SAGE Research Methods: Doing Research Online

What are *SAGE Research Methods* Case Studies?
SAGE Research Methods Cases are used for teaching and learning social science research methods in more than 350 institutions worldwide. Cases are peer-reviewed and are . . .

- **Short** and **accessible** accounts of **research methods** in the context of **real research projects**
- **Pedagogically focused** to help students understand the practicalities of doing research
- **Introductory in tone**: explanatory and jargon-free
- **Engaging**: using examples and writing devices that reach out to the student reader and make research feel relevant, meaningful and useful

What is the focus of Doing Research Online Cases?
Main types of cases in the Doing Research Online collection include:

- Cases **highlighting challenges of specific steps of research** e.g. data collection from Twitter; recruiting participants online; getting ethics committee approval for an innovative methodology; creating, managing and storing digital data effectively;

- Cases about using **innovative digital methods** e.g. the use of gaming techniques for social research, virtual ethnography

- Cases highlighting **challenges of redesigning research studies/adapting research plans** for online and what methodological implications this presents

- Cases **highlighting challenges of online data analysis**, including qual, quant and big data

Please discuss the focus of your case study with your editorial contact before you start writing. If your case study deviates from the above topics this must be made clear to your editorial contact, who will be able to advice as to whether the focus is within the scope of this resource.

Each case study should include a brief overview of the entire project, but focus in-depth on just one or two stages or aspects of the research, for example data collection or data analysis.

Whilst each case study will be drawn from a specific research project, authors should seek to draw out lessons that are widely applicable. The aim of these case studies is to introduce the reader to the topic at hand and to provide **methodological guidance** and **practical insights** which can be **employed in their own research.**

Authors: Please complete only the white fields below.

Case Study Title	*Searching for the Red Tent Online: Using manual archiving to scope out the representation of a movement of women's circles*
Authors:	

1	Name	*Madeleine Castro*
	Author email	*m.a.castro@leedsbeckett.ac.uk*
	Affiliation, country	*Leeds Beckett University, UK*
	SAGE Author ID	*[office use only]*

Author bio. Please include a separate biography for each author. Maximum of 200 words per author.	Dr Madeleine Castro, BA, MA, PhD is a Senior Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Psychology at Leeds Beckett University, UK.
	Broadly speaking her research interests include exceptional human experiences (EHEs), Feminism(s), contemporary spiritualities and Transpersonal Psychology.
	Madeleine completed an MA in Social Research at Goldsmiths, University of London, in 2004. Her Masters dissertation considered qualitative accounts of women's reported EHEs. Securing scholarship funding for a PhD in the Department of Sociology at the University of York, she continued this line of research, completing her PhD in 2009, exploring how people talked about and made sense of their transcendent EHEs. She then attained a postdoctoral position at the University of York, surveying the British population about their reported paranormal experiences (see here for the journal article about this research).
	She currently teaches on various modules for both the BA in *Social Psychology* and the MA in *Interdisciplinary Psychology* at Leeds Beckett.
	Her current research focuses on The Red Tent Movement – a loosely connected network of women's circles across the globe (though her interest is predominantly on the manifestation of these circles in the UK). Her most recent journal article about the Red Tent can be found here.
	She co-organises an interdisciplinary network called Exploring the Extraordinary and is also an active committee member of the Transpersonal Section of the British Psychological Society.
Discipline Alert your editorial contact if your field is not included prior to writing your entry.	*Sociology [D1]*
Academic Level of intended readership	**Intermediate Undergraduate**
Published articles	Castro, M. (2020). Introducing the Red Tent: A Discursive and Critically Hopeful Exploration of Women's Circles in a Neoliberal Postfeminist Context. *Sociological Research Online,* 25(3): 386-404. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1360780419889973
For office use only:	
Title/Spin ID	
Access/Product Code	
ISBN	
DOI	
URI	

Abstract

The abstract should be a concise summary of your case study. What aspect of the research process, or specific methodological and practical challenges, will your case study address? It should be succinct and enticing, and should incorporate key words and concepts discussed in the body of the text. Please do not *cite references within the abstract.*

In this case study I review part of the first phase of data collection for research into the UK Red Tent movement online. The Red Tent movement is a loosely affiliated international network of women's circles that ordinarily meet face-to-face in differing locales monthly to support and nourish each other. In this phase of the research, I was interested in determining how the UK Red Tent movement imagined and presented itself online. Researching the Movement online presented several challenges such as establishing the boundaries of a dataset and attempts to discern web content that originated from or was connected to the UK. Other difficulties included developing efficient and effective processes of cataloguing data via manual archiving, especially considering the fluctuating nature of online content, dead links, and the emergence of ethical issues connected principally to the use of interactive web platforms as potential data. These methodological and practical challenges are discussed in detail with a view to taking the reader through some idea of the research actions performed, relaying any lessons I learnt and highlighting the beneficial implications of this for anyone wishing to conduct this kind of scoping research online themselves.

