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3rd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ILIS

Research Methods in the Digital Society: Areas and Practices

ILIS
INTERNATIONAL LAB FOR
INNOVATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH

**University of Salerno
24-25 November 2021**

III International conference International Lab for Innovative Social Research (ILIS)

Research Methods in the Digital Society: areas and practices

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(Basing on how the pandemic will evolve, the conference will be entirely on-site, in Salerno, entirely online or will take a hybrid format)

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Doing research is an ever-changing challenge for social scientists. This is especially true in the digital society recently announced as Society 5.0 (Gladden 2019).

Internet and computer mediated communication (CMC) are being incorporated into every aspect of daily life and social life has been deeply penetrated by the Internet. This is due to recent technological developments which increase the scope and range of online social spaces and the forms and time of participation such as the web 2.0 which widened the opportunities for user-generated content, the emergence of an "internet of things" and of ubiquitous mobile devices which make it possible to be always connected.

We can say that digital technologies are becoming central in understanding culture and society, human experience and social world since computer software and hardware actively constitute self-hood, embodiment, social life, social relations, social institutions, in a word us as humans (Lupton 2015). Thus, digital technologies are entangled in the structures of society in many different, complex, and even contradictory ways and are deeply changing the practices, symbols, and shared meanings of our societies. The distinction between real and virtual, material and immaterial, bounded and unbounded spaces, in group, outgroup become confused and overlapping (Veltri, 2021; Rabelo, Bhide and Gutierrez, 2019) with frequent incursions of virtual reality into real life, social relations developed in physically unspecified places, online interactions losing their space-time anchorage and strength of linkages and incorporation of technology into our daily materiality.

The "digital turn" (Caliandro, Gandini, 2019) provides both new objects of study (*natively digital data objects*, born in the web), digitalized and digital data and innovative source of methods, that is a *natively digital methodological array* (Rogers 2013; Caliandro 2018). Digitalized and digital data, also called *big data*, are related to our digital traces and our routine interactions (e.g. search engine queries, phone calls, shopping, banking interactions, social media posts, narratives and storytelling, etc.) (Kumar, Morstatter e Liu, 2013; Zafarani, Abbasi e Liu, 2014; Amaturo, Aragona, 2019b). The impact of such turn on the epistemological and methodological asset of social research is undeniable due to the specificity of such digital data (Agodi 2010) and the opportunities of creative and innovative research practices (Giuffrida, Rinaldi, Zarba, 2016). Thus, some hypothesize a shift toward a *fourth paradigm* in social sciences based on the power of algorithms and computers (Stefanizzi, 2016; 2021). We can accept or not the notion of paradigm for such developments but what is undeniable is that the pervasive digitalization calls for interpretative schemes and methodological options more suitable for grasping the current complexity.

This calls for a tuning of the epistemological and methodological stances of social research from a twofold perspective: first by adapting the established social research methods to the practices and the interactions made by people when acting online (digitalized methods), then by creating new methods and techniques in order to analyze those online experiences that could not be framed using the tools of the traditional social research methodology (digital methods).

With reference to the specificity, a crucial epistemological and ethical issue refers to the nature of data collected online which are drastically different from those collected through questionnaires, surveys or interviews: they are collected without the actor is aware of it (Corposanto, Valastro 2014). It is a new ontological object that is referred to in different ways (digital life, digital shadow, digital footprint, algorithmic identity) (Addeo, Masullo 2021). If on the one hand this confers to this information a naturalistic character, making them paradoxically closer to ethnographic materials than provoked data (such as answers to surveys and interviews) (Cardano, 2011), on the other hand, it raises important ethical issues. On the quantitative side, big data together with the development in computational science have allowed for the spread of innovative explanatory models and simulations (topic modelling, machine learning) although their feature of being "searched" and "found" online may drive social research toward a data-driven approach and a naïve new empirism (Kitchin 2014, Amaturo, Aragona 2019a)).

Digitalization gave also opportunity for rediscovering methods that had never been mainstream, such as network analysis (Corbisiero, 2021) and content analysis (Punziano, 2021). On the qualitative side, the spread of spaces of online narration and storytelling, have strengthen the possibility of digital ethnography and biographic research (Delli Paoli, D'Auria 2021; Delli Paoli, 2021; Masullo, Addeo, Delli Paoli 2020).

