Home

DIGITAL METHODS FOR CRITICAL CONSUMER STUDIES

Exploring the nexus among surveillance capitalism, consumer culture, and social media

School's rationale, objectives, and topics

In the last decade Digital Methods established themselves as the main methodological paradigm for studying the Internet from a sociological perspective. Over the years, thanks to Digital Methods, scholars have cast light upon several key and emerging socio-cultural phenomena, such as the 'like economy', echo-chambers, the platformization of the Web, social bots, fake news – just to name a few. Since the beginning, Digital Methods privileged *politics* as their main field of research -intended as both the *politics of the medium* (e.g., algorithms) and *politics within the medium* (e.g., climate change). Curiously enough, consumption and consumer culture received scarce attention within Digital Methods studies. This amounts to be a notable gap, since consumption is not simply one topic among others that might be interesting to explore through Digital Methods, but rather a key phenomenon that underpins the logic of functioning of the contemporary digital landscape. Consider for example that, among the top applications that dominate the contemporary 2.0 Web (as well as govern its functioning), there are (private) companies like Google, Facebook, Amazon, Uber and Airbnb, whose business models consist in extracting data from consumers in order to deliver them consumer products, experiences and advertising. Moreover, most of the more interesting current consumer phenomena are *natively digital*, such as self-branding, influencer marketing or brand publics. Nevertheless, few consumer culture and marketing scholars addressed those phenomena by using Digital Methods. Indeed, a more systematic focus on Digital Methods and Consumer Studies means advancing both the disciplines.

Therefore, the overarching scope of the Summer School is two-fold. On the one hand, it aims at introducing students to the basic Digital Methods' concepts, strategies, techniques, and tools. On the other hand, it teaches and stimulates students to apply such methodological array to consumer-related topics. In doing so, the School aims at fostering students an 'activist' attitude towards digital data by encouraging them to take seriously the ethics of digital research as well as the redistribution of the social value of digital data to the public.

This year the School will be dedicated to the theme of *surveillance capitalism* and its nexus with consumer culture. Digital platforms such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, etc. configure as ad hoc 'surveillance devices' for systematic data extraction from the mass of users they host – data that are used for explicit business purposes (e.g., targeted advertising, development of AI products and services, etc.). To meet their business purposes, platforms not only need an enclosed space where to monitor, track and predict user behaviour; they need to design spaces where to constrain users' activities into standardised patterns of action in order to make their behaviours predictable. Social media like Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok seem particularly suited for this purpose, since they provide users with free tools to produce creative content, create communities and express their identities. All these tools are, yet, purposely designed to capture such social-cultural processes, transform them into data points, and convert them into marketing and business products – for a global and emerging socio-economic model that Shoshana Zuboff calls surveillance capitalism.

Specifically, this year, we will address surveillance capitalism empirically through three main lines of research:

1. Mapping imaginaries and practices of surveillance capitalism within social media environments
2. Detecting and mapping the standardization of cultural production on social media (e.g., memetic behaviours)
3. Repurposing surveillance methods for social research purposes as well as exposing mechanisms of surveillance itself.

Beyond the overarching theme of the Summer School, the students will be introduced to the main aspects of Digital Methods research, such as data collection, network analysis, digital content analysis, visual analysis, cross-platform analysis, data visualisation. The course will be delivered using a mix of keynote speeches, frontal lessons, hands-on activities, and group works.

In collaboration with

- **SOMET** (PhD Programme, University of Milan & Turin)
- **Master COM** (Università di Milano)
- **Master COD** (Università di Pavia)

School Directors

School Directors:

- Alessandro Caliandro (Università degli Studi di Pavia; alessandro.caliandro@unipv.it),
- Alessandro Gandini (Università degli Studi di Milano; alessandro.gandini@unimi.it),
- Guido Anselmi (Università degli Studi di Catania; guido.anselmi@unict.it)

Keynote Speakers

Prof. Janice Denegri-Knott (Bournemouth University)

Janice Denegri Knott is Associate Editor of Marketing Theory and co-editor of the Journal of Promotional Communications. She is Professor of Consumer Culture & Behaviour at Bournemouth University where she teaches Consumer Insights. She is also Visiting Professor at the University of Gothenburg. Her research interests span from conceptualising and documenting digital consumption and its practices and more generally the subject of power in consumer and marketing research. Her work has been published in journals including: Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Computer Mediated Communication, Marketing Theory, Journal of Marketing Management, Journal of Consumer Culture, Consumption, Markets & Culture, and the European Journal of Marketing.

