

ETHICAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL NETWORKING RESEARCH

Prof. Paula Swatman
Chair, Social Sciences HREC
University of Tasmania

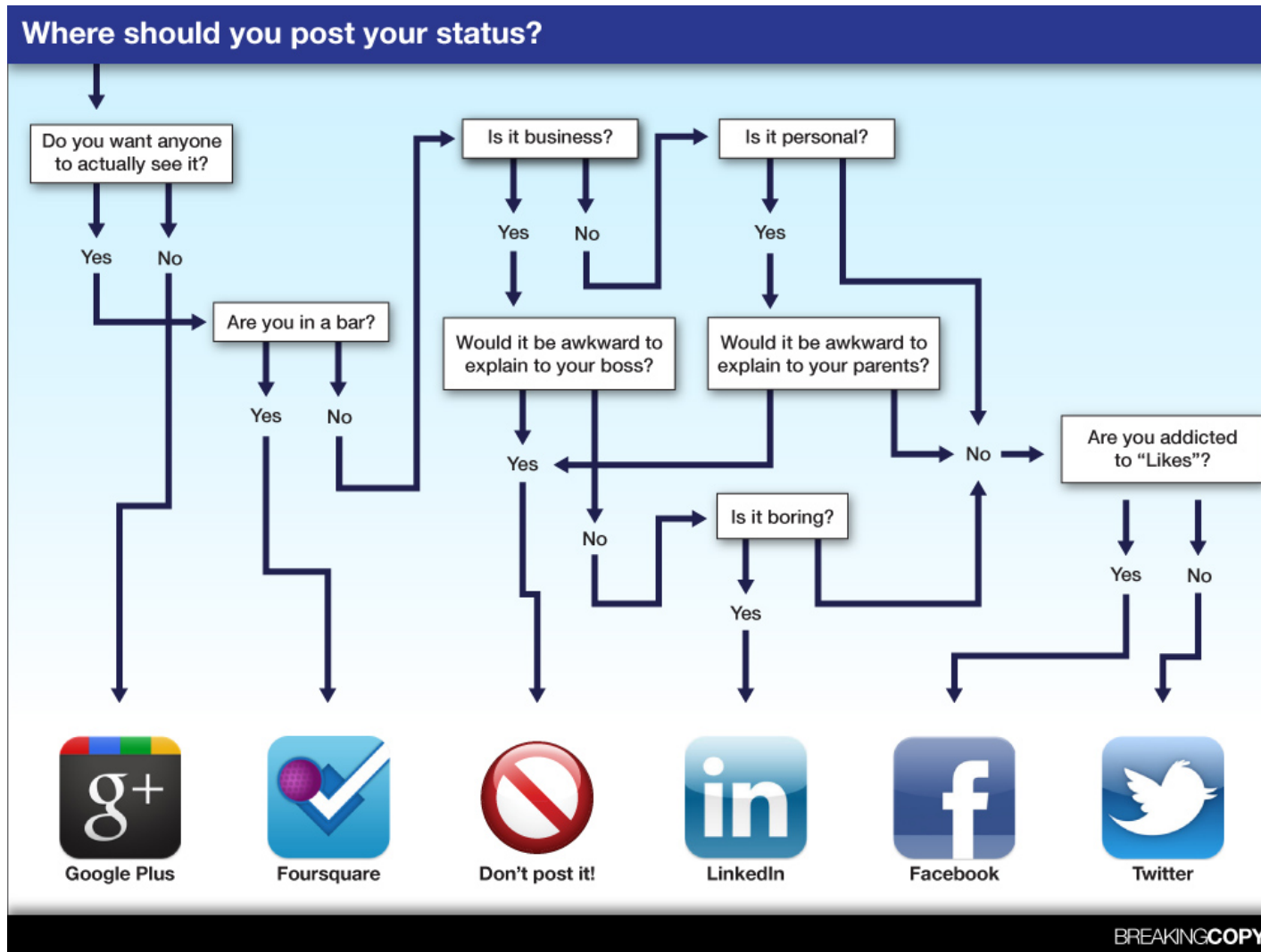


Research into & with Social Media

- The Internet supports research in 2 quite different ways
 1. As a tool: for finding & accessing people / material ...
 - Search engines, online surveys, etc.
 2. As a location: for meeting & interacting with people & groups
 - Forums, user groups, chat rooms, newsgroups, etc.
- But this distinction is not so clear with social media
 - Users no longer fit neatly into categories
 - Tools are increasingly being built into social networking sites
 - The line between tool and location is blurring ...

Social Media defined

Daryl Lang, 'Breaking Copy' blog



Ethical issues in social media research

Elizabeth Buchanan, Professor of Ethics, University of Wisconsin-Stout

- Researchers venturing into social media need to pay particular attention to the following issues:
 - Recruitment
 - Privacy/Anonymity/Confidentiality
 - Consent
 - Age verification
 - Documentation
 - Data Sharing / Data Storage
 - Terms of Service / End-User Licence Agreements

Recruiting via social networks

- Traditional participant recruitment is generally “push” based
 - Researchers know who they’re targeting
 - Even with snowball sampling, participant groups are ‘controlled’
- Social media participant recruitment is generally “pull” based
 - Potential participants can discuss the invitation – and tell others about it – without any researcher control or influence
 - Response to participant invitation is interactive, rather than static
 - And can lead to unexpected outcomes ...
 - Subsequent posts may modify already-posted information

Privacy in social media research

Problematic for researcher and participant

- Is the space being researched seen as private by its users?
 - Are they aware they are being observed?
 - What is the researcher's role?
- Is everything what it seems?
 - Are Fred X and Mary Y really who they claim to be?
 - How often did Fred X vote / comment / contribute?
- How do researchers ensure their participants really are anonymous?
 - IP addresses are (usually) traceable
 - Tweets may contain identifiers ...



Consent in social networks

- Adults – consent is relatively straightforward
 - Links from social networking sites to other, more reliable, sites solve most problems