Learning Outcomes

Please refer back to these learning outcomes when writing your case study. Your case study must satisfy each proposed outcome. It is vital that you provide achievable and measurable learning outcomes. Please see the links below for guidance on writing effective learning outcomes:

- *Writing learning outcomes*
- *Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs*

[Insert 3–5 learning outcomes under the following statement: "By the end of this case, students should be able to . . ."].

By the end of this guide, students should be able to . . .

By the end of this case, students should be able to:

- Explain how researching online content can be used as a scoping tool

- Adopt and apply manual archiving techniques using online content

- Identify, evaluate, and reflect on the ethical issues surrounding the use of social media as a research resource

- Critically appraise both the possibilities and the limitations of using online research to 'find out' about an aspect of the social world

---

Case Study

[Insert your case study here. The main body of the text should be between 2,000 and 5,000 words.]

Headings and sub-headings add structure to the body of your case, enhance online discoverability and make your case easier to read on screen. This template includes suggested headings, you should also add your own according to the focus of your case study.
Each main section with a heading must be followed by a Section Summary. *Each Section Summary should consist of 2-3 bullet points, written out as full sentences, succinctly encapsulating the preceding section.*
Suggested headings:

Project Overview and Context
Includes information about the substantive focus of your research project. Why were you interested in studying this topic, particularly using the methods you chose? Are the methods you chose typical for researching your topic? If not, explain your choice of methods. This section

For my research, I was interested in the Red Tent Movement. The Red Tent Movement is a network of loosely connected women's circles who meet monthly offline to support, share wisdom, and listen to each other. These circles have grown in popularity across the globe, inspired originally by a novel, *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant (1997), and influenced by 2nd wave feminist spirituality. Diamant's book retells 'The Rape of Dinah' from the Old Testament, affording the female protagonists' voices and agency (unlike the original). Here, the Red Tent is where the women go to menstruate, give birth, share fertility advice, worship numerous deities (including female ones) and bond with each other.

I became interested in Red Tents for several reasons. Firstly, I attended a Red Tent group and found it incredibly powerful and deeply moving. I witnessed the effects of attendance on other women. Women really listened to other women. They gently offered alternative perspectives on matters women were 'stuck' with. These circles appeared to be deeply nurturing and life affirming. I wanted to know if this was the same for all women who attended, and I wanted to investigate the increasing popularity. *What was it about circles that appealed to those women who attended? Why now?* I was also interested in the potential effects of these groups. *In what ways were they beneficial? Were there any problems or issues for and/or within these groups?*

These circles emerge, meet, and evolve within their respective geographic locations with little overarching prescription about their exact form. Women who feel called to establish and organize a Red Tent are welcome to do so. However, whilst there are currently Red Tents operating in virtual spaces or hosting online circles (because of the global pandemic), when I

conducted my research, circles predominantly met offline. Nonetheless, there was online material about the Red Tent Movement which included social media and web content.

This piqued my interest in the Red Tent Movement and its' representation online, as it appeared to be a good 'way in' to the movement. Online content was fundamentally the 'public face' of the movement – and, long-term I wanted to discern the relationship between the manifestation of the Red Tent on and offline. I was particularly interested in the UK Red Tent because there was limited academic research on this. Therefore, the first phase of my research would focus on the Red Tent online, where it could be found and its depiction.

Section summary

- *The Red Tent Movement is a grassroots and loosely connected network of localised women's circles.*

- *The Red Tent Movement appeared to be growing in reach, scale, and popularity with evidence of this online in the form of Facebook groups, websites, articles, and blog posts.*

- *Researching the Red Tent Movement online evolved as a way of finding out about the movement, and how it imagined and presented itself online.*

Research Design
*Includes an investigation into how you designed your study, taking into account any fundamental decisions you had to make. **This section should emphasize the aspects of the research project – specific methods or challenges - that you will focus on in this case study**. You should ensure that you define and explain any key terms for student readers.*

I was interested in traditional non-interactive web content *and* Web 2.0 platforms. Web 2.0 refers to a richer user experience typified by more interactive or dynamic web content including blogs, wikis, social networking, vlogs, and podcasts, for instance. As Schneider &

Foot (2005: 158) have suggested, this content can be considered a *web sphere*, when it is related by topic, issues or events, (including web 2.0 platforms) and within a specific time period. Therefore, the web content associated with the Red Tent Movement online during this period was classed as a web sphere.

