

Digital Methods in Information and Communication Sciences

Special issue coordinated by:
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In information and communication sciences, the exploration of digital environments has driven the deployment of specific methods, often supported by computational tools. This centrality of the digital – as a fieldwork, as a research topic, and as a technical support for scholars – is explained both by "the historical interest of information and document sciences in data computerization, indexing, and classification, and by the attention paid by communication sciences to emerging technical devices" (Pinède and Mercier, 2022).

Intervening from collection to publication, including the constitution of corpora and their processing (Bigot, 2018), digital methods shape objects of research (Venturini et al., 2014; Severo, 2017) and participate in redefining the questions of the scholars who deploy them (Rogers, 2013). Facing these challenges, and in a context where the mappings of methods testify to their constant evolution (Barats et al., 2021), this call for papers invites researchers in communication and information sciences to question what the deployment of digital methods does to their research practices and to bear witness to the concrete modalities of their work.

Presentation

To document this evolution, we particularly encourage contributions grounded in case studies. Empirical work is essential for revealing the technical constraints inherent to digital fieldwork, interrogating the status of these tools, and articulating the iterative interplay between the field and the development of research frameworks (Millette et al., 2020). Contributions that situate their reflections in "collaborative initiatives" characteristic of the deployment of digital methods (Casagrande and Vuillon, 2017) are particularly welcome. In this perspective, we strongly encourage co-written contributions (bringing together researchers, engineers, and data scientists).

1. Behind-the-scenes and creativity in digital methods

We expect contributions exploring the "methodological tinkering," the "inner workings," and the "behind-the-scenes" of research in digital environments. These papers might highlight the methodological creativity researchers must deploy to gain access to digital spaces, as well as to collect and analyze their corpora. In this context, inventiveness goes beyond advanced programming skills or the automated processing of Big Data. The deployment of digital methods equally encompasses more "artisanal," qualitative, and situated approaches, which this special issue aims to fully showcase. For instance, studying mobile applications, closed digital environments, or ephemeral platform content (like live videos or stories) often requires ad hoc data capture practices, such as screenshots or screen recordings of browsing sessions (Allard, 2021). This echoes earlier practices adopted by researchers studying unarchived environments, such as the Minitel (Jouët, 2018). Proposals may also document how methods are adapted in response to the changing nature of these platforms. Examples include the sudden implementation of anti-bot barriers (e.g., CAPTCHAs) on web portals, or, more recently, the

2023 shutdown of the *Twitter/X* API and its impact on research tools. These frictions, often material in nature, ultimately raise questions about the long-term sustainability of the tools deployed in such contexts, and the ongoing challenges of maintaining and adapting them over time.

2. Researcher reflexivity in the deployment of digital methods

While this special issue seeks to document the methodological innovations emerging from digital methods, it steers clear of the sometimes blind enthusiasm for automated corpus processing (Boyd and Crawford, 2011). Instead, we encourage contributions that adopt a reflexive approach, moving away from a strictly "solutionist" paradigm. This theme welcomes proposals that interrogate the "black boxes" of the tools researchers integrate into their methodological protocols. Articles focusing on computational tools might, for instance, revisit the original purposes for which these tools were designed (Venturini, 2024) and highlight the methodological shifts they afford (or impose). Importantly, contributors should address the specific status of these tools within their research: what practices do they enable? What tasks do they automate? Which operations cannot be delegated to them? And where are compromises made between analytical frameworks and tool "efficiency"? Furthermore, what critical stance should researchers adopt toward proprietary solutions or more "user-friendly" platforms, such as *Voyant Tools*? How do we navigate or "make do with" the black-boxed nature of the tools available for research? Finally, how can we avoid naturalizing the data produced during the research process, and instead re-situate its production within its full complexity (social, semiotic, economic, institutional, etc.)?

3. Institutional contexts and sovereignty issues in the deployment of digital methods

This theme aims to highlight the underlying socio-economic, institutional, and sovereignty dynamics of digital research. Often, the tools most readily accessible to researchers were originally designed for commercial or managerial purposes, as is the case with *Google Workplace apps* or *CrowdTangle* (acquired by *Meta* in 2016). Relying on such tools raises profound ethical and legal questions (Domenget et al., 2022): how can we rethink data sovereignty given the growing dependence of French public research on foreign private platforms? Furthermore, this theme seeks to critically examine the impact of a project-based research organization that increasingly favors short-term contracts and compressed timeframes. The deployment of digital methods is heavily conditioned by these funding mechanisms (Hubert and Louvel, 2012). In this respect, the logic driving competitive calls for projects (such as those issued by the French National Research Agency [ANR] or Horizon Europe) and its consequences on the use of digital methods warrant critical scrutiny. How can we consolidate and sustain the development of tools intended for the scientific community when research personnel face a succession of short-term contracts and funding fluctuations? How can we maintain these tools, ensure their continued visibility, and expand their uses, particularly to avoid wasting the initial human and financial investments that made their deployment possible? This theme therefore invites contributions that document the concrete effects of these infrastructural instabilities (Barats et al., 2021). Finally, within this institutional context, we also welcome proposals exploring the stakes of collaborative and transdisciplinary work fostered by research infrastructures like Huma-Num, as well as university initiatives dedicated to digital methods (such as the Sciences Po médialab, the CERES at Sorbonne University, the Textopol project at Céditec, the laboratory of the National Audiovisual Institute [INA] Lab) or the DataLab at the National Library of France).

References

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Proposal selection process

The selection of proposals will take place in two stages:

- First, based on a 1,500 to 2,000-word abstract outlining the proposal's objectives, argumentation, and originality, along with a few bibliographical references;
- Second, for accepted abstracts, a further evaluation will be conducted based on the full articles.

Author guidelines, which must be strictly adhered to, are available on the journal's website: <https://journals.openedition.org/edc/668>.

Peer review will be conducted anonymously (double-blind) by at least two members of the reading committee.

Abstracts must be submitted no later than **October 15, 2026**, in .doc, .docx, or .odt format, to the following two email addresses:

- thibault.grison@univ-lille.fr
- virginie.julliard@sorbonne-universite.fr

Proposals, and subsequently the full articles – which must be between 35,000 and 45,000 characters in length (including spaces, footnotes, and bibliography) – may be submitted in either French or English. The final articles will be published in French for the print edition of the journal, and in French (and English, if applicable) for the electronic version. No commitment to publish can be made prior to the review of the full manuscript.

Timeline

- **October 15, 2026:** Submission of abstracts for evaluation
- **November 15, 2026:** Notification of acceptance or rejection
- **March 1, 2027:** Submission of full articles
- **June 1, 2027:** Submission of final revised articles
- **Late October 2027:** Publication of the special issue in *Études de Communication* no. 69

Review Committee (currently being formed)

Laetitia Biscarrat, Université Côte d'Azur, LIRCES
 Marion Coville, Université de Poitiers, CEREGE-COMIN
 Jean-Claude Domenget, Université Marie et Louis Pasteur, ELLIADD
 Eric Kergosien, Université de Lille, GERiiCO
 Valérie Schafer, Université du Luxembourg, C²DH
 Marta Severo, Université Paris Nanterre, Dicen
 Lauren Tilton, University of Richmond, CLAAI