

Special Issue "The Sustainability of Social Media Research"

Deadline for manuscript submissions: **15 July 2022**

Special Issue Information

Dear Colleagues,

The objective of this Special Issue is to discuss the sustainability of the research on the Web and social media. "Sustainability" is used here in the original meaning introduced by the 1987 Brundtland Report and revived by Kuhlman and Farrington in this very journal. Rather than balancing environmental protection and socioeconomic development (as in the 1997 *UN Agenda for Development*), the original definition focuses instead on "the real contradiction which exists between long-term sustainability and short-term welfare." (Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010:3437). We believe that this contradiction and the consideration of long-term environmental and social consequence is very relevant for online research.

In the last two decades, the drastic increase in the availability of records collected through digital technologies has encouraged the renewal of social research and the emergence of a variety of approaches subsumed under the labels of computational social sciences and digital sociology. In the short term, there is little doubt that these developments have been productive and opened exciting avenues for understanding collective phenomena. Still, little reflection has been devoted to their consequences in the medium and long term.

By raising concern about the long-term sustainability of computational social sciences, we refer to the much greater consumption of energy required by the technical infrastructure necessary to support this research, not only by research institutions but also (and to a much greater extent) by the industrial giants who generate and store the new traces. We also refer to the lingering societal risks raised by the growing traceability of individual and collective behaviors and increasingly highlighted by surveillance studies. Finally, we wish to address the long-term consequences of grounding social research on records that are originally collected for marketing purposes by a handful of powerful industrial actors.

This is why, among the many strands of computational social sciences, this Special Issue focuses in particular on the research on and with social media. While piggybacking the data infrastructure of online platforms has been invaluable in renewing our outlook on collective phenomena, it came at the cost of implicitly endorsing social media and their self-coronation as gatekeepers of "social big data". Ethical guidelines, such as the one of the Association of Internet Researchers, provide precious advice on how to conduct the academic side of research carefully, yet they tend to skip over the aftereffects imported by the repurposing of nonacademic records. If we are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of Web giants, our steps risk being guided by their short-term economic interests, rather than by our own research curiosity. This does not have to be the case, but it might if we do not pay enough attention to this risk.

Fostering attention to the long-standing environmental and democratic consequences of social media research is the objective of this Special Issue, which welcomes submissions from across the whole spectrum of digital sociology, computational social science, and new media research discussing the risks, side effects, and long-term bias of this type of research.

Kuhlman T and Farrington J (2010) What is sustainability? Sustainability 2(11): 3436–3448. DOI: 10.3390/su2113436.

Dr. Tommaso Venturini
Guest Editor

Manuscript Submission Information

Manuscripts should be submitted online at www.mdpi.com by [registering](#) and [logging in to this website](#). Once you are registered, [click here to go to the submission form](#). Manuscripts can be submitted until the deadline. All submissions that pass pre-check are peer-reviewed. Accepted papers will be published continuously in the journal (as soon as accepted) and will be listed together on the special issue website. Research articles, review articles as well as short communications are invited. For planned papers, a title and short abstract (about 100 words) can be sent to the Editorial Office for announcement on this website.

Submitted manuscripts should not have been published previously, nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere (except conference proceedings papers). All manuscripts are thoroughly refereed through a single-blind peer-review process. A guide for authors and other relevant information for submission of manuscripts is available on the [Instructions for Authors](#) page. *Sustainability* is an international peer-reviewed open access semimonthly journal published by MDPI.

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Keywords

- social media
- online platforms
- digital debate
- surveillance capitalism
- digital methods
- computational social sciences
- infrastructure studies

Published Papers

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