Foreword: lively devices, lively data and lively leisure studies

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In the countries of the Global North, each person, to a greater or lesser degree, has become configured as a data subject. When we use search engines, smartphones and other digital devices, apps and social media platforms, and when we move around in spaces carrying devices, they record our geolocation, or where there are embedded sensors or cameras recording our movements, we are datafied: rendered into assemblages of digital data. These personal digital data assemblages are only ever partial portraits of us and are constantly changing: but they are beginning to have significant impacts on the ways in which people understand themselves and others and on their life opportunities and chances. Leisure cultures and practices are imbricated within digital and data practices and assemblages. Indeed, digital technologies are beginning to transform many areas of life into leisure pursuits in unprecedented ways, expanding the purview of leisure studies in several interesting dimensions.

These processes of datafication can begin even before birth and continue after death. Proud expectant parents commonly announce pregnancies on social media, uploading ultrasound images of their foetuses and sometimes even creating accounts in the name of the unborn so that they can ostensibly communicate from within the womb. Images from the birth of the child may also become publicly disseminated: as in the genre of the childbirth video on YouTube. This is followed by the opportunity for parents to record and broadcast many images of their babies' and children's lives. At the other end of life, many images of the dying and dead bodies can now be found on the internet. People with terminal illnesses write blogs, use Facebook status updates or tweet about their experiences and post images of themselves as their bodies deteriorate. Memorial websites or dedicated pages on social media sites are used after people's death to commemorate them. Beyond these types of datafication, the data generated from other interactions online and by digital sensors in devices and physical environments constantly work to generate streams of digital data about people. In some cases, people may choose to generate these data; in most other cases, they are collected and used by others, often without people's knowledge or consent. These data have become highly valuable as elements of the global knowledge economy, whether aggregated and used as big data-sets or used to reveal insights into individuals' habits, behaviours and preferences.

One of my current research interests is exploring the ways in which digital technologies work to generate personal information about people and how individuals themselves and a range of other actors and agencies use these data. I have developed the concept of 'lively data', which is an attempt to incorporate the various elements of how we are living with and by our data. Lively data are generated by lively devices: those smartphones, tablet computers, wearable devices and embedded sensors that we live with and alongside, our companions throughout our waking days. Lively data about humans are vital in four main respects: (1) they are about human life itself; (2) they have their own social lives as they circulate and combine and recombine in the digital data economy; (3) they are beginning to

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affect people's lives, limiting or promoting life chances and opportunities (for example, whether people are offered employment or credit); and (4) they contribute to livelihoods (as part of their economic and managerial value).

These elements of datafication and lively data have major implications for leisure cultures. Research into people's use of digital technologies for recreation, including the articles collected here and others previously published in this journal, draws attention to the pleasures, excitements and playful dimensions of digital encounters. These are important aspects to consider, particularly when much research into digital society focuses on the limitations or dangers of digital technology use such as the possibilities of various types of 'addiction' to their use or the potential for oppressive surveillance or exploitation of users that these technologies present. What is often lost in such discussions is an acknowledgement of the value that digital technologies can offer ordinary users (and not just the internet empires that profit from them). Perspectives that can balance awareness of both the benefits and possible drawbacks of digital technologies provide a richer analysis of their affordances and social impact. When people are using digital technologies for leisure purposes, they are largely doing so voluntarily because they have identified a personal use for the technologies that will provide enjoyment, relaxation or some other form of escape from the workaday world. What is particularly intriguing, at least from my perspective in my interest in lively data, is how the data streams from digitised leisure pursuits are becoming increasingly entangled with other areas of life and concepts of selfhood. Gamification and ludification strategies, in which elements of play are introduced into domains such as the workplace, health care, intimate relationships and educational institutions, are central to this expansion.

