

27-29 March 2019

National Library of Australia, Canberra

Australian Academy of the Humanities'
2nd Humanities, Arts and Culture Data Summit
and
3rd international DARIAH Beyond Europe workshop



#DARIAHBeyondEurope #HACDS2019

Digital methods and the future of communication and media research



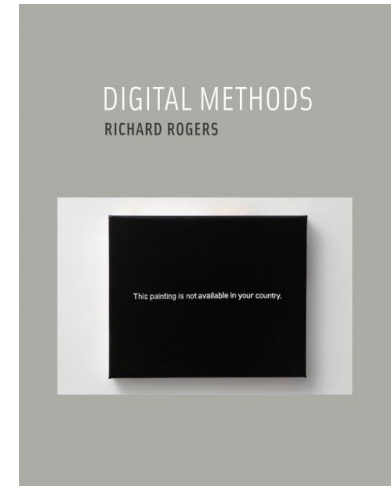
Digital Media
Research Centre

Jean Burgess | @jeanburgess

Humanities, Arts and Culture Data Summit | Canberra | March 2019

Digital methods

1. Using 'the methods of the medium' (Rogers, 2013; 2017) to study the internet's role in culture and society
2. Digital methods have co-evolved with digital media
3. From HTML pages to apps, platforms, and algorithms



2000s-2010s: 'big social data' research

1. Free, open APIs enable third-party developers to innovate and extend upon platforms
2. Data access for researchers was a **side effect** of the 'open innovation' paradigm
3. 'Big social data' research as a troubled 'trading zone' (Rieder & Röhle 2012) across and within HASS and STEM disciplines
4. Media and communication research focused on mapping public communication – structures, dynamics, themes and dynamics
5. Intense period of skills development, new data and statistical literacy in the discipline



QUT Digital Observatory

Building on TrISMA ARC LIEF (QUT + 6 other universities)

- 3.7 million Australian Twitter accounts, 2.4+ billion tweets captured to date
- 1+ million new tweets per day, from 140,000 daily active users
- Comprehensive map of follower/followee network structure
- Trends over time

2018: the API Apocalypse

Crackdowns, lockdowns, and lockout

1. The rise of retail social data markets from 2010 → restriction of API data access
2. Cambridge Analytica, stricter data and privacy regulation (GDPR), the 'techlash'
3. Platform enclosure: Tighter in-house control of research, app development, and data exploitation → loss of public oversight.
4. Ethics frameworks conversation maturing across disciplines
5. Increased institutional awareness of and avoidance of risk



April 4, 2018

An Update on Our Plans to Restrict Data Access on Facebook

“

We believe these changes will better protect people's information while still enabling developers to create useful experiences.

”

By Mike Schroepfer, Chief Technology Officer

Two weeks ago we promised to take a hard look at the information apps can use when you connect them to Facebook as well as other data practices. Today, we want to update you on the changes we're making to better protect your Facebook information. We expect to make more changes over the coming months — and will keep you updated on our progress. Here are the details of the nine most important changes we are making.



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Instagram suddenly chokes off developers as Facebook chases privacy



Josh Constine @joshconstine / 8 months ago

Comment



The Politics of Systems

Thoughts on Software, Power, and Digital Method

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Category Archives: facebook

Facebook's app review and how independent research just got a lot harder

Posted by [Bernhard](#) on August 11th 2018 @ 8:24 am

3 Comments

For the last ten years, I have been developing a Facebook app for researchers called Netvizz. It started as part of a class on advanced web programming I was teaching at the [département hypermédia](#) and morphed quite a bit over the years, often in response to [API changes](#). After losing the ability to generate graph files for friendships, it kind of stabilized around analysis for Facebook Pages and – to a lesser degree – Groups. If you check the almost [300 scholarly papers](#) that cited the accompanying publication – and the many more that did not – you get a good idea what outputs were used for.

When the Cambridge Analytica scandal hit earlier this year, I expected trouble. Although the data doors that allowed CA to gather the data they did were closed in 2015 already, Facebook had to react. A new API version and stricter terms were introduced and, most importantly, all apps would again have to submit to a review. Netvizz was also part of a group of "suspicious applications" that received particular scrutiny concerning their *past* activities (here is the [questionnaire](#) I was asked to fill out). This certainly makes sense, since I could have easily created a treasure trove of data by storing all the data requested through the app.