She is the recipient of eight prestigious awards including an Editor's highly commended paper in the Journal of Marketing Management, Influential Paper Award in the European Journal of Marketing and two Best Overall Paper awards in Consumption, Markets & Culture. For her industry facing research she has received several industry prizes including: Mediatel's Outstanding Data Communication Award, the Market Research Society's Media Research Award and the Media Research Group's Best Initiative Award. Recent research has been funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme. Prof. Denegri Knott is also Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in the UK.

Dr. Sophie Bishop (University of Sheffield)

Sophie Bishop (she/her) is a Lecturer in Cultural and Creative Industries at the University of Sheffield, UK. Her research focuses on promotional cultures on social media platforms, through the lens of feminist political economy. Her work has been published in journals such as the Sociological Review, Social Media + Society, New Media & Society, Communication, Culture and Critique and Feminist Media Studies. She was the Specialist Advisor to the UK Parliamentary Inquiry into Influencer Culture (2022) and has contributed to EU Policy on the impact of influencers on advertising and consumer protection. Her current research includes 'Paying for it', a project examining the use of targeted advertising in UK creative industries, and Chairing 'Algorithms for Her?', a conference a conference prioritising the study of intersectional forms of injustice that algorithms (and the systems in which they are embedded) often propagate and sustain.

Teachers

Guido Anselmi (Senior Lecturer at University of Catania); Alessandro Caliandro (Associate Professor at University of Pavia); Alessandro Gandini (Associate Professor at University of Milano); Giulia Giorgi (Post-doc Researcher at University of Milano); Ilir Rama (Post-doc Researcher at University of Milano)

Teaching assistants

Laura Bruschi, Margherita di Cicco, Chiara Perin, Camilla Volpe

Programme

The school will be articulated across 5 days. The mornings will be dedicated to teaching activities (related to the topics of the School and delivered through the modalities illustrated above); these will be managed by the teaching team and teaching assistants. The afternoons will be dedicated to student activities (overseen by teaching assistants). During the last day of the school students will present their work and receive feedback from directors, teaching assistants, keynote speakers, and fellow colleagues. A final discussion will conclude the School activities. Below is an indicative schedule of activities.

Day 1 (24 July): Surveillance capitalism in marketing and consumer culture research

14 Welcome from the Directors

14.30 Introduction to Digital Methods for Consumer Research, *Alessandro Caliandro*

15.30-17 Keynote lecture, *Janice Denegri-Knott* (Bournemouth University)

17-19 Assignment of research themes and formation of working groups

19.30 Welcome Aperitivo

Day 2 (25 July): Data collection (scraping, APIs, tracking techniques, online tools)

9-10.30 Seminar: Data Collection for Digital Methods, *Guido Anselmi*

11-13 Seminar: Epistemology and techniques of tracking methods, *Ilir Rama*

Lunch

14.30-16 Working groups session: students' activities

16-19 Feedback on working groups session

Day 3: (26 July): Basic techniques for digital data analysis

9-10.30 Seminar 1: Social network analysis, *Alessandro Gandini*

11-13 Seminar 2: Digital content analysis, *Alessandro Gandini, Giulia Giorgi*

Lunch

14.30-16 Working groups session: students' activities

16-19 Feedback on working groups session

Day 4: (27 July): Visual Analysis & Data Visualization

9-10.30 Seminar 1: Visual analysis, *Giulia Giorgi, Laura Bruschi*

11-13 Seminar 2: Cross-platform analysis & Data visualisation, *Giulia Giorgi, Alessandro Gandini*

Lunch

14.30-16.00 Keynote lecture, Sophie Bishop (University of Sheffield)

16-19 Working groups session: students' activities

Social dinner

Day 5: (28 July): Presentations & Concluding Discussion

9-12.00 Presentations

12-13: Concluding discussion

Lunch on the Lake

Contact Us

For enquiries about the venue of the school, travel, registration and accomodation contact:
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