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Installation of Public Opinion Sensors: How a Community Based Web Survey Platform Facilitates the Collection of Qualitative Opinion Data

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In the emerging field of data science crawling social media for trends and patterns has been identified as important approach to understand the public. To social sciences, however, this approach may not be sufficient when it comes to obtain preferences and opinions about targeted subject or issues. Data collected from social media may not present expected qualitative data from which deep meanings can be drawn for further interpretation. I am arguing that conventional approaches of survey via telephone or face-to-face interviews have started to fail to reach this promise and achieve this goal of data "thickness," either. Looking from a "thick data" perspective I created a web survey platform to serve as a community in which participants could feel comfortably to be interviewed and traced regarding sensitive and targeted political issues. In this paper I am demonstrating how this goal was achieved by sharing experiences of creating and maintaining smilepoll.tw. Although theoretically it is impossible to installing public opinion sensors to the voters and consumers, a community-based web survey platform could contribute (1) collection of sincerely answered survey responses and (2) the creation of multiple-wave panel data that have not been done in social sciences. The potential of this approach will be discussed. Scholars across disciplines, particularly data science and social sciences may find a new way to collaborate when the need of people and better governance in a democracy become a common interest.

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