In this conference we annually bring together researchers from different disciplines who engage in wide forms of reflection on the future of the research methods in the study of the digital society in its broadest sense.

In the previous editions of this conference, which is now at its third edition, we discussed the future of digital research and the significance of the digital challenge to social research by reflecting on the epistemological impact of digital methods, on innovative methodological practices (digital ethnography, computational analysis, etc.), on the digital adaptation of traditional methods and on the methodological challenges opened by the digital which implies embracing the natural logic of online communication affordances in gathering, ordering, and analyzing data—as with tags, links, or hashtags.

This resulted in several publications which collect the outputs of the previous conferences:
- A special issue in Italian Sociological Review (Class A journal -ANVUR rating) dedicated to the reconceptualization of social research in the digital era
- A Handbook of Research on Advanced Research Methodologies for a Digital Society
- A special issue in Cultura e Studi del Sociale (Scientific journal – ANVUR rating) dedicated to digital research during Covid-19 pandemic.
- A book dedicated to ethnography and netnography

The advent of the global Covid-19 pandemic from late 2019 onwards have accelerated the adoption of digital solutions at an unprecedented pace, exacerbated the importance of digital innovations, the pervasiveness of the internet in daily life, the hybridization between "social" and "technological"

processes and consequently the availability of information and of *natively digital data objects* (born in the web) to be studied.

In this conference we would like to examine both the impact of the digital on traditionally "offline" and face-to-face contexts such as education, policy and politics, sensitive topics and population such as gender and sexualities and the spread of innovative digital research practices.

Given the spread of digital technologies into most crannies of everyday life, it is impossible for one conference to cover all the areas that could be affected by digital research. The modest aim of the conference is to introduce a range of interesting areas most affected by digital innovations and presenting concrete research practices.

Thus, this conference especially (but not exclusively) calls for contributions that shed new light on the following topics:

- Theoretical, epistemological, methodological, ontological and ethical reflections about the digital research methods;
- Digital research in education;
- Digital research in policy and politics;
- Digital research on business, consumption and tourism;
- Digital research on gender and sexualities;
- Digital research on health and e-health;
- Digital research on media and communication studies;
- Digital research on territories and environment.

Submissions may consider the relationship between the current global uncertainties and changes and social research and practice.

Abstracts need to be limited to **500 words** and include goals, research methods and main findings. Please use the **abstract form** and send it as an attached file to: labilis@unisa.it

Conference publications

All the paper selected for presentation will be published. The scientific committee of the conference will select best papers for publications in special issues dedicated to the conference on **Italian A-grade journals in sociological fields**. The remaining papers will be published in special issues on a scientific journal and/or in an international Handbook of research, and/or a national book.

Conference organisation

The conference is organised by the International Lab for innovative social research (ILIS). The lab is an interdisciplinary centre for social research established within the Department of Humanities, Philosophy and Education. It aims to stimulate theoretical and methodological discussions, as well as empirical studies, on emerging trends in social research: from theoretical challenges faced by new social issues to innovative methodological approaches to understand them. The lab's mission is to promote theoretical, epistemological and methodological advances in the social sciences through continuous exchanges with national and international scholars.

The research interests focus on social processes ranging from educational, migratory, identity and cultural processes, to gender, generational and health issues drawing special attention to the social research methods.

The main goal is to offer an integrated research system to direct scientific actions towards an innovative theoretical and empirical knowledge of the processes transforming our societies.

From the scientific point of view, the centre aims to combine the understanding of contemporary social processes with emerging trends in social research methods which have innovated traditional approaches and have introduced alternative data collection and analysis methods together with new methods for representing information (such as in the case of e-methods and big data analysis).

The conference will be held on the **24th and 25th of November 2021**.

Call for abstract

Deadline to submit abstracts: 26 July 2021

Author Notification: 31 July 2021

Deadline to submit papers: 31 October 2021

Conference dates: 24-25 November 2021

Executive Board: Felice Addeo, Angela Delli Paoli, Giuseppe Masullo, University of Salerno, Gabriella Punziano, University of Naples Federico II

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Participation fees

The participation fee for the III International Conference ILIS is **30 euros**, including VAT. The methods of payment will be communicated together with the acceptance of the abstract by the Executive Board.

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