

Researching Cybercrimes

Anita Lavorgna · Thomas J. Holt
Editors

Researching Cybercrimes

Methodologies, Ethics, and Critical
Approaches

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Editors

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Preface

The wealth of data that is readily available online, whether through text-based or more image-driven social media platforms, presents substantial opportunities for researchers to investigate and assess a number of online behaviours like dating and political expression, along with deviant and criminal acts that are facilitated in part by technology.

In cyberspace, textual, visual or meta-data from content can be collected manually by researchers or through the use of automated programmes and tools. There is no real standard or consistent processes for the collection of online data, creating substantive variations in the practices researchers adopt. The data may then be analysed through qualitative or quantitative means informed by the researchers' experiences with and understanding of automated tools and hand coding strategies. Some of these approaches closely resemble long standing social science research methods, such as the use of interview protocols administered via Skype or instant messaging. Others often require innovative approaches that need cross-disciplinary knowledge of computational methods more common to computer science.

Additionally, ethical standards required to collect these data are still under development and vary by place. The guidelines used in traditional research methods may be inadequate to respond to the challenges and possibilities presented by online research, especially in a sensitive area such as cybercrimes.

It is not surprising that the unique and dynamic characteristics of online spaces demand multi- and inter-disciplinary methodological approaches. These conditions mean that certain approaches may be less effective, as there is generally poor communication within and across the social and technical sciences. The different lexicon and analytical frameworks applied may be viewed as incompatible, challenging the ability of researchers to collaborate or understand one another's research agendas. These issues can be exacerbated in cross-national contexts because of linguistic and cultural differences that may be present.

The absence of consensus regarding online methodologies and ethical standards is an issue that severely complicates academic research in the cybercrime arena. Thus, there is both an opportunity for and responsibility among researchers to develop a common language around online data use, including its ethical collection, the limitations and benefits of collection, and techniques for analysis. Such information is largely absent in any single textbook or edited volume to date, making it difficult to find a uniform set of insights into the nature of online data and its use in practice.

This edited book proposes to address this gap in the literature by offering a single volume that provides a state-of-the-art collection on the critical use of online data throughout its three parts (*Knowledge production and research datafication in cybercrime research*; *Methodologies and strategies for cybercrime research*; and *Geographies and cultures of ethics in cybercrime research*). This work will also provide a review of the ethics associated with the use of online data sources across various parts of the globe. The authors are drawn from multiple disciplines and nations, providing unique insights into the value and challenges evident in online data use for cybercrime scholarship.

By the end of the book, we hope you will be fascinated—as we are—by the possibilities cyberspace offers to the research community to further our understanding of complex societal issues. Also, we hope

this book encourages a discussion on the importance of cross-disciplinary collaboration, which is at times complicated, but nonetheless increasingly necessary to meet the challenges of much cybercrime research.

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Thomas J. Holt

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my inspiring co-editor Tom, and to Dave and Russell among the others, to drag me, with their work, into the fascinating world of cybercrime research. And to all the contributors for making the preparation of this book a pleasant effort.

In these increasingly challenging times for early career researchers, international researchers and—more in general—researchers, my graduate students are a constant reminder of what academia can and should be. This book is for you.

—Anita Lavorgna

I would like to thank my co-editor, Anita, for all of her efforts with this work from start to finish. It would not have been possible without her dedication. I would also like to thank all of the contributors for this book for sharing their views and insights.

—Thomas J. Holt

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