I began the investigation with internet searches, using terms such as 'The Red Tent', 'The Red Tent UK', 'The Red Tent Movement', and 'women's circles' to explore the web content that was out there. At this point, I also noted Red Tent (and related) groups on Facebook (though very little on Instagram or Twitter and no relevant podcasts). At the same time, I discovered related groupings and differing terminology being used. For instance, there were references to moon lodges, feminine wisdom, goddesses, divine feminine, sisterhood, witches (neo)paganism, and spirituality. Furthermore, whilst some sites were explicitly US or UK-based, many were more ambiguous about their origin location – in part because the Red Tent was often presented as a 'global' movement. Finally, there was some content about *The Red Tent* novel or the TV serialized drama and some that was connected to pregnancy, labour, birthing and doulas (women who support women before, during and after birth).

Challenge One: Defining Boundaries

Defining boundaries formed one of the first challenges – how to establish boundaries around what constituted the Red Tent and whether it was possible to separate material by national borders in virtual spaces. In other words, it was difficult to exclusively research the UK Red Tent online because:

- of crossover material – there were numerous groups and pages that displayed *similarities* to the Red Tent Movement but were not explicitly associated with it, and

- of the global reach of the internet – determining which content was associated with which country was sometimes difficult (many opinion pieces spoke across national boundaries because they raised 'issues' about the Red Tent which were international)

Challenge Two: Cataloguing Data

The second challenge was setting time limits on searches and devising a cataloguing system, especially given the changing nature and finite lifespan of some content. During initial and exploratory searches, it became clear that there were several prominent and central sources for the movement itself, numerous individual pages (including Facebook group pages) for individual Red Tent circles, a handful of blog posts or opinion pieces, several online newspaper or magazine articles and hundreds of mentions of the Red Tent on various webpages (not necessarily themselves about the Red Tent). The other issue I observed over time was that some online materials and content were changing, updating, appearing, or disappearing. It became clear that I needed criteria to hone my searches and logging system and make some decisions about content, including relative importance, lifespan, and inclusion in the project (e.g., dead links).

Challenge Three: Representation in online spaces

The third challenge revolved around determining the relationship between material on and offline and the extent to which this was important. For example, some content was critical of the movement in various ways, and some was celebratory, 'marketing' the movement positively. Which sources were to be treated as reliable? How was it possible to determine overall whether the Movement was a positive or negative force? Was the tone of this material

more representative of online behaviour in general rather than about the Red Tent per se? In other words, was criticism of the Red Tent Movement harsher online than it would have been offline? Was celebratory content about the Red Tent overly positive, a rose-tinted gloss on these women's circles?

This was not easy to judge. Furthermore, it was impossible not to consider whether the manifestation of these issues and their significance, was skewed or magnified in online spaces. This led me to ask questions about the relationship between on and offline spaces in this particular instance. Ultimately, the answer is likely to depend on individual projects. Indeed, there are likely to be some social phenomena which occur almost exclusively online. The Red Tent Movement is or has been a predominantly offline phenomenon that has some representation online and yet this phase of the research was exclusively focused on online materials. This created a tension.

Section summary
- *The first challenge concerned defining the parameters of the dataset (Web sphere) because of crossover material and the difficulty of determining the national boundaries of content.*
- *The second challenge was around developing a system for cataloguing and organising the web content with relevant temporal boundaries and appropriate Web sphere criteria.*
- *The third challenge revolved around the way in which the movement was represented online, how sites were to be assessed in terms of their view (e.g., positive or negative) of the movement.*

Research Practicalities

*This should include a discussion of the **primary aspects of focus** for this case study.*

Which aspects of the process you had to navigate when conducting your research will hold the most value for the student reader? For example, how did you recruit participants of your study, or access secondary data? What method was employed for data collection or data analysis? How did you work within a wider research team? What ethical considerations were essential? You might choose to rename this section, or to include a subsequent section (or sections) with a sub-heading that directly relates to the primary focus of the case study.

