Understanding Social Media Researchers’ Data Management Practices

Faculty supervisor: Libby Hemphill

ICPSR is developing a curated archive to house datasets, workflows, and code used by social media researchers for the empirical analysis of social media platforms, content, and user behavior. Our goal is to provide a user-friendly, large-scale, next-generation data resource for social, behavioral, and economic science researchers conducting data-intensive research using data from social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram. As social media data becomes critical to our efforts to understand social, behavioral, and economic phenomena, it is critical that this data (and its associated workflows and code) be well-maintained, discoverable, and accessible to researchers.

As part of this effort, we need to understand how social media researchers manage their data. Some questions include what tools do they use to collect data? How do they keep track of multiple collections? What efforts do they undertake to clean or share the data? What transformations do the data undergo between collection and analysis?

During the summer of 2018, the work on this project will include the following activities:

- Systematic literature review to identify methods reported in research articles that leverage social media data
- Interviews with researchers who use social media data (including drafting an interview protocol and recruiting participants)
- Analyzing interview data
- Drafting publications (e.g., white papers, research articles) that explain the results of the study and its implications for the social media archive and research practice

Interested students should have strong interests in digital curation and data management practices and must have excellent reading and writing skills. Experience with social media data (e.g., using platform APIs, cleaning messy data) is a plus but is not required.

I will meet weekly with the student and will introduce them to faculty and staff at ICPSR working on this archive. I will help identify literature for review, develop the interview protocol, and recruit study participants. I will also help the student learn to write for a scholarly audience. ICPSR can provide financial assistance for travel and to compensate participants for their time.