

SOCIAL MEDIA

Pedagogy and Practice

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Chapter 5

How to Do Communication Research Using Social Media Data

William B. Hart & Erica C. Taylor

This chapter offers advice on how to do communication research on social media data. We specifically cover what should be included in a quantitative research paper on social media and we illustrate our advice with a case study. As we cover each section of a research paper, we highlight aspects of the section that are specifically relevant to social media. For example, in the discussion about the methodology section we address the technical and ethical issues of using social media data. In terms of ethics, the key issue being: is a social media post private data or public? Beyond ethical issues, there are also technical issues when gathering social media data. The general purpose of the chapter is to help researchers address these and other issues and help facilitate more study of social media within communication and media research.

Drawing on the advice given in several sources, what follows is a how-to on writing a quantitative research paper on social media (American Psychological Association, 2010; Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., Friedman, P. G., and Kreps, G. L., 1992; Galvan, 2009; Girten and Kabacoff, 2011; Keyton, 2006). For a more qualitative perspective on doing social media research see Altheide and Schneider (2013). A quantitative research paper contains a problem statement, a literature review, a methods section, a results section, and a discussion section.

Writing the Introduction or Problem Statement

The beginning of a quantitative research paper contains one or more introductory paragraphs sometimes called the problem statement. Usually there are three main objectives of the problem statement: (1) introduce the reader to the topic, (2) explain the purpose of the research, and (3) explain the