

## Emerging Methods for Digital Media Research: An Introduction

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Now as in earlier periods of acute change in the media environment, new disciplinary articulations are producing new methods for media and communication research. At the same time, established media and communication studies methods are being recombined, reconfigured, and remediated alongside their objects of study. This special issue of *JOBEM* seeks to explore the conceptual, political and practical aspects of emerging methods for digital media research. It does so at the juncture of a number of important contemporary trends: the rise of a “third wave” of the Digital Humanities and the “computational turn” (Berry, 2011) associated with natively digital objects and the methods for studying them; the apparently ubiquitous Big Data paradigm—with its various manifestations across academia, business, and government—that brings with it a rapidly increasing interest in social media communication and online “behavior” from the “hard” sciences; along with the multisited, embodied, and emplaced nature of everyday digital media practice.

The issue contains seven articles that advocate for, reflect upon, or critique current

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methodological trends in digital media research. It ranges from a discussion of the emergence of a new wave of Digital Humanities (Neils Brügger and Niels Ole Finneman), the potential for digital media research of emerging approaches like Media Archaeology (Frédéric Lesage), the role of language in research (Randy Kluver, Heidi Campbell and Stephen Balfour), to the ways Big Data is impacting upon content analysis (Seth C. Lewis, Rodrigo Zamith, and Alfred Hermida), digital media methods (Merja Mahrt and Michael Scharkow) and the large-scale policy research potential of community media archives (Nicole Matthews and Naomi Sunderland).

The special issue begins with Randy Kluver, Heidi Campbell and Stephen Balfour's "Language and the Boundaries of Research" which argues that "data-driven research" has failed to engage with its increasingly internationalized context, especially in terms of its Anglophonic or Western-centric focus. As Kluver et al. rightly identify, the field remains focused upon Western media as a placeholder for "global media." Here we are reminded of the importance of understanding Digital Media in context. While Big Data can often abstract the cultural, social, and linguistic nuances of digital media practice, there is a growing pool of researchers exploring interdisciplinary methods such as "ethno-mining" that use ethnography to critique Big Data (Anderson et al., 2009) and situate digital media as part of the complex dynamics of everyday life (Coleman, 2010).

In their review article "The Value of Big Data in Digital Media Research," Merja Mahrt and Michael Scharkow provide a critical survey of methodological approaches to media communication and how the field is being reconfigured in an age of Big Data. In particular, Mahrt and Scharkow focus upon the consequences of using Big Data at different stages of research process, in dialogue with the traditions underpinning manual quantitative and

qualitative approaches. For Seth C. Lewis, Rodrigo Zamith, and Alfred Hermida in “Content Analysis in an Era of Big Data: A Hybrid Approach to Computational and Manual Methods,” one can gain insight into content by blending computational and manual methods. Drawing on a case study of Twitter, Lewis et al. argue that a hybrid method of computational and manual techniques can provide both systematic rigor and contextual sensitivity.

This is followed by Anne Galloway’s “Emergent Media Technologies, Speculation, Expectation and Human/nonhuman Relations” in which Galloway draws on her background as one of the earliest researchers to study ubiquitous computing to discuss the role of sociology in situating emergent media technologies as part of a cultural process involving a range of human and nonhuman actors. Here Galloway focuses upon the often-overlooked aspect of anticipation and expectation in the process of media practice and the production of imaginaries for and of the future. Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, Galloway concludes with some thought-provoking questions for relationships between Digital Media methods and design.

For Neils Brügger and Niels Ole Finneman in “The Web and Digital Humanities: Theoretical and Methodological Concerns” there is a need for the Digital Humanities to understand the complex social, temporal, and spatial dimensions of the web. Using the case study of the real-time and archived web (as a dynamic depiction, not simply a copy of what was once online) to illustrate their point, Brügger and Finneman argue that, currently, the Digital Humanities is limited in its ability to capture the moving architecture of digital media. Frédéric Lesage compliments this discussion by picking up on some aspects of the related field of software studies as well as cultural analytics and media archaeology, in “Cultural

Biographies and Excavations of Media: Context and Process.” Lesage argues for a “cultural biography” approach to the study of software as media objects—as “things.”

Nicole Matthews and Naomi Sunderland’s “Digital Life Story Narratives as Data for Policy Makers and Practitioners: Thinking Through Methodologies for Large-scale Multimedia Qualitative Datasets” explores the role of community-based digital media narratives (e.g. via digital storytelling projects) in “amplifying marginalized voices in the public domain.” It is clear from Matthews and Sunderland’s piece that despite the large numbers of these projects—and hence the depth of research potential in the stories they have produced—the effective deployment of this potential in social policy remains a missed articulation with political, ethical, and methodological dimensions.

### References

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