# Using social media data in research

Much data posted on social media platforms is public and users nominally agree to let third parties use their data when they agree to the terms of service. So *legally* there is no need to get informed consent. However there are *ethical* considerations (such as, 'what were the users' expectations when they posted their data?') that need to be taken into account. In most cases it is ethically advisable to anonymise any information that could identify the user (including not using direct quotes). This might not be necessary if the person who has posted the information is a public a figure (e.g. politician, a celebrity, etc.)

## Useful links

**LSE Social Media, Personal Data and Research Guidance**

Glasgow: Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics

Ahmed, W., Bath, P. and Demartini, G. (2017) Chapter 4: Using Twitter as a Data Source: An Overview of Ethical, Legal and Methodological Challenges

Williams, Burnap and Sloan, 2017: Towards an Ethics Framework for Publishing Twitter Data in Social Research: Taking into Account Users' Views, Online Context and Algorithmic Estimation (Has a useful 'Decision flow chart' for publication of Twitter communications

## Further resources

Hewson, C. (2016). Ethics issues in digital methods research. In H. Snee, C. Hine, Y. Morey, S. Roberts, & H. Watson (Eds.), Digital Methods for Social Science: An Interdisciplinary Guide to Research Innovation (pp. 206–221). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Hoser, B., & Nitschke, T. (2010). Questions on ethics for research in the virtually connected world. Social Networks, 32(3), 180–186.

Foucault Welles, B., González-Bailón, S., & Hancock, J. (2020). The Ethics of Digital Research. In The Oxford Handbook of Networked Communication: Oxford University Press.

## Technical help/training:   LSE Digital Skills Lab

See also LSE data management guidance

## Contacts

Data management: contact the research data librarian via datalibrary@lse.ac.uk

Research ethics:  contact Lyn Grove via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk