

Guidelines for recruitment via social media and for use of social media data

For any research recruiting by individual contact via social media, the researcher should inform the participant of how they located them just as they would if they found their contact details on a publically available website, e.g. UCL's staff pages.

Researchers may only use information from public profiles or publically available groups for individual recruitment contacts and are strongly encouraged not to target specific individuals unless absolutely necessary.

It can be legitimate to post a recruitment 'advert' in a non-public group, but whether or not it is legitimate depends on a range of factors about the particular group (topic, membership, are other adverts posted etc.). Researchers need to justify their approach.

Use of social media data

Researchers should consider some important points with regard to social media data before proceeding with their research. As with all projects, researchers are strongly encouraged to use their best professional judgement when utilising social media for recruitment or research purposes.

Important Points to Note:

- Some CCTV footage is publicly available. However, it shows individuals going about their daily lives who have not agreed to be filmed for research purposes. They may not even know that they are being filmed. Some would therefore argue that individuals have a right to ensure any footage of them recorded in this way is kept private unless disclosure is absolutely necessary (e.g. reporting criminal activity or missing persons cases). Researchers should carefully consider this point if wanting to use CCTV footage for research purposes.
- Information published through social media, although publicly available, often contains the personal preferences, histories and opinions that users are sharing with close personal friends and acquaintances. Even if this information is in the public domain, it is not necessarily intended to be used by individuals who are merely 'followers' and not personal contacts. There are numerous instances when users are upset to find that what they thought were private conversations appear in other contexts. Researchers should carefully consider this as a potential trust issue with social media users and tread carefully when attempting to use this information for research purposes.
- Some would argue that researchers have an obligation to act as role models for accessing and utilising social media data and should therefore demonstrate that they will adhere to the highest possible standards. Therefore even if it may be possible to utilise valuable or vital data, researchers should carefully consider the repercussions for doing so, especially if the end result will violate the privacy or expectations of the individuals involved.
- A comprehensive list of social media tools that researchers may find useful can be found here: <http://www.rin.ac.uk/node/1009>
- In addition, an excellent resource that covers the ethical implications of involving people in research via social media can be found here: <http://www.invo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/9982-Social-Media-Guide-WEB.pdf> and a sensible US guideline for internet research here: <http://aoir.org/ethics/>
- Finally, the use of application programme interfaces ([APIs](#)) for data collection is standard across most platforms. However, researchers should take care when utilising these interfaces as accuracy depends largely on the query structure and programs that are built by the researcher. In addition they cannot give complete assurance that unwanted content will not be collected.

Twitter

- All data published on Twitter are in the public domain and therefore accessible to everyone.
- The data are treated in the same way as broadcast or newspaper data and can be shared freely, a researcher should, however still consider the different privacy expectations of 'private users' and corporate and public users.
- It is recommended to put a disclaimer on any Twitter account or hashtag used for research purposes, although this may not always be practical due to the nature of the research project as it may skew the data. Researchers are encouraged to use their best professional judgement in these circumstances.

Facebook

- All data placed onto Facebook are owned by Facebook and not by the user
- Researchers should consider carefully before using data from non-public groups or non-public profiles. Similar considerations apply to *Discussion boards* outside of Facebook.

YouTube

- All media published on YouTube are in the public domain (if the privacy settings of the user profile is set to public) and therefore accessible to everyone, including any comments posted on specific pieces of media.

Blogs/CCTV Footage

- Researchers should always check the disclaimers of any websites used for these purposes to see if they can be used for research before proceeding. As with any of the above, if the privacy settings of the profiles are set to public, the information is available in the public domain and accessible to everyone

Adherence to terms and conditions

Any research use of social information must adhere to the legal terms and conditions of the particular service. See below for direct links to the terms and conditions of some popular services:

- <https://help.instagram.com/478745558852511>
- <https://help.instagram.com/478745558852511>
- <https://www.flickr.com/help/guidelines>
- <https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/terms-of-service>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/legal/user-agreement>
- <https://about.pinterest.com/en/terms-service>
- <https://www.youtube.com/static?gl=GB&template=terms>
- <https://twitter.com/tos>
- <https://www.facebook.com/legal/terms>