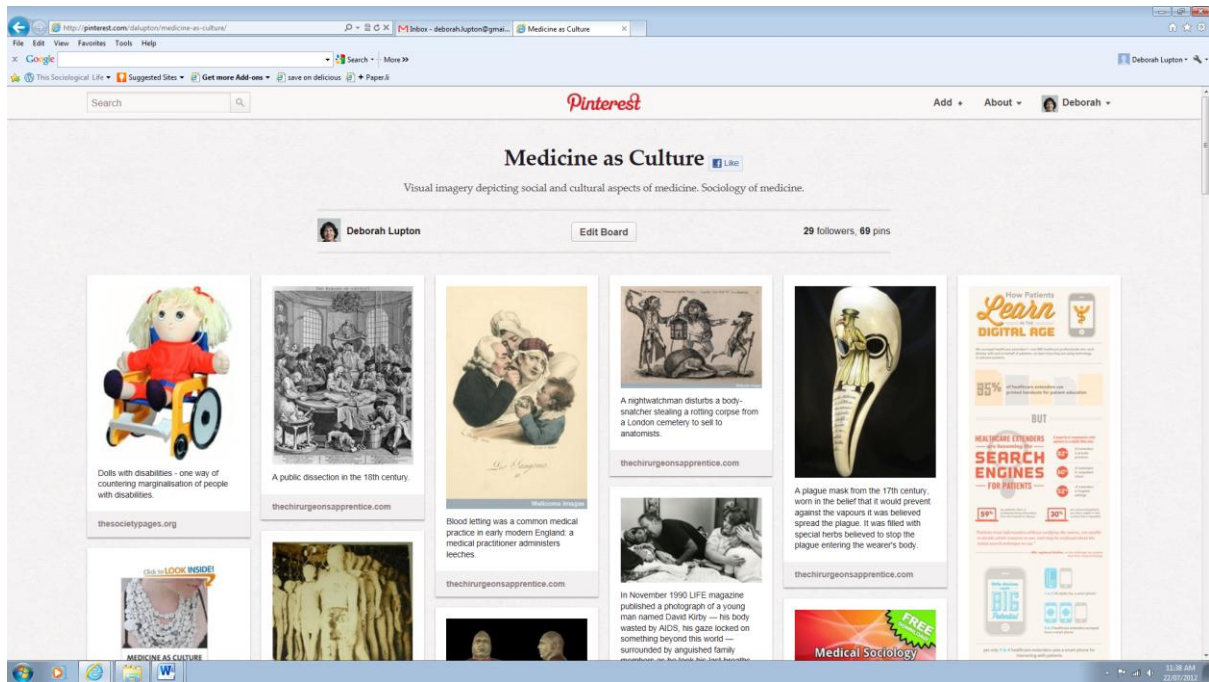
Some other interesting Pinterest boards on sociological topics I have discovered include:

- [The Sociological Cinema](#) on Pinterest: many boards, including 'The Environment", 'Social Theorists', 'War and Military', 'Gender and Physical Violence'. 'Teaching Sociology' and 'Bodies'.
- [Sociological Images](#) on Pinterest: includes a range of boards on topics such as 'Racial/Ethnic Objectification', 'Deconstructing Disney',' Social Construction of Everything' and 'Social Construction of Race'.
- [LSE Review of Books](#) : boards include such topics as 'Sociology and Anthropology', 'Politics and International Relations', 'Philosophy and the Humanities' and 'Urban Studies and Architecture'.
- [Prof Jess](#): her boards include 'Sociology of Emotion', 'Sociology (Music)' and 'Sociology of Sport(s)'.

Further information about Pinterest for beginners can be found [here](#).

5   Apps and Academics: Why I Made my Own Sociology App

The front page of my 'Medical Sociology' app

My decision to make an app stemmed from two major reasons. First, I have long been interested in the ways people interact with computer technologies, and have published some research on this in the past. More recently my interest has turned to health-related apps available for smartphones and tablet computers. I had been researching the various apps available for such purposes and had noted that many apps have been developed for teaching purposes for medical students.