 - Surveys (Qualtrics, Survey Monkey, etc.)
 - Observable environments
 - Portals / tokens can be used in games environments
- Children / Young People – this is a minefield!
 - No way of ensuring participant's age / level of maturity
 - E.g. are all Facebook users really 18+ ???
 - Difficult to obtain parental consent
 - And even harder to be sure who actually consented!
- Think carefully about whether some forms of research are worth doing via social media sites ...

Your data and social media sites

Can you still conform with Ch. 2 of the Aust. Code?

- How secure are your data in a social networking site?
 - Can you access them as/when you need?
 - Can anyone else access them at will?
- Can you depend on privacy / reliability claims from a social networking service?
 - E.g. is your social network of choice always available?
- Foreign government access to your data (Hopewell 2011)
 - Social networking platforms are mostly US-based, with real implications for your data
 - US-based data are subject to the Patriot Act & the Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance Act – data can be accessed by US federal law enforcement agencies, no matter who owns them!
 - Australians storing data on US sites cannot claim protection under the Fourth Amendment of the US Constitution (which protects against unlawful search and seizure of property and information) because their data is stored by a 3rd-party provider
 - Inter-governmental treaties and agreements (e.g. the European Convention on Cybercrime) allow data stored in the US to be requisitioned by European law enforcement agencies – without the customer even being aware of this!

Social Network Terms of Service

- Who owns the data you create in a social networking site?
- Facebook claims the rights to any data collected from applications (including surveys) created within it
 - Jaquith (2009): *“Facebook’s definition of data ownership does not include the right to export that data. **It’s “mine,” so long as I leave it under Facebook’s control**”*
 - Protalinski (2012): *“In short, Facebook owns any IP you give it, because you gave it permission to own it. If there is content you don't want Facebook to own, don't upload it to Facebook”*
- How different are the ToS in other social networking sites?

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