

Doing Research Online, Doing Online Research

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Objectives

In this lecture, I would like to introduce you to several ways of answering research questions online, using online tools. I will do this by:

1. Discussing some online tools used by social scientists for collecting data
2. Provide opportunities for you to practice collecting data online with potential group members
3. Discuss using online tools properly

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Online Tools

Pew Internet and American Life Project

- ▶ www.pewinternet.org
- ▶ A non-profit project that produces reports on "Internet and American Life"
- ▶ Data is collected through surveys
- ▶ Two areas you should focus on:
 - ▶ "Topics"
 - ▶ "Research Toolkit" – "Get the Latest Statistics"

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Online Tools

Pew Internet and American Life Project

- ▶ The "Topics" section provides links to detailed studies about social issues
- ▶ You can find facts through the "Get the Latest Statistics" link
- ▶ If you want to use information from the Pew website, you need to cite it (discussed at the end of this lecture)
- ▶ Using the "Topics" or "Get the Latest Statistics" links, try and answer this question:
 - ▶ What racial group has the highest percentage of teens online?

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Online Tools

Google's Touchgraph SEO

- ▶ <http://www.touchgraph.com/seo>
- ▶ Provides a way of visualizing the connections between websites
- ▶ You can use this tool to if you are interested in studying websites that may have similar themes or users
- ▶ You can look for related keywords or websites
- ▶ You can find out which websites are more central to your theme (they have more connections)

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Online Tools

Google's Touchgraph SEO

- ▶ <http://www.touchgraph.com/seo>
- ▶ Try to produce your own graph
 1. Select a keyword or website
 2. Build a graph with at least three nodes (keywords)
 3. What is the top domain/website (if there is one)
 4. Try to export this graph

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Online Tools

Alexa.Com

- ▶ Website that can give you a measure of the amount of traffic that a website gets
- ▶ You can compare sites to see which is more popular
- ▶ You can find out the demographics of those who visit the site

Use Alexa.Com

1. Pick a website that you like and find out its Alexa rank
2. Compare that website to other websites
3. Find out the demographics of those who visit the site

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Online Tools

Creative Commons

<http://creativecommons.org/>

- ▶ Is a "portal" where internet content is shared *legally* and *legitimately*
- ▶ You should use this site if you want to use images, video, and other Internet content on your wikipage
- ▶ Try to find content on creative commons:
 1. Pick a keyword or topic
 2. Find audio content that you can use
 3. Find an image that you can use
 4. Try downloading a file to your desktop

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Online Tools

You! (Participant Observation)

- ▶ The most effective way of collecting data is your own observations online
- ▶ Consider a website like a foreign culture, and your job is to visit that culture and learn about it
- ▶ Refer to the first lecture on "Basic Sociological Concepts" to get an idea the elements of culture
- ▶ People doing participant observations take field notes

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Using Online Tools Properly

- ▶ When observing discussion boards, do not participate in them (participating requires permission from the College)
- ▶ You can, however, record anonymous comments made by users - this is public information.

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Online Tools

- ▶ Let's do an exercise in participant observation
- A. Pick a website that is an online community (as a group)
- B. Take 15 – 20 minutes exploring the website
- C. Make a list of all the things that you see (type or write). These “things” can be:
 - ▶ Cultural elements – norms, symbols, values, beliefs, language
 - ▶ Personal opinions
 - ▶ Random observations

Each person should make their own list, and then you can combine it together

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Online Tools

- ▶ Let's do another exercise in participant observation
- A. Using that same website...
- B. Take 15 – 20 minutes exploring the same website
- C. As a group, answer these questions (type in word...)
 1. What kind of topics are discussed on the website?
 2. Who are the main participants on the website?
 3. How does one get to become a participant? (are there any rules or regulations)
 4. Are their specific symbols, language, or norms unique to the website? What are they?
 5. How can this website help a specific group (structural-functional analysis), how can it create conflict in society (social-conflict analysis)?

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Using Online Tools Properly

► Using the Web to Find Research and Citations

Here are two examples of how to cite:

Markowitz, Robin. 1991. "Canonizing the Popular." *Cultural Studies Central*. Retrieved October 31, 2001
(<http://culturalstudies.net/canon.htm>)

Southern Poverty Law Center. 2011. Retrieved August, 3 2011
(<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/113/groups>)

- To find out more about citing properly, in ASA style, use this link:
<http://www.ric.edu/sociology/termpaperguide.php>

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Using Online Tools Properly

- Do not use any website just because it is convenient
- If you wish to use a website in your report, or on your wikipage, use websites that are:
 - Major newspapers (Projo, New York Times) and news outlets (CNN, FOX)
 - Government websites
 - Most non-profit or academic organizations (check with me)
- Stay away from other websites because you can't be sure if that information is legitimate. Stay away from blog unless you are researching the blog itself

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Online Tools

- Google Scholar
 - If you wish to use the Internet to do research, I strongly recommend trying Google Scholar
 - This allows you to search university libraries and academic databases
 - It is linked to the RIC library
 - You can often find "gems"

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A Note

- ▶ The Adams Library has a good collection of books that you can use
- ▶ I have provided a list of these books on the class website:
<http://internetandsociety.wikispaces.com/Key+Texts>
- ▶ Find out if these books are useful through Amazon or other places that provide an online summary (remember, for your written paper you will have to use some books)

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Wrap-Up

- ▶ You have several tools available to you:
 - ▶ Pew Internet and American Life Project
 - ▶ Google's Touchgraph SEO
 - ▶ Alexa.COM
 - ▶ Creative Commons
 - ▶ Participant Observation
- ▶ Online tools should be used properly
 - ▶ Cite at all times
 - ▶ Use credible sources
 - ▶ For this class, you are only to observe and collect, not interact
- ▶ Use the texts available in the library to add to your work

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