Accessing Secondary Data

A considerable body of previous research has considered online communities, how they have emerged and evolved, what potential benefits they may bring and how their members might communicate with each other across these platforms, known as Social Movement Studies (SMS). Indeed, I thought that this work would help me with my research. However, much SMS literature was concerned with how online communities operated and evolved, how online interactions might connect to or inspire political action in the offline world, any contentious issues with the movement and what these communities offered those who were involved.

Though some of this resonated with the wider Red Tent research project, I was not contacting participants in this phase. Instead, I was scoping the movement online as a foundation for later research. I knew Red Tent circles' primary focus was offline, though there was a *wider* Red Tent community online, where people learnt about the Red Tent and consumed associated content. There was interactive content, e.g., social media groups, including users who were possibly not members of a Red Tent circle themselves. So, this was a question of boundary setting around the web sphere. Ensuring that the project kept within these parameters was important – especially given the amorphous nature of online content.

Sites discovered included a directory, which listed individual Red Tents and direct links. Other websites and blogs hyperlinked to articles or events connected to the Red Tent and Facebook groups. Content length and depth varied dramatically across sites.

Methods employed for data collection

I had not encountered any research that looked at comparable web spheres. Therefore, initially, deducing suitable methods of collection and analysis was challenging. What kind of data was I collecting? How would I study and store rapidly changing content? Web content is precarious and instable, which made creating a dataset tricky. Mosca (2014) details methods to manually archive web materials (and ways to automatically archive web content). There is free software, such as Zotero, which helps catalogue and stabilize data (screenshotting web content is one way of stabilizing data). This allows connections to be made between content and systematizes a dataset. However, as my dataset was not unwieldy (below I discuss establishing parameters), I set up password-protected, encrypted folders and sub-folders for collating content such as screenshots or pdfs of web content. As some of the content was user-generated by individual members I wanted to allow for protecting anonymity and confidentiality, hence the encrypted folders. One positive aspect of manual archiving is that I could manage quality control, discounting irrelevant sites or material of poor value. Equally, I could decide about the extent/depth of analysis of material.

Data collection, which was essentially an exercise in manual archiving, took place over almost two years. Collection periods were sporadic and adhoc over this time. Occasionally URLs were dead by the end of the collection period. However, if they were already in the archive, I retained them as they formed a snapshot. They also indicated the extent to which

material on the Red Tent Movement had any longevity or was transitory. Thus, this was also a 'comment' on the nature of the movement.

Data analysis was necessarily varied and depended on content. I conducted some simple categorizing and counting (descriptive statistics) to gauge the extent of the movement online via type (e.g., social media groups, blogs, websites, films, apps). This allowed me to assess how significant and widespread the movement was. Initially I analysed the mainly text-based content (e.g., websites, blog posts and articles), using a discursive approach, which was informed by Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and Conversation Analysis (Wooffitt, 2005). These analytic methodologies have a close focus on language, how it is used and what it is 'doing' in the spoken or written context. This allowed me to explore how the use of language in these settings was tied to particular social phenomena. It also enabled consideration of how certain identities might be alluded to or drawn on in the text and what 'issues', 'benefits' or 'problems' were pertinent to or underlying the movement.

Ethical considerations

Whilst assessing the relevance of web content, I stumbled upon previously unforeseen ethical considerations. Initially, I had screenshots of (open) Facebook group pages included in the dataset. However, some of these were (heated) exchanges about sensitive issues with intense differences of opinion. Suddenly, there were questions about the extent to which online material could be merely considered 'the public domain'. Indeed, it became clear that there were differences between using blog posts, interviews or published articles as data versus individual user's' contributions on social media. Furthermore, two things happened to affect their inclusion within the project:

1) the issues were increasingly becoming politically and personally sensitive (outside of the Red Tent). There were some examples where individuals who publicly expressed strong views experienced direct (often quite unpleasant) comeback in on and offline spaces (which was conveyed in blogs and media reports), including doxxing (where personal or private information is shared online), verbal abuse (on and offline) and (very rarely) physical violence.

2) a few of the previously public/open Facebook groups suddenly became closed or private groups – which changed the ethical slant on their inclusion.

