

research methods must be transparent, and that no-one contributing to the research is unfairly treated or faces discrimination. It also means that the researcher should protect themselves), inc.

protecting from any exploitation for the sake of research (World Medical Association, 2006). As such, online recruitment should be truthful, transparent, and honest when describing the aims, details, risks, and benefits of their studies.

- Researchers must evaluate all physical, social, psychological or medical harms or risks that their participants may face by virtue of being in the project, and make every possible attempt to minimize these harms and maximize the benefits to them. Within the context of online research, the risk of harm arises when there is a disclosure of

risk of embarrassment, reputational damage, or legal prosecution. (which can happen by choosing a particular online platform)

Overall, each type of online research method (i.e., observational, interactive, or survey/interview research) is highly contextual and involves different levels of engagement and interaction between the participant and the researcher, which has implications for ethics.

Our recommendation is to apply risk mitigation strategies that are proportional to the magnitude and probability of risks, which are clearly outlined to the UOL Research Ethics Committee.

1. Observational or Non-intrusive Web-Based Research

subjects and gain informed consent without any coercion, as in normal circumstances, to protect the privacy of their participants, but also the privacy of the website/media (such as chatrooms or blogs) through which they draw their information/data. If participants are viewed as authors, the researcher may decide to give acknowledgment where it is due. If however, needs to guarantee their anonymity.

3. Surveys and Interviews

Surveys and interviews are common and well-developed methods of online research. In conducting surveys and interviews online, ethical concerns may arise with regard to obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity of the participants, and maintaining confidentiality of the data. Consent is considered to be knowledgeable when individuals know the purpose of the information collected about them and their right to give, withhold, or withdraw the consent anytime they wish.

Enrolling participants for research involves some open and clear communication between the researcher and the potential participants, however this may be compromised in virtual settings. Different ways through which an online consent can be obtained include emails or online statements that may require participants to agree to the terms of participation, thus implying consent. However, it is difficult to verify whether the participant has actually read the details carefully, whether there are any misunderstandings and issues in comprehension, and whether the person who is giving the consent is the authentic participant. Furthermore, verifying certain information such as age or mental capacity to give the consent can also be difficult.

Researchers should provide complete details of the study **as in normal circumstances** (see Ethics guidelines for details), including a readily available link that provides contact information, study aims, data collection procedure, potential benefits and harms, and steps taken to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

A few ways to ensure participants read and understand the study details in online settings include use of multistage consent forms, enhancing readability of the document by reducing the amount of text, use of subheadings, or colours (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee [SSHWC], 2008). Testing the consent forms and survey questionnaires are other important ways to minimize the risk of unintended consequences at later stages of the research.

Preserving Anonymity in Online Survey Research

It is the prime responsibility of the researcher to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the data, which is collected and stored. If the data are not contentious, or if privacy can be ensured, then this is less of a concern compared to controversial research topics or research where it is necessary to obtain personal information. In case of any sensitive information, researchers need to ensure that participant the participant. Steps to take to ensure ethical practice include:

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2. Personal information should not be sought from or about the respondents without their prior knowledge.
3. The researcher must ensure that data are not used for subsequent non-research purposes.
4. Personally identifiable data and other research related data should be kept and stored separately.

5. Respondents should be informed about the duration of the survey and must be given links to data protection, privacy policy, cookie policy statements, or information about the use of a software at the beginning of the survey, which should be available in simple language.
6. Any s
computer without their consent and even when consent is provided, respondents should be able to remove any such software easily.
7. Respondents should be given entitlement to ask the researcher to delete their records and researcher should conform to such requests where reasonable.
8. In case of surveys where an email list is acquired from some agency, the

etc. that can be entered into a search engine and traced back to a living individual, and will thus be subject to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). If data contains personal information, make sure to be compliant with the privacy rules.

Personal data exchanged in public messages on social media brand or the agencies acting on behalf of brands; it is owned by the individual who uses social media platforms. The social media platforms have their own privacy notices and guidelines which social media platform users and advertisers agree to comply with. On top of this, brands must set out in their privacy notices how they will use such personal data in accordance with the requirements of the GDPR, in particular, but not exclusively, the right to be informed. An example of this is the social media section in its privacy notice.

(employees, contractors, consultants, trainees etc) such as name, job title, phone number, email address, and personal social media account details all fall within the definition of personal data.

GDPR legislation stipulates that personal data must be collected

explain to visitors how it will be used and provide them with their information rights, and secondly ensure the different purposes for processing the personal data are separated out.

It should be clear, unambiguous and used and ensure it is not ambiguous.

The GDPR lists a number of rights to individuals in regards to their data. There are, however, a number of exemptions to these rights in regards to research data in the GDPR and the UK Data Protection Act 2018, as long as appropriate safeguards are in place. Details can be found in Section 14 Appendix C of our [GDPR guidance](#).

The processing of personal data that takes place on a social media platform is ultimately the responsibility of the platform provider. If the user agrees to these terms and conditions of

personal data held on the platform is processed in compliance with the GDPR. However, by removing personal data from the original platform on which it was published, the responsibility shifts to those who become data controllers (the researchers). **Accordingly, we have to treat that personal data in the same ways as any other personal data under the GDPR.**

Ultimately you will have to comply with all the legal requirements under the GDPR including but not limited to making sure you have a legal ground under the GDPR for processing such personal data; a valid purpose as to why you are retrieving the personal data from the social media platform; and being able to justify your actions under the accountability principle. The

For the performance of a task in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller

See our policy [here](#)

If a researcher is storing personal data, he/she needs to:

- ensure it is accurate and kept up to date.

- only keep the personal data for as long as it is necessary for the specified purposes.

If you export a spreadsheet with all the posts on it from a social media platform on it (highly likely to contain personal info), ask

For further information regarding academic research and data protection, please review our extensive guidance here: <https://www.sas.ac.uk/research/research-policies-and-protocols/research-ethics>

Advice per platform:

1. Social Networks (eg: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram)

A social networking site is a social media site that allows you to connect with people who have similar interests and backgrounds. These platforms allow you to connect with friends,

between public and private is not determined by accessibility, but by social norms and practices. For instance, in a small town where everyone knows intimate details about everyone else, people tend to pretend not to know facts that are considered personal. Others argue that mining public data is equivalent to conducting archival research, a method frequently employed in disciplines, such as history, art criticism and literature, which rarely involve rules for the protection of human subjects.

Our advice is that public Facebook profile data may be used **without participants' consent if it is reasonable to assume that the data were knowingly made public by the individuals. Researchers should, however, immediately and irreversibly anonymize the data and abstain from any communication or interaction with the individuals in the sample. Furthermore, researchers should be cautious not to reveal any information that could be attributed to a single individual (such as photographs or samples of text) while publishing the results of the study.**

- **Questionnaire**

An existing online survey or questionnaire can be integrated easily with Facebook by adding a fragment of HTML code. Obtaining access to participants' Facebook profiles means that many of the typical questions (such as those concerning demographics) can be skipped given that data can be obtained directly from the Facebook profile or inferred from the targeting approach used to promote the link to the study.

- **Incentives or not?**

As in other contexts, offering appropriate incentives to participants is an important consideration while designing a Facebook-based study. In general, we discourage finanBTtBT/F3 11.04 Tf1

Twitter

Twitter is best described as a cross between blogging (or micro-blogging) and instant messaging. It allows the user to send a short message of not more than 140 characters (known as a tweet). Whereas conventional blogging is often confined to a single author, Twitter is more interactive: it can create a conversation that anyone can join.

One of its fundamental principles is that you elect to follow those whose conversations most played a key role in many contemporary events, which is of interest to the academic community in many ways.