Thus, for example, we now see concepts of the 'healthy, productive worker', in which employers seek to encourage their workers to engage in fitness pursuits to develop highly achieving and healthy employees who can avoid taking time out because of illness and operate at maximum efficiency in the workplace. Fitness tracker companies offer employers discounted wearable devices for their employees so that corporate 'wellness' programmes can be put in place in which fitness data sharing and competition are encouraged among employees. Dating apps like Tinder encourage users to think of the search for partners as a game and the attractive presentation of the self as a key element in 'winning' the interest of many potential dates. The #fitspo and #fitspiration hashtags used in Instagram and other social media platforms draw attention to female and male bodies that are slim, physically fit and well-groomed, performing dominant notions of sexual attractiveness. Pregnancy has become ludified with a range of digital technologies. Using their smartphones and dedicated apps, pregnant women can take 'belfies', or belly selfies, and generate time-lapse videos for their own and others' entertainment (including uploading the videos on social media sites). Three-D printing companies offer parents the opportunity to generate replicas of their foetuses from 3D ultrasounds for use as display objects on mantelpieces or work desks. Little girls are offered apps which encourage then to perform makeovers on pregnant women or help them deliver their babies via caesarean section. In the education sector, digitised gamification blurs leisure, learning and physical fitness. Schools are beginning to distribute heart rate monitors, coaching apps and other self-tracking devices to children during sporting activities and physical education classes, promoting a culture of self-surveillance via digital data at the same time as teachers' monitoring of their students' bodies is intensified. Online education platforms for children like Mathletics encourage users to complete tasks to win medals and work their way up the leaderboard, competing against other users around the world.

In these domains and many others, the intersections of work, play, health, fitness, education, parenthood, intimacy, productivity, achievement and concepts of embodiment, selfhood and social relations are blurred, complicated and far-reaching. These practices raise many questions for researchers interested in digitised leisure cultures across the age span. What are the affordances of the devices, software and platforms that people use for leisure? How do these technologies promote and limit leisure activities? How are people's data used by other actors and agencies and in what ways do these third parties profit from them? What do people know about how their personal details are generated, stored and used by other actors and agencies? How do they engage with their own data or those about

others in their lives? What benefits, pleasures and opportunities do such activities offer, and what are their drawbacks, risks and harms? How are the carers and teachers of children and young people encouraging or enjoining them to use these technologies and to what extent are they are aware of the possible harms as well as benefits? How are data privacy and security issues recognised and managed, on the part both of those who take up these pursuits voluntarily and those who encourage or impose them on others? When does digitised leisure begin to feel more like work and vice versa; and what are the implications of this?

These questions return to the issue of lively data, and how these data are generated and managed, the impact they have on people's lives and concepts of selfhood and embodiment. As I noted earlier, digital technologies contribute to new ways of reconceptualising areas of life as games or as leisure pursuits that previously were not thought of or treated in those terms. In the context of this move towards rendering practices and phenomena as recreational and the rapidly changing sociomaterial environment, all social researchers interested in digital society need to be lively in response to lively devices and lively data. As the editors of this special issue contend, researching digital leisure cultures demands a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective. Several exciting new interdisciplinary areas have emerged in response to the increasingly digitised world: among them internet studies, platform studies, software studies, critical algorithm studies and critical data studies. The ways in which leisure studies can engage with these, as well the work carried out in subdisciplines such as digital sociology, digital humanities and digital anthropology, have yet to be fully realised. In return, the key focus areas of leisure studies, both conceptually and empirically – aspects of pleasure, performance, politics and power relations, embodiment, selfhood, social relations and the intersections between leisure and work – offer much to these other areas of enquiry.

The articles published in this special issue go some way to addressing these issues, particularly in relation to young people. The contributors demonstrate how people may accept and take up the dominant assumptions and concepts about idealised selves and bodies expressed in digital technologies but also how users may resist these assumptions or seek to re-invent them. As such, this special issue represents a major step forward in promoting a focus on the digital in leisure studies, working towards generating a lively leisure studies that can make sense of the constantly changing worlds of lively devices and lively data.

Disclosure statement