

Using Digital Trace Data for Social and Political Research

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Internet and communication technologies record unprecedented amounts of data about human activity every day. These data come from a wide range of sources, such as websites, social media, messaging apps, digital sensors, online administrative data, browser records, and internet archive among others. These new data sources allow researchers to collect data with high precision and granularity in a nonintrusive way, and they provide researchers with new opportunities for studying human behaviour and social phenomenon. At the same time, the massive volume of digital trace data made available has made many traditional methods infeasible and inapplicable. In response, social science researchers began to harness the power of computers to automate data collection process and the methods developed in computer science to complement analysis. These new approaches form the core of the emerging field of computational social science.

Against this background, this panel brings together scholars from social and political sciences, each with a different substantive interest and regional focus. We hope to foster the exchange about methodological approaches and demonstrate how digital trace data can be used to address social science research questions and understand social and political and phenomena, including civic opportunity and infrastructure in the US and elite recruitment in hybrid regimes. The methodological contributions of this panel address key questions regarding digital trace data, including the data collection process and the methods used for analysis.