What is blog analysis?

Helene Snee, Sociology
Blog analysis

• Any analysis that uses blogs as a source of data
• Wide range of approaches:
  – Qualitative / quantitative / mixed methods
  – Solicited / unsolicited blogs
• Wide range of research questions
  – Interest in phenomenon of blogs and blogging
  – Asking questions about ‘offline life’
Introduction to blogs

• Web-log = blog
• 1997: used to describe website to ‘log’ webpages (Blood 2004: n.p.)
• “Rise of linkless blogging culture” (Wakeford and Cohen 2008: 311) and online journals
• Development of new blog ‘genres’ – no longer a specific form of web content (Bruns and Jacobs 2006)
  – corporate blogs, news blogs, travel blogs, research blogs....
Contemporary blogging conventions

• “… regular and frequent updating, whether writing, photos or other content; the expectation of linking to other bloggers and online sources; a month-by-month archive; the capacity of feedback through comments to the blog; a particular style of writing which is often characterised as spontaneous and revelatory” (Wakeford and Cohen 2008: 308).
Combining the strengths of UMIST and The Victoria University of Manchester

(Huffaker, 2006: 3)
Web 2.0

- Social software and user content
- Producers = users
- Interactive web
- The personal is now public
- ‘Archives of everyday life’
  - “preferences, choices, views, gender, physical attributes, geographical locations, background, employment and educational history, photographs…” (Beer and Burrows 2007: 4.4)
Examples of blog analysis

   - How interlinked is the blogosphere? Do other types of conversation take place?
   - Random sample from blog tracking service (blo.gs)
   - Manually followed hyperlinks
   - Social network analysis and qualitative analysis of “conversations” (e.g. comments)
Examples of blog analysis

   – Exploring public opinion
   – Retrospective - Danish cartoon controversy (Thelwall 2007)
   – Emergent - public fears about sciences (Thelwall and Prabowo 2007)

   • Automated data collection using ‘RSS’ feeds
   • Trend detection for posts using ‘fear’ words and ‘science’ words
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Examples of blog analysis

   - Examination of gender similarities and differences among teenage blogs
   - Content analysis of randomly-selected blogs sampled using blog search engines
   - Presentation of identities and use of language to express experiences and feelings
Examples of blog analysis

   – Goth community and transition from discussion forums to blogs
   – Context - debates surrounding individualisation and identity
   – Ethnography of LiveJournal users
   – Set up own LiveJournal account
   – Participant observation and interviews with users recruited through journal
Examples of blog analysis

   - Experience of morality in everyday life
   - Presentations of self unprompted by research interaction
   - Set up online presence – blog and research website
   - Data collection through both passive ‘trawling’ and active solicitation
     • Recruitment through blog community networks
Blog Analysis Case Study

• “Framing the gap year”
  – Representations of gap year experiences
• How do young people present their gap year stories?
• Blogs as narratives

Image: www.smileinternational.org
Gap Year Study: Why Blogs?

- Practical advantages, e.g. access
- Wealth of data
- Unobtrusive
  - Unsolicited and naturalistic narratives
  - Own language and reflections
- How did the gappers ‘frame’ their accounts for an audience?
  - Extent of ‘unprompted reflexivity’ or accounts guided by ‘pre-existing dispositions’?
Gap Year Study: Practical Issues

- Searching for blogs
  - Blog search engines and blogging websites
  - Manual checking to construct sample
- Keeping track
- Managing blog data
  - Converted to text and imported into Atlas.ti
  - Problem: blogs are multimedia ‘texts’ ....
  - Over 1 million words!
Gap Year Study: Methodological Issues

- Who are we capturing?
  - ‘Digital divide’
  - Alternative perspectives
- New form of text
  - Text; pictures; video; comments; hyperlinks; audio; adverts
- Verifying identity
  - E.g. could not make conclusions regarding class background
Gap Year Study: Ethical Issues

• Public or private data?
• Blogs as representation of a person or text with author?
• Tension between acknowledging authorship and protecting identity
• Data in public domain
  – Informed consent not required
  – ‘Personal but not private’ (Hookway 2008: 105)
• Data anonymised
• Bruckman (2002): ‘moderate disguise’
Some conclusions

- Wide variety of approaches
- Wide variety of research questions
- Opportunities and challenges
  - Sampling, managing data, analysis tools
  - Ethical considerations
- Collaboration with information scientists
Further information

• Statistical Cybermetrics Research Group
  - Specialises in the downloading and analysis of data on a large scale from the web http://cybermetrics.wlv.ac.uk/

• The Blog Analysis Toolkit (BAT)
  - System for capturing, archiving and sharing blog posts https://surveyweb2.ucsur.pitt.edu/qblog/page_login.php

• Blog trends / searches / directories
  - http://blo.gs/about.php
  - http://www.blogpulse.com/
  - http://blogsearch.google.com/
  - http://technorati.com/
Case Studies


Additional References


