Some brief notes on Social media/networking and online data collection

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Please also check out CoSS ethics webpages for further information and links to relevant resources

Social media and online ethics

- **Public – v – private**

- **Ownership and legal requirements (ToS, EULAs, etc.) – use of APIs**

- **Observational**

- **User's views**

Swatman (2012) on privacy:

- Is the space being researched seen as private by its users?
- **Are they aware they are being observed?**

- Is everything what it seems?
- **Are Fred X and Mary Y really who they claim to be? Age? Bots?**
- How do researchers ensure their participants really are anonymous?

- **IP addresses are (usually) traceable; Tweets may contain identifiers…**
- **See also** Internet Specific Ethical Questions section in AOIR (2012)

Some links to popular social media/networking API

- **Twitter – [Developer Agreement and Policy](#)**

- **Google – [Google APIs Terms of Service](#)**
- **Google - [API Services: User Data Policy](#)**

- **Facebook – [Statement of Rights and Responsibilities](#)**

Observational studies

Both BPS (2013) and BERA Guidelines (2011) appear to support obtaining consent in observational studies conducted online. BERA guidelines state:

> *Social networking and other on-line activities, including their video-based environments, present challenges for consideration of consent issues and the participants must be clearly informed that their participation and interactions are being monitored and analysed for research.(p. 5)*

And BPS guidelines go further, placing the burden of proof on the researcher to demonstrate that the value of covert observation or collection of user-generated posts without consent:

> *"[t]here must be a clear and convincing argument for the use of deception online, which is only condoned if the research question can be seen to justify it" (p.7).*

Salmons (2014) p17

Users

- just 38% of the public are aware their social media posts are potentially being analysed for research projects.

- a majority (60%) say they don't think social media companies should be sharing their data with third parties for research purposes. (IPSOS Mori, 2015)

- **Representivity** – offline – online? (IPSO Mori/Demos)

https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/news/show.php?article=5522

Early on in the research we quickly realised that many of the learned society ethical resources were of little guidance, given their focus on non-digital data. Where addendums on using Internet data were written, they had little to say about social media. Papers were being published in reputable journals with tweets quoted verbatim, with unacceptable and ineffective methods of anonymisation, and without informed consent from users[1]. ………. Research on users' views of the repurposing of their social media data consistently shows that the majority wish to be asked for informed consent if their content is to be published outside of the platform which it was intended for[2].

Social Media and Online Research

- Snee, H. (2008) [Web 2.0 as a Social Science Research Tool](#)
- Williams, M. (2015) [Ethics in Social Media Research](#)
- Swatman, P. (2012) [Ethical Issues in Social Networking Research](#)
- AOIR (2102) [Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research](#)
- [New social media, New social science.. And New ethical issues!](#) Janet Salmons
- Blurring the Boundaries? New Social Media, New Social Research: Developing a network to explore the issues faced by researchers negotiating the new research landscape of online social media platforms ([Woodfield *et al.*, 2013](#))

- *International Journal of Internet Research Ethics* Issue 3.1, December 2010

- *Research Ethics* the Journal of the Association for Research Ethics

- **And some caution advised:**

- **#SocialEthics: A guide to embedding ethics in social media research**

- **The road to representivity – a Demos and Ipsos MORI report on sociological research using Twitter**

- **Research using Social Media; Users' Views (Beninger et al., 2104)**

- **Unlocking the value of social media – a review of research ethics (DEMOS, 2015)**

 General

The Use of Social Media for Research and Analysis: A Feasibility Study (DWP 2014)

- **Moreno et al (2013)** Ethics of Social Media Research: Common Concerns and Practical Considerations, *CYBERPSYCHOLOGY, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING* V16(9)