Second, I had noticed the huge number of educational apps that are available for children's use, from infancy to high-school level. Some Australian high schools have acknowledged young people's high take-up of mobile digital devices and are beginning to advocate that students bring their devices to school and use them for educational purposes during the school day. The relevance for tertiary-level education appeared obvious. I wondered whether many universities, academic publishers or academics themselves had begun to develop apps.

Yet, having searched both the Android and the Apple App Stores using the search term of my discipline, 'sociology', I discovered only a handful of apps related to this subject for tertiary students. Nor were there many for other social sciences. There seemed to be a wide-open gap in the market.

So, as a bit of an experiment, I set about making my own app. I wanted to see how difficult it would be for someone like me who is not very computer-savvy. I decided to make an app which explained key concepts in medical sociology, a field I have been

writing about for many years. The idea would be for the app to list each key concept and a brief explanation of it as a resource for students studying this topic.

After some investigation I found an online app maker wizard (Appmaker for Android) that was very easy to use. It basically involves using the program's templates to type in the information you want to include. My app is very simple. It is text-based only and has no illustrations or graphics, but there is provision for these to be included if the developer so chooses. Apps developed using this particular wizard are only be available for use on Android devices, but having looked at similar app makers for Apple devices I was put off by their more technical nature and the greater expense involved.

In just a couple of hours my app was ready. I had typed in over 25 medical sociology key concepts (for example, social class, discourse, identity, illness narratives, poststructuralism), plus a list of books for further reading, chosen a nice-looking background and paid US$79.00 for the app to appear without ads and to guarantee that it would be submitted to the Android App Store. A day later I received a message notifying me that the app had been accepted into the App Store and was now ready for anyone to download (see it [here](#)). It was all very quick and easy. I was now an app developer!

The potential for using apps for tertiary education is enormous. Academics or universities developing their own apps are able to tailor the content to their own specific needs and purposes. Some universities, including those in Australia, have begun to provide apps that provide information about the university (although some of these are little more than brochures uploaded to an app format). Yet it seems that very few have developed more specific subject-based content for apps. It would be so easy for university students to carry apps on their mobile devices that provided information such as subject outlines, for example. Short apps listing and defining key concepts on a specific topic area such as the one I have developed could be made for any number of subjects, available for ready consultation by students.

6 Some Notes on Using Storify, Pearltrees and Infographics Tools

Storify and Pearltrees, as I noted in section 2 above, are social media platforms for gathering and sharing information. Infographics tools may be used to create a graphic demonstrating information or data from your research.

Storify has a focus on presenting information as a narrative. It is used extensively by journalists as a way of collecting diverse pieces of information from the web and quickly collating them into a news story that can be easily updated with the latest breaking news on that topic.

While most academics are not involved with breaking news, Storify is a useful tool for collecting and presenting information on a research topic. You can drag information from various parts of the web (including tweets, blogs, online news and other websites) and insert hyper-links into boxes. You can also type in your own text. I have seen Storify presentations that consist only of tweets, and these are a good way of preserving a valuable conversation that you may have had on Twitter. Storify is also used frequently to present notes or summaries from a conference, sometimes using tweets people have sent from the conference. You can also insert images from the web as well as your own photos (as long as you have uploaded your photos to a platform compatible with Storify such as Instagram or Flickr first).

