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**Social Research** that works for society

# Are we getting it right? Social media users' views on social media research

Kelsey Beninger, Alexandra Fry & Natalie Jago

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# The Context

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# Mind the Gap!

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- Obligation to act ethically in research using social media
- Unclear and rigid principles of good practice
- Useful moral theory and ethical guidelines
- Knowledge gap: flexible application and user's perspectives

# Research Objective

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## To understand...

- What social media sites people use, and how
- What people think about how information is used and shared online

## To explore...

- Views on their information being used by researchers
- The perceived benefits and harms of using social media for research purposes

## To contribute to wider discussions on

- Ethical principles of using information from social media for research, informed by the views of users

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# Methodolog

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# Methodological Approach

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- Qualitative research using British Social Attitudes 29 sample
- Focus group participants grouped according to level of social media usage

<b>LOW:</b> use social media once a week; less than once a week	<b>MEDIUM:</b> use social media once a day; several times a week	<b>HIGH:</b> use social media several times a day
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- Variation within each group with respect to:
  - How they use social media (posting and/or viewing content)
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Ethnicity

# Fieldwork

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## What we have achieved so far

- 2 focus groups
  - Mixed users
  - Low/medium users
- 4 interviews with medium/high users

## What we plan next

- 2 online groups
  - No geographical restrictions
  - Different responses
  - Flexibility



# Conducting the Group

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## Topic guides

- How people use social media
- What they know about who can look at and use their information
- Views on the ethics of online research using social media
- Key messages for the research community

## Vignettes

- Stimulate thinking
- Help participants to discuss research topic more deeply

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# Preliminary Findings

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# Emerging Themes

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**Awareness and Understanding**

**Managing Online Behaviours**

**Ethics of Social Media Research**

**Quality of Social Media Research**

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# Awareness & Understanding

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## Data ownership

Large variation in understanding of who owns what.

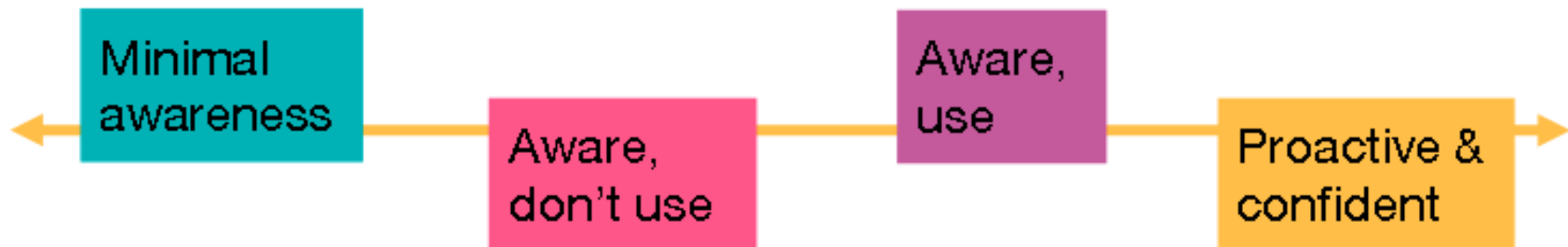
- Open access- 'once it's online, it's not yours'
- Social media platforms own data
- Individual ownership of the data

# Awareness & Understanding

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## Online privacy

- People span a continuum of awareness of online privacy
- Some people make deliberate choices but aware of other's who are less informed



# Managing Online Behaviours

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People use a wide range of sites for a variety of reasons

- Purpose (social, work, interests )
- Information types (photo, text, video)

Managing behaviours depends on:

- How identifiable they are
- Personal sensitivity of information

Concerns behind managing behaviour

- Reputational: professional, personal
- Criminal: identity theft, fraud, online stalking, grooming

# Ethics of Social Media Research

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## Anonymity

- Consistent view that names should always be protected in the report findings

However...

- The degree of anonymity, i.e. the use of direct quotes, twitter handles, identifying characteristics etc varied on a number of factors.

# Ethics of Social Media Research

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## Consent

Dependent on 3 main factors:

- Platform
- Type of information (text, photos, videos)
- Content of information (i.e. research topic)



# What participants said

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I publish things on twitter for other people to read, its slightly different than using Facebook

# Ethics of Social Media Research

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## Consent

Dependent on 3 main factors:

- Platform
- Type of information (text, photos, videos)
- Content of information (i.e. research topic)

# What participants said

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If you write something,  
anyone could have  
written it, but with a  
picture they know its you

# Ethics of Social Media Research

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## Consent

Dependent on 3 main factors:

- Platform
- Type of information (text, photos, videos)
- Content of information (i.e. research topic)

# What participants said

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Your views on the Olympic games, at the end of the day are general, quite generic. but if it's sexual, political you've got to be careful

# Ethics of Social Media Research

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Acceptance of social media research dependent on purpose:

- Aims of research
- Profit vs. not for profit

# Quality of Social Media Research

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Criticisms about rigour of social media research

- Online favours extreme views
- Online personas are inflated/refined
- Yields poor quality data & an 'inaccurate' depiction?

# What participants said

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Quality issue, yes. Do I have a problem with people looking at it? No, if you're daft enough to put it up there and out there and you've got it to say then certainly



# Quality of Social Media Research

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Criticisms about rigour of social media research

- Online favours extreme views
- Online persona's are inflated/refined

Yields poor quality data & an 'inaccurate' depiction?

# What participants said

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You're getting two extremes but are you getting the middle ground?

# Quality of Social Media Research

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Criticisms about rigour of social media research

- Online favours extreme views
- Online persona's are inflated/refined

Yields poor quality data & an 'inaccurate' depiction?

# What participants said

What data are you even using- Are you using me, or my online persona?

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# Implications & What's Next?

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# Questions to Consider so Far

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- Appropriateness of social media for research
- Some clearly expect to be asked to give consent and to not be identifiable
- Unclear whether people's views are a result of a platform or because of nature of the content
- Wide range of understanding and awareness so make no assumptions

# What's Next?

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- Online focus groups
- Full analysis & report
- Future dissemination plans
  - Social Media Week: 23-27 Sept
  - Articles: SRA September Newsletter
  - Blogs: NSMNSS, NatCen

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# Thank you for listening

Any Questions?