It became necessary to decide which materials to include in my dataset and carefully consider the ethical implications. Given the sensitivities and potentially unpleasant consequences surrounding these exchanges, it felt irresponsible to include individual Facebook posts without good reason. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were not the same as they might have been for verbal data (e.g., interviewing); an open Facebook group post could be traced back to an individual with a simple search. Furthermore, when various Facebook groups began to change their settings to closed or private, I interpreted this as action to protect members (who adhered to group guidelines). I would have needed permission to include entries from private groups into my dataset. This was not the purpose of this research phase, so I chose instead to refer to the issues themselves, noting that they were being discussed on Facebook (in sometimes intense exchanges, representing differing views).

There is perhaps a broader discussion to be had about the extent to which individual posts on social media sites are 'fair game' for researchers and it will depend on the project (and the subject matter or focus) as to what researchers decide, but projects will need to balance

interests (the researcher's and individuals on social media) and ethics. I also took the view that blog posts, published interviews, articles and opinion pieces, constituted more public data, where 'authors' intentionally placed their comment in the public domain. Consequently, these were included in the dataset.

Section summary

- *Manual archiving was an excellent tool for a relatively small Web sphere and facilitated the ability for the researcher to 'quality control' the content being archived.*

- *Data was stored in password-protected, encrypted folders as screenshots, pdfs and word documents but could have used specialist cataloguing software such as Zotero.*

- *Making judgements about the inclusion of social media posts on sensitive issues was an ethical balance, affected by the wider social context, on and offline.*

Method in Action and Practical Lessons Learned

This should be a "warts and all" description and evaluation of how your chosen research method/approach actually worked in practice. What went well? What did not go to plan? What challenges did you face? How did you respond? What would you do differently?

This is perhaps the most important section of your research methods case study*. This should be an in-depth reflection on the specific methods/approaches used in the research project, detailing the important lessons you learned from this experience. Student readers must be able to learn from these lessons in order to inform their own research projects.*

Web spheres, Archiving and Parameters

When I first began cataloguing data, it was somewhat adhoc. It took a while for me to organize and categorize efficiently; to find or develop a system that worked. For a time, I felt that I was 'doing it wrong', though this is often the way with research, especially when using methods or mediums that are unfamiliar. Discovering the idea of a web sphere was extremely helpful conceptually and allowed me to begin exploring what this meant for my data.

Learning about manual archiving and the different means of doing this also allowed for decisions around how to store a stable dataset for analysis.

If I was to conduct another research project that involved 'scoping' online phenomena (especially if the web sphere was more extensive), I would definitely use software, such as Zotero, to organize and catalogue the data. Factoring in extra time to familiarise myself with the software would also make sense.

It was challenging to deduce appropriate parameters around the web sphere and which content to include or omit. The two main problems here concerned:

- how to decide on inclusion/exclusion criteria for the web sphere, and
- how to distinguish UK web content from that which spanned several continents (as both the movement and the internet are global/international)

I navigated this by spending considerable time manually reviewing web content for archiving. After a year, my knowledge of the available web content increased and therefore I experienced less hesitancy about excluding content. Decisions were made by considering relevance for and engagement with the movement. I devised a level of acceptable of 'substantial engagement' with the Red Tent Movement that I then identified when sifting web content. The criteria to determine substantial engagement was text of more than two paragraphs in length, and content which did not duplicate material elsewhere. Once these were in place, archiving was much more straightforward, but it took a while for these parameters to develop.

In terms of national boundaries this proved to be quite a headache. Discerning whether content derived from national locations e.g., the UK, was not always crystal clear. Further,

there were references, links, and interconnections between and amongst sites within the UK

and Europe, and across the globe, including Australia and the USA. Eventually, I decided to

include content if it was relevant to the Red Tent in the UK – by issue or topic – as the

movement is transnational and interwoven in ways that is hard to completely disentangle.

This worked well to an extent, but I sometimes felt like I had perhaps fudged this slightly and

that this *might* be more discernible to a well-seasoned internet researcher. I am still unsure

about this and occasionally feel I might have failed in this part of the research.

I think if I was to do this again, I would ensure that any internet research was international in

scope and focused on the substantive phenomenon, rather than with national boundaries

online (unless the movement or phenomena was exclusively UK-based) – though this would

clearly be a very different project and would lose something in the contextualisation of the

social issues.

Changing online content

During phase 1 data collection (internet searches, sorting and archiving data), there were

several weblinks where content changed, was updated, or was removed. Deciding what to

include, whether to include multiple versions of some content or just the most recent, and

whether to include dead links in the analysis was tricky. I had to consider my rationale and

what would be reasonable justification. As the period during which I was researching was

fairly long (almost 2 years), I decided to keep multiple versions of changed or updated

content (essentially date-stamped) from key websites, blogs, and open Facebook groups.