Looking forward, however, was the new permission system and the connected app review. In order to continue to retrieve data for Pages, the new [Page Public Content Access](#) permission is needed. As always, the use cases for getting this permission are rather vague and make no room whatsoever for academic research. Since many researchers and students are relying on Netvizz, I wanted to give the app review a shot.

Such app reviews are not some interactive dialogue with a human operator, but a bunch of form fields and the request to record a screencast that explains how permissions are used. This then normally yields a canned response, not some explanation that actually reflects the submitted app. There is no email address, no appeal process, no "relationship" other than the pre-formatted interface and some pre-formatted answer.

After an initial refusal because "permissions data must be visibly used within your app", which I think means that you cannot just provide data download, I added a bunch of in-app visualization modules and tried again. After two more attempts, I ended up with a one sentence explanation in the form of a "note from your reviewer":

⊖ Not Approved

Your screencast doesn't show how the use of this permission directly improves the user experience in your app. Unfortunately, we also weren't able to determine this from testing your app manually.

All permissions data must be visibly used within your app. We do not accept permission requests for data that you may decide to use later.

Please see our [Examples page](#) to learn more about making and submitting a successful screencast.

[Learn more about testing permissions prior to approval.](#)

Notes From Your Reviewer:

Page Public Content Access is meant only for aggregated, anonymized public content that is meant to be used as comparative analytics.

[@RiederB](#) September 23, 2018

The steadily reduced "observability" of social media platforms is worrisome
[twitter.com/discovertext/s...](#)

← ↻ ★

[@RiederB](#) September 19, 2018

the European Commission has selected the members of the expert group for the upcoming Observatory on the Online Pla...
[twitter.com//web/status/1...](#)

← ↻ ★

[@RiederB](#) September 17, 2018

the "digital wellbeing" feature of Android 9 Pie can turn the screen to grayscale for "winding down"
[arstechnica.com/gadgets/2018/0...](#)

← ↻ ★

[@RiederB](#) September 7, 2018

another way would be a frontend/backend break up: a shared infrastructure for post exchange and networking, and a n...
[twitter.com//web/status/1...](#)

← ↻ ★

[@RiederB](#) August 31, 2018

don't miss [@ezraklein](#) interviewing [@zeynep](#) on the internet/politics intersection
[vox.com/2018/8/6/17656...](#)

← ↻ ★

Categories

- [abstract](#) (3)
- [actor-network theory](#) (3)



Yoel Roth
@yoyoel

Follow



Today we introduced some big changes to how developers get access to our APIs. We know these changes may impact the research community, but think they're the right thing for the long-term health of our platform.

Twitter API  @TwitterAPI

As a developer platform, our first responsibility is our users: to provide a place that supports the health of conversation on Twitter.

To continue to prevent misuse of our platform, we are introducing a few...

Show this thread

4:23 AM - 25 Jul 2018

58 Retweets 99 Likes



22 58 99



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But we have a lot to be getting on with!

- The ‘digital condition’ (Stadler, 2018) is one of ‘deep mediatization’ (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) and datafication of social and cultural life
- Coordinated via a small number of proprietary platforms, mostly owned by massive technology companies
- Data-driven, semi-automated decision making and behavioural manipulation is already everywhere (from politics and news to shopping and dating)
- What are we doing about this?

The future of digital methods for media and communication

1. API-compliant methods (esp. Twitter, YouTube), more attention to subcultural platforms (Reddit, Tumblr)
2. Return to 'grey area' practices like scraping and automated testing (bots) – do our institutions have the risk appetite for this?
3. Qualitative/hybrid digital methods e.g. app walkthrough, platform biography
4. Forensic and experimental methods e.g. algorithm audits, data donation projects (ala AlgorithmWatch)



Digital methods research training – DMRC Summer Schools (2015-)

Name
▶ Algorithms by design
▶ App Walkthrough
▶ Critical Media Industry Studies
▶ Digital Methods Digital Ethics
▶ Discourse Analysis
▶ Encrypt all the things!!! Digital Privacy and Security for Researchers
▶ Ethnographic methods, ethics and children's digital media use
▶ Exploring Media Histories
▶ Information Visualisation for Text-based Social Data
▶ Introducing Instagram
▶ Introduction to Photogrammetry
▶ Introduction to Social Network Analysis in R
▶ Multiplatform Issue Mapping
▶ Online Focus Groups
▶ Social Media Analytics
▶ The Bodies We Never Leave Behind



Thank you!
@jeanburgess