Exploring Gender, Race, and Sexuality with Social Media Data

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Abstract

We present a full day, hands-on workshop that will provide an opportunity for researchers in our community to explore social media data and ask questions about the intersectionalities of gender, race, and sexuality. We will discuss scholarly questions and methods related to application of social media data analysis and the implications of using, presenting, and communicating results in research contexts. Workshop participants will learn how to access and analyze data using various tools and methods, drawing specifically on a Twitter dataset collected May-June 2014 during the trending hashtag #YesAllWomen. Selected participants will also present their own work to foster opportunities for targeted discussion and continued collaboration. The goals of this workshop are not only to build community but also to enable researchers to begin collecting and analyzing social media data to further their own work. The workshop emphasizes the importance of analyzing social media data ethically, respecting and engaging the sometimes vulnerable and marginalized populations who may have generated the data.

1   Description

Social media data present a powerful opportunity for researchers to explore how they might ask nuanced questions regarding the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality. Recent controversies like #Gamergate and #YesAllWomen, both of which unfolded over social media channels and left a rich trail of data, can have important implications for understanding feminism, sexism, and misogyny. At the same time, online communities are active, dynamic populations that can respond to research in real time. For instance, Black Twitter has responded to and discussed research focused on stakeholders in its community, demonstrating the importance of ethical practices and accountability to online communities when conducting social media data analysis.

With an eye on data from social media sites more broadly, this workshop will use a Twitter dataset collected in May and June 2014 from #YesAllWomen, #NotAllMen, #YesAllWhiteWomen, #YesAllBlackWomen, and #CisGaze to explore specific approaches, tools, and methods to analyze data collected via this relatively new medium. The workshop will provide a combination of hands-on research design and analysis experiences with discussions about the implications of using public social media data to ask questions about human information behavior and needs.

1.1   Purpose and Intended Audience

We invite anyone interested in discussing these topics to join us at this iConference workshop where we will:

- Help build a community of researchers working on issues of gender, race, and/or sexuality within the information sciences.
- Create skill-building experiences that enable researchers to collect and analyze social media data to further their own work.
- Explore how to analyze social media data ethically and develop practices that respect and engage the sometimes vulnerable and marginalized populations who may have generated the data.
- Critically discuss the use of social media data to generate new insights and scholarship.

This workshop is designed to appeal to anyone interested in research issues related to the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and information. We welcome both new and experienced

researchers and encourage participation from a wide range of methodological orientations, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

1.2   Workshop Format

We will begin with introductions and an icebreaking activity. Next, we will hear about some of the challenges and insights in participants' own work in presentations from participants who chose to submit optional workshop papers. (A call for participation was circulated and managed by the organizers prior to the workshop.) This time will also allow for discussion of how other social media datasets may necessarily differ from the Twitter dataset used as the basis for workshop demonstrations.

We will then delve into the ethics of working with social media data generated by vulnerable and/or marginalized populations. We will discuss ways researchers can work collaboratively with and engage the voices of study populations, the limitations of social media data analyses (Tufekci, 2014), and types of questions such data and analyses cannot answer.

Over lunch, participants will engage in collaborative brainstorming in small groups to generate research questions that might be answered using social media data. After lunch, each group will report their research questions back to the larger group.

Next, we will lead hands-on demonstrations showcasing various analytical methods, which may include content or discourse analysis, computational linguistics, information visualization, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and thematic analysis using a theoretical lens. We will apply these methods directly to research questions generated earlier by the group.

Finally, the workshop will conclude with a group discussion to synthesize ideas discussed throughout the workshop and surface future collaboration opportunities.

1.3   Goals and Outcomes

The primary goal of this workshop is to facilitate continued communication and collaboration among a community of gender, sexuality, and race scholars within the iSchools. The workshop also aims to give this community an introductory set of empirical and technical skills that can be applied to future research.

The organizers will maintain a website at iConferenceSocialMediaData.wordpress.com, which will be active before, during, and after the workshop. The website will include the full dataset for access by participants, references and tutorials for answering questions with social media data, and the papers and collaboratively-generated research questions presented at the workshop. Real-time workshop reflections and wrap-up thoughts will be archived via Storify using the hashtag #iConfSMdata. Finally, an article, series of articles, or special issue of a journal will be planned depending on the breadth of research questions asked and answered by workshop participants and organizers.

1.4   Relevance to the iConference

The successful iConference 2013 workshop on Big Social Data for Social and Information Scientists (Goggins *et al.*, 2013), which provided a similar hands-on demonstration experience as we propose, demonstrated the feasibility and desirability of this approach. Additionally, numerous iConference papers in recent years have used social data analytic methods (*e.g.*, Hemsley & Eckert, 2014; Starbird *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, the Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies Colloquium at the University of Toronto (2014) demonstrates growing interest into gender and sexuality within the information sciences. Social computing conferences have had success with similar workshops (*e.g.*, Feminism and Social Media (Hemphill *et al.*, 2014) at CSCW), however, the iConference has yet to combine social media data analysis methods with issues of gender, race, sexuality, and intersectionality. Now is an ideal time to do so.

1.5   Number of Participants

Because the workshop involves hands-on demonstrations, 20 participants would be ideal. However, the workshop could accommodate up to 25 participants.

2   References

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