Regarding dead links, I made judgements based on whether they were peripheral sites and

content. Where dead links had important or central content, where they exhibited unique

material about the Red Tent, I kept them in the analysis. Ultimately if they demonstrated the 'substantial engagement' criteria mentioned earlier and were significant resources for the dataset, they were retained. I deduced also that dead links or URLs illustrated the fast-paced (sometimes short-lived) nature of internet content and the ongoing evolution of the Red Tent online.

If I was researching the Red Tent Movement again, I would keep an archive journal to note specific changes and dead links during data collection. Whilst I kept a reflective research journal, this was not specifically about web resources. An archive journal would have allowed me to detail the shifting nature of the online 'face' of the movement more comprehensively. The only record regarding this was a date-stamp for content and any reflections I might have noted in my (generic) research journal.

Social Media and Ethics

Deciding to exclude the material on social media (individual posts, specifically in closed Facebook groups) initially felt like a real blow to the project. Equally, however, I was torn between wanting to protect members from any potentially unpleasant fallout and wanting to showcase these difficult issues and how they were manifesting in particular ways (in this case within the Red Tent online). I had already collected data from Facebook before the unpleasantness reached a tipping point (in broader spheres) and groups became closed/private. Essentially, the decision to exclude individual postings meant abandoning a considerable portion of my dataset and at the time I experienced extreme disappointment. Ultimately, I felt I had wasted time researching matters I could not include in my analysis. However, I did not want to be instrumental in any harms meted out and this was the right

thing to do morally and ethically, so I just had to accept this decision and move on. In some senses, I grieved for a project that was not feasible and then continued with what I was able to do.

It became exceedingly clear that there were specific challenges and difficult ethical decisions to be weighed up when doing research drawing on Web 2.0, particularly social media, platforms where individual user content was to be included. It drew my attention to considerations of power and responsibility in research, especially when my research had a feminist focus. It seemed impossible to put 'public interest' over personal consequences for the women in these online groups.

As a white, cis, able-bodied feminist researcher, my privileged positioning both on the basis of my social locations and of being a researcher were important to consider. Social locations refer to factors such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, ability and education that can impact upon an individual's life and their levels of privilege or experiences of oppression. The interaction of these factors has been termed intersectionality (the point where differing aspects of an individual's social locations meet; see further reading for more about this concept). It was important to consider any potential inequities between myself and those that are part of my project (the research population) reflexively and critically. For example, there are certain aspects of my social location that confer advantages over the (potential) online research population (many of whom may be disabled, black, trans or non-binary, for instance). This acknowledgement of my positioning and advantages, including the potential negative impact of a power imbalance on these women is vital in feminist projects (see for instance, Hamilton, 2019, for more on how this unfolded for black feminist researchers researching black populations).

It raised questions about the extent to which material posted as individual comments is public in any straightforward sense. It also illustrated that it was still possible to conduct research that included reference to and discussion of these issues without sabotaging anonymity or confidentiality for individuals. There are several excellent resources out there regarding ethics, online research, and intersectional feminism – some of which I detail below.

I would be keen to conduct research of an online community through social media e.g., Facebook group/s, #hashtags, Instagram, and Twitter, and conduct a more extensive analysis of social media groups and postings *only*. However, this would be a different project to the one I conducted. As time went on, I realized this. This would be more akin to the research in SMS that analyses the interactions of a movement online in-depth. This would be particularly relevant given the way in which the global pandemic has affected how groups and interactions have worked – i.e., many of them have moved into online settings (at least temporarily). In this sense, it would be interesting to investigate the nature of the current online manifestation of the movement to make comparisons between the differing shapes of a movement such as the Red Tent which has been predominantly offline, but increasingly has found itself unable to only exist in offline spaces.

