

### **Convenors**

*Phill Brooker, Sheena McRae, Meenakshi Mani*

The Digital Sociology Study Group has in the last year begun the process of reconfiguration as we bring onboard three new convenors. As a result, we have been working to refocus our aims and are planning an event with our members at the University of Salford as part of this process.

We also aim to facilitate a plenary based on the outcomes of this event at the 2027 BSA conference in Manchester. We would add that for the second year in a row the numbers of submissions to the stream we share with STS have grown substantially signalling that there is still a thriving digital research community still engaging with both the BSA and the conference, which we feel merits the work we are doing to re-engage the members more actively with the Digital Sociology Study group.

### **Budget**

As of 31st December 2025, the account balance for the Digital Sociology study group was £467.28



**NCRM AND BSA Digital Sociology Study Group One Day workshop on Generative AI and the Future of Social Research: Opportunities, Challenges, and Implications**

**1st October 2024 | 09:00 - 17:00**

**Radisson Blue, 80 High Street, The Royal Mile, Edinburgh, EH1 1TH**

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Generative AI opens up novel avenues for research, enabling the creation and analysis of vast amounts of synthetic data, simulating and modelling complex social systems. Natural Language Processing techniques powered by generative AI provide us with powerful tools for the analysis of large volumes of data, facilitating the exploration of complex social phenomena and enabling researchers to identify trends and correlations not readily visible when using traditional methods.

However, these tools come with significant practical and ethical challenges. How can we ensure the reproducibility of data? How transparent are the algorithms used in AI-driven research, and how can we ensure researchers and participants understand the impact of these algorithms? How can we navigate the ethical complexities of working with AI-generated content? Given the well documented issues of bias in training datasets for Large Language Models how can we ensure that we represent and include diverse populations rather than perpetuating structural inequalities?

Concerns around the usefulness of the work produced by LLMs continues to be a notable issue, with the idea of LLMs as 'stochastic parrots' suggesting that while AI may produce plausible enough responses, these responses can be devoid of meaning.

In the realm of digital social research, generative AI poses fundamental questions about the nature of online content and its relationship to human agency. The rise of computational propaganda has already begun to test the assumed link between online content and human actors, but generative AI threatens to sever this connection entirely. As AI-generated content becomes increasingly pervasive, researchers must grapple with the epistemological implications of studying a digital landscape shaped by artificial intelligence.

Combined these issues pose concerns for what role AI can meaningfully play in sociological research. This event will bring together leading scholars and practitioners to discuss these issues and chart a path forward for social research in an era of generative AI. Through a series of panel discussions we will explore the methodological innovations, ethical challenges, and theoretical frameworks necessary to navigate this new frontier of social inquiry. Key questions will include:

- How might AI affect research design, sampling, data collection and analysis?
- What ethical challenges emerge when using AI in social research?
- What role do human researchers play in overseeing AI-driven processes?
- How can we ensure that AI-driven research is accessible and inclusive to researchers with varying levels of technical expertise and resources?
- What are the implications of AI on power dynamics within social research, and how can we mitigate potential biases and avoid reinforcing existing inequalities?
- What impact might AI have on research practices, disciplinary norms and understandings of knowledge production?
- How can we foster interdisciplinary collaborations between social scientists, computer scientists, ethicists, and other stakeholders to address the challenges and enrich the development and application of AI in social research?
- How might our research practices be configured to consider how we meet the emerging research agendas of our students as they move into their academic and industrial careers? How do we best equip them for the research questions they will address in years to come?

Join us as we confront the profound implications of generative AI for social research and work towards a future in which these powerful tools are harnessed for the advancement of knowledge and the betterment of society.

**Outline of day**

|                                       |                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Registration and Morning Refreshments |                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                        |
| 9:00 - 09:15                          | Welcome and Introduction to the Conference |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                        |
| 09.15 - 10.30                         | Panel session 1                            | <b>CHAIR – Sheena MacRae</b><br><br>What are the implications of AI for how we do social research?<br><br>Critical reflections on how we integrate Generative AI in social research.                                                | <b>Phillip Booker</b><br><b>Jen Ross</b><br><b>Kate Miltner</b><br><b>Peaks Krafft</b> |
| 10.30-10.45                           | Break                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                        |
| 10.45-12.00                           | Panel session 2                            | <b>CHAIR – Huw Davies</b><br><br>How can we ensure that AI-driven research is accessible and inclusive?<br><br>How can we mitigate potential biases and avoid reinforcing existing inequalities?                                    | <b>Ayça Atabey</b><br><b>Mark Wong</b><br><b>Nabila Cruz</b>                           |
| 12.00-13.00                           | Lunch                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                        |
| 13.00-14:30                           | Panel session 3                            | <b>CHAIR – Mark Carrigan</b><br><br>How can we foster interdisciplinary collaborations to address the challenges of AI in social research?<br><br>How do we need to configure research practices to meet emerging research agendas? | <b>Louise Scott</b><br><b>Judy Robertson</b><br><b>Jane Wellens</b>                    |
| 14.30-14.45                           | Break                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                        |
| 14.45-16.00                           | Closing Round Table                        | <b>CHAIR – Kate Orton-Johnson</b><br><br>Reflections, questions, provocations and next steps?                                                                                                                                       | <b>Vassilis Galanos</b><br><b>Karen Gregory</b><br><b>Kevin Guyan</b>                  |