Some advice on creating an account is available in Part 1 (of Social Media guidance).

Twitter is excellent for obtaining data from a survey: you can set up a micro-blogging site and get responses from thousands of participants.

Twitter creates an automatic database of information in real time, which is archived and has become a unique source of historical information.

Researcher must be clear on their methodology as to whether they collect information that is on the platform or guide the discussion by for example using hashtags. Either way, this

unknowingly taking part and their comments are used. The academic purpose and the terms and conditions of Twitter may allow the researchers to use the tweets in this way. Indeed, by agreeing to the terms, users will consent for their information to be collected and used by third parties (Twitter, 2016A and B). A justification often provided with regard to the ethical and legal implications of using data without informed consent is that the reuse of data is permitted in the Terms and service as well as within the privacy policy.

But several aspects need to be considered, as mentioned above, inc.:

- The boundaries of what is private vs public comments;
- The lack of interactions with knowing participants;
- The fact that all comments can be deleted even if archived;
- The lack of anonymity when tweets and comments are being used outside Twitter;
- The participation pool, which is large, and varied, and can include vulnerable

Twitter users may be concerned about of who owns tweets and whether users have the right of ownership and copyright of tweets that they post. However, in practice, many tweets would not be considered under copyright law because, in most cases, tweets are not original

Content redistribution:

- ***The best place to get Twitter Content is directly from Twitter. Consequently, we restrict the redistribution of Twitter Content to third parties.*** *If you provide Twitter Content to third parties, including downloadable datasets or via an API, you may only distribute Tweet IDs, Direct Message IDs, and/or User IDs (except as described below). We also grant special permissions to academic researchers sharing Tweet IDs and User IDs for non-commercial research purposes.*
- *Academic researchers are permitted to distribute an unlimited number of Tweet IDs and/or User IDs if they are doing so on behalf of an academic institution and for the sole purpose of non-commer*

- contact details of researcher

Please note that jurisdictions within and outside the EU/EEA may have different rules for using the data. E.g. Twitter has different rules for US and non-US users. Other services have different conditions for different countries incorporated into one document.

Not only must the researcher be aware of the terms and conditions of using a particular platform, but must ensure that the participants are also fully aware of them and how they may impact on the protections of their data. It is therefore recommended that any use of particular platform must be fully disclosed in the **participation sheet and inform consent form**, for the participants to fully agree to all aspects of the research project, the use of a particular platform included.

You must ensure

owned by the consortium or its individual members. Adding content to the database usually requires consent from the IPR holder. If the new IPR was created in the phase of research, the decision to publish must not violate the rights of any co-author. Researchers should be aware of the citation requirements for the used in order to avoid a charge of academic misconduct. Note that there is variation in national laws.

Summary

Good ethical practices researchers can adopt for internet-based research are summarised below:

- Ensure transparency while recruitment, especially while recruiting using an acquired email list or through closed or open social media groups.
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- Ensure compliance to national data protection laws and the applicable ethical codes.
- Use a password identity system to ensure authentic participants.
- Ensure that consent is informed and knowledgeable.
- Ensure that a privacy statement is provided which explicitly mentions purposes for strategies adopted by the research team for maintaining anonymity, confidentiality, and data protection.
- Assign each participant a unique identification number/code to track progress and maintain security.
- Provide opportunities to participants to reach the research team or clarify any concerns.
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- Ensure encryption and Secured Socket Layer protection systems.
- Use password protected computer directory to store the data.
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Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics :
https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_487729_smxx.pdf

British Psychological Association (2013). Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research. Report available at: <http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/inf206-guidelinesfor-internet-mediated-research.pdf>

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http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.casro.org/resource/resmgr/docs/social_media_research_guidel.pdf

Collaborative Online Social Media Observatory (COSMOS) Ethics Resource Guide. Available at: <https://www.cs.cf.ac.uk/cosmos/ethics-resource-guide/>

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