Section summary
- *Developing an effective and efficient archiving system took time to develop, as did deciding on inclusion/exclusion criteria and how to deal with material spanning the globe.*

- *The fast-paced and rapidly changing nature of some web content led to dead links and questions about which versions to include. An archive journal would have been a good research tool to include here.*

- *Politically sensitive issues and potentially unpleasant personal consequences for users on social media platforms meant, for ethical and feminist reasons, I felt compelled to alter my project – issues of 'public' and 'private' came to the fore.*

Conclusion

Includes a round-up of the issues discussed in your case study. This should not *be a discussion of conclusions drawn from the research findings, but should focus reflectively on the research methodology. Include just enough detail of your findings to enable the reader to understand how the method/approach you used could be utilized by others. Would you recommend using this method/approach or, on reflection, would you make difference choices in the future?* ***What can readers learn from your experience and apply to their own research?***

In this case study I have considered my investigation of the Red Tent Movement online. I wanted to scope out the movement, find out about its' reach, its' purpose, and its' shape and understand any benefits, issues, or problems. Working out the best methods took some time and I faced various methodological challenges and difficulties during the research process. Early challenges included, determining the parameters around web content which would form the web sphere, deducing inclusion/exclusion criteria, effectively cataloguing the data, and assessing the veracity of the online content (which was ultimately impossible to verify). Once I had established a manual archiving process, the web sphere began to develop, though judging national boundaries regarding web content was complex as was deciding what to do about changing content and dead links. Later challenges included whether to omit individual social media posts on sensitive issues. This gave rise to ethical reflection about what is public and what is private in online spaces and issues of power, responsibility, and representation in feminist research.

The web sphere for the Red Tent Movement online was relatively small, which allowed the web content to be effectively manually archived into a web sphere. From this, I was able to scope the (public) reach of the movement across the UK (and further afield). I discovered there were hundreds of UK Red Tent circles online, several in Europe, hundreds in the US, some in Australia and several more across the (predominantly global north) of the world. These numbers are slowly increasing all the time. Where the web content was positive or celebratory, it was evident that Red Tent circles were presented as healing and transformative spaces, that were nurturing and highly valuable for those that organised and attended them. Where the web content was more critical, the issues that were flagged included the predominantly white and western nature of the movement, issues with diversity and inclusion, some claims of cultural appropriation and gender essentialism. These were the kinds of broader narratives that were evident in the web content, which arose from analyses conducted on the dataset.

Manual archiving was slow-going in terms of gathering data and cataloguing it effectively. However, it meant that I could comprehensively quality control all the content in the web sphere. For small datasets with less than 50 websites content this is feasible and effective. For more extensive projects with big data or more extensive web spheres, manual archiving methods would be extremely time-consuming. Automatic archiving would be better for those. In an ideal situation I would have had one or two shorter, more intensive, finite, data collection periods. This would have helped with decisions about dead links and changing content. An archive journal, specifically to document details of and reflections about the collection process would have helped to better document the evolving shape of the movement.

Thinking about your own project

You can use this case study to review, discuss and reflect on the methods and experiences detailed here for developing your own scoping projects or as part of a larger project – it is possible that scoping be used as a 'way in' to an online movement or phenomena. Thinking early about your project and possible parameters for web spheres, including setting inclusion/exclusion criteria regarding a manageable dataset would be advantageous, even if these change and evolve over time. You might be tempted to overlook (even undervalue) archiving methods and data cataloguing when there are more 'juicy' methods which involve reaching out and connecting with participants. However, scoping online phenomena can allow you to see or discover themes, patterns, representations, and identities that are not explicitly in the web content or materials. Seeking these 'underlying' depictions can offer you an unsurpassed initial view into the phenomena, how it is imagined by those producing content, what image is important, whether that is a contested view, what pertinent issues or problems might be at the heart of the movement or phenomena and how it connects to wider social contexts.

It is likely that forms of web 2.0 and social media will continue to evolve and transform in ways it may not be possible to foresee, so research drawing on these platforms is very likely here to stay in the social sciences. As you can see from this case study (and likely your own experiences) using social media as data might be an ethical minefield. You'll need to carefully consider balancing your own research interests against personal privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, amongst other aspects. Feminist writings on power, responsibility and representation are instructive here (see list of resources below). Understanding the extent to which issues are sensitive and the differing manifestation of particular platforms are also

likely to be important (e.g., differences between Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok), as are seriously and reflexively considering issues of inequity and intersectionality.

Another matter to consider early is the likelihood that scoping will require a mixed methods approach. That is, you may need to analyse imagery, audio, video, gifs, memes, and other digital media in addition to text and numbers. The exact analyses will clearly depend on a number of factors such as expertise, time and research aims and objectives. Finally, an appreciation of the likely conflicting presentations of the online phenomena under scrutiny, how important or favourable the presentation is, what issues or problems the phenomena creates, addresses or aligns with and the purpose and effects of the online content are also important. No social phenomenon is straightforwardly one thing, and views of social movements or online phenomena are likely to be evolving, complex, contested, and nuanced. It is helpful to bear this in mind when conducting online research projects and can work to relieve any pressure you might feel to 'accurately' represent online phenomena, which is an impossible goal. Nonetheless, hopefully the possibilities and pitfalls of scoping an online movement have been relayed here and readers will benefit from my experiences to better their own projects.

