

Trajectories of identity in social media

Svenja Adolphs, Derek McAuley

University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

The spread of the Internet into nearly every aspect of our daily lives has stimulated the growth of a vibrant and expanding set of systems to support social interaction via a range of internet connected devices. Often collectively referred to as social media this set of applications and services are undergoing a highly unstable and dynamic growth as society shapes and is shaped by the emergence of these new capabilities. The sheer volume of users of these systems and the diversity of people using social media make it immediately appealing as means of gaining insight and understanding into the performance of identity.

The information available from the dominant social media services such as Facebook and Twitter represents only a small fraction of the personal information we generate. From Web searches and browsing histories, purchases, texts, emails, photos, videos, locations, levels of activity, physiological data – the list of human data we bleed as we go about our everyday life continues to grow and commercial, government and research organisations are starting to collect and triangulate different data sources. From a sociolinguistic perspective we now have the opportunity to explore the dynamic relationship between time, physical location and performed identity in social media and to develop possible 'trajectories' of identity across different social media channels over time.

In this presentation we will draw on different types of social media data to illustrate both the approach and possible insights of studying performed identity over time. We will focus in particular on the possibilities afforded by using corpus linguistic investigations to surface patterns of performed identity in a combined approach with more discourse analytical investigations.

Keywords: social media, identity.