**Research Ethics and Data Protection
on the Use of Data from Social Media**
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Is social media data to be considered as published secondary data?

Data from social media platforms may be available publicly, but this does not mean that there are no limits to its use. Prior to using such data, unless you have explicit consent, you should assess if it was the authors' intention for their data to be publicly available or not. In other words, you should not use data which was not intended to be fully public (unless you have explicit consent from the research participant).

How can the researcher assess if social media data was intended to be for public consumption or not?

The assessment in this case should rely on whether the data is accessible by everyone, or not. One can test this by attempting to access a page from the web browser's incognito mode. Information that is in fact accessible from the web browser's incognito mode without any logins can be considered as public data. Social media posts whose audience is limited (e.g., only to the 'friends' of the posts' authors) is not public data.

Should there be any restrictions on the use of publicly available social media data created by children?

According to the EU Ethics and Data Protection policy, *"the GDPR establishes special safeguards for children in relation to 'information society services', a broad term covering all internet service providers, including social media platforms"* (Ethics and Data Protection, 2018, p12). Therefore, any data collection from children from social media platforms needs to adhere to EU and national laws, and be accompanied by the necessary consent from a parent/legal representative.

Can data from social media platforms intended for public consumption, just be collected and used without any further restrictions?

Data from social media platforms, apart from the assessments described above, should be collected according to the data platforms' terms and conditions. For instance, if the social media platform in question requires that any collection of data be performed through its official Application Programming Interface (API), and any 'scraping' of data is disallowed, this must be respected. Researchers are advised to try to use official APIs as much as possible, as data provided in this manner fall under a contractual agreement of provision of data from the data controller.

References:

Ahteensuu, M. (2019). Do you use social media data in your research?
https://vastuullinentiede.fi/en/doing-research/do-you-use-social-media-data-your-research

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