Discussion Questions

[Insert three to five discussion questions on the methods described in your case study]

Discussion questions should be suitable for eliciting debate and critical thinking. Avoid questions which require only a single-word answer such as "yes" or "no."

1. What are some of the problems with manual archiving methods?

2. How do you establish effective inclusion or exclusion criteria when researching a web sphere?

3. What are the strengths and limitations of using non-interactive online sources as a scoping tool to 'find out' about a movement or phenomenon?

4. To what extent is web content public and therefore 'fair game' for research analysis?

5. Discuss the kind of ethical challenges researchers face when researching social media or Web 2.0 platforms.

Multiple Choice Quiz Questions

[Insert three to five multiple choice quiz questions here. Each question should have only three possible answers (A, B, or C). Please indicate the correct answer by writing CORRECT after the relevant answer.]

Multiple Choice Quiz Questions should test readers' understanding of your case study, and should not require any previous knowledge. They should relate to the research methodology, rather that the research findings.

1) What is a web sphere?
   a) A collection of websites
   b) A collection of web-based content linked by hyperlinks
   c) Web-based content that is connected by theme or subject matter and context CORRECT

2) What are inclusion/exclusion criteria?
   a) Rules that include or exclude phenomena from your dataset CORRECT
   b) A methodological approach
   c) Ways of deciding which participants are included in your online research

3) What are manual archiving methods good for?
   a) Finding research papers for a literature review
   b) Sifting through large data sets
   c) Quality control in small data sets CORRECT

4) What is involved in 'scoping' online phenomena?
   a) Counting and recording all the web content connected to the movement
   b) Searching online over a set period, cataloguing the data and methods for analysis CORRECT

c) Online searches

Further Reading

Please ensure content is inclusive and represents diverse voices. In your references, further readings and web resources you should aim to represent a diversity of people. We have a global readership and we want students of a wide range of perspectives to see themselves reflected in our pedagogical materials.

 [Insert list of up to six further readings here]

- Crenshaw, K. (2017). *Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. New York: The New Press.

- Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2012). (Ed.) *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*. London: SAGE.

- Kei Daniel, B. (2011). (Ed.) *Methods and Techniques for Studying Virtual Communities: Paradigms and Phenomena*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

- Linabary, J.R and Corple, D.J. (2019). Privacy for whom?: a feminist intervention in online research practice. *Information, Culture and Society*. 22(10): 1447-1463. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1438492

- Silver, D. and Massanari, A. (2006). (Eds.) *Critical Cyberculture Studies*. New York: NYU Press.

- Zimmer, M. & Kinder-Kurlanda, K. (2017). (eds.) *Internet Research Ethics for the Social Age: New Challenges, Cases, and Contexts.* Peter Lang: New York.

Web Resources

[Insert links to up to six relevant web resources here]

- https://www.apc.org/en/project/firn-feminist-internet-research-network

- https://dennis-nguyen.com/2015/03/02/web-sphere-analysis-a-very-brief-overview/

- http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf

- https://www.isko.org/cyclo/web_archive#web

References

[Insert bibliography of references cited in text here]

References should conform to American Psychological Association (APA) style, 7ᵗʰ edition, and should contain the digital object identifier (DOI) where available. SAGE will not accept cases that are incorrectly referenced. Please ensure accuracy before submission. For help on reference styling see https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines.

Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive Psychology*. SAGE.

Hamilton, P. (2019). 'Now that I know what you're about': black feminist reflections on power in the

research relationship: *Qualitative Research*, *20*(5), 519–533.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119891583

Mosca, L. (2014). Methodological Practices in Social Movement Online Research. *Methodological*

Practices in Social Movement Research, 397–417.

https://doi.org/10.1093/ACPROF:OSO/9780198719571.003.0016

Schneider, S. M., & Foot, K. A. (2005). Web sphere analysis: An approach to studying online action. In

C. Hine (Ed.), *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet* (pp. 157–170). Berg.

Wooffitt, R. (2005). *Conversation analysis and discourse analysis : a comparative and critical*

introduction. SAGE.