The Pearltrees social media tool is a good way of gathering web-links together under subject headings. The display is very simple, showing one 'pearl' (a circle containing the link) which is the main topic, with associated pearls linking outwards in a radial pattern (the 'pearltree'). Simply click on any of the pearls to be directed immediately to the website they represent. An example of one of the Pearltrees I have made is below.
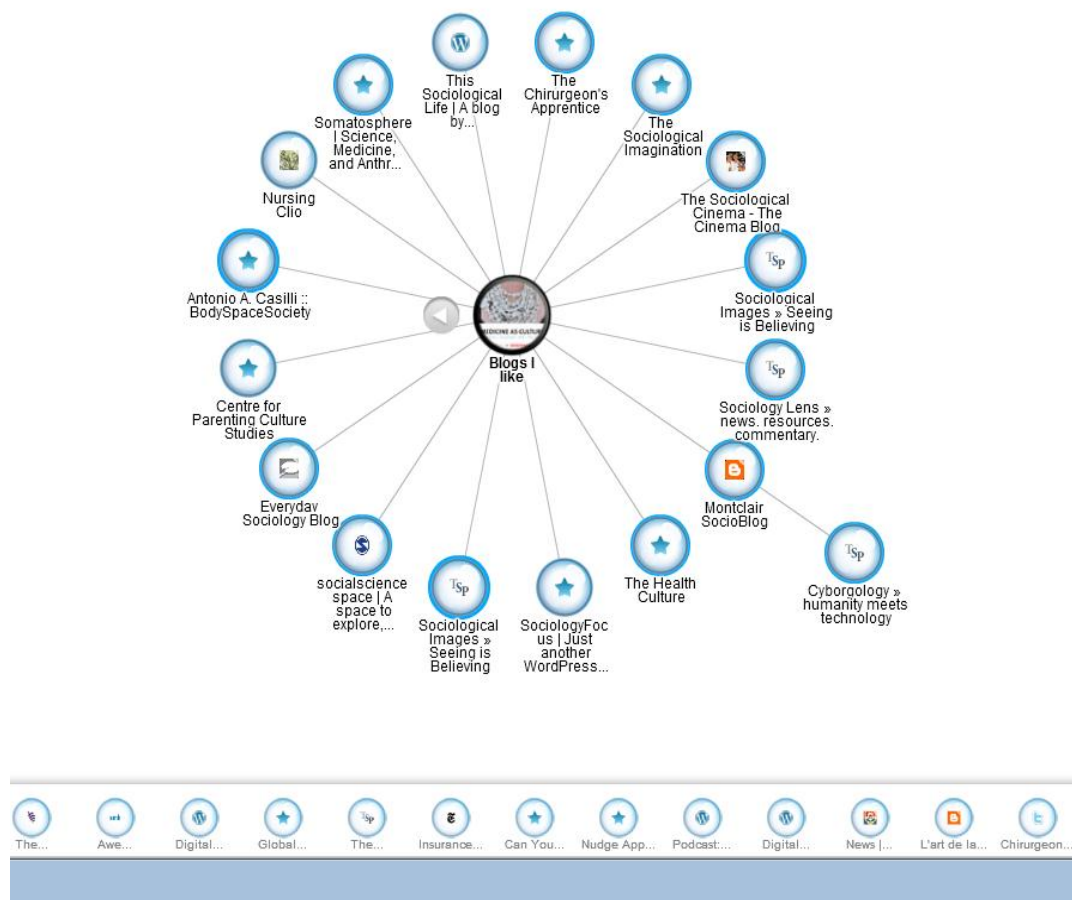
Infographic tools provide a way to display information or research findings in a visually appealing format. Several tools may be downloaded for free from the web to use, including Piktochart, Chart Gizmo, Wordle, ManyEyes and Visual.ly. I used ManyEyes to make the word cloud graphic on the cover page of this document, and found it quick and easy to use.

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Gehl, R. (2011) Ladders, samurai and blue collars: personal branding in Web 2.0. First Monday, 16(9), available [here](#).

Uprichard, E. (2012) Being stuck in (live) time: the sticky sociological imagination. In Back. L. and Puwar, N. (eds) *Live Research Methods* (Sociological Review Monograph), in press. Preprint copy available [here](#).

Useful Links

The [LSE Impact of the Social Sciences](#) blog provides invaluable content for academics interested in using digital media. It also has a handbook on maximising the impact of one's research (including via digital means) and a guide to using Twitter for academic purposes, both of which can be downloaded free.

See also the [University of Warwick's research page](#) for links to useful articles about creating an academic e-profile.

See my Delicious stack '[Social Media and Academia](#)' for an extensive collection of articles and blog posts and Mark Carrigan's Bundlr collection on '[Academia 2.0](#)'.

Some Twitter hashtags for sociology include:

 #sociology #soctalk #medsoc (medical sociology) #digsoc (digital sociology) #socrisk (sociology of risk) #discrimination #gender #feminism #imperialism #goodsociety #class #racism #sdoh (social determinants of health)

To see a collection of interesting sociology blogs go [here](#).