Ethics – When, Why, How?

Informatics Project Proposal
The University of Edinburgh

Björn Ross
Agenda

• Why ethics?
• What needs ethics approval?
• How do I apply?
• What happens after I have applied
Facebook emotion study breached ethical guidelines, researchers say

Lack of ‘informed consent’ means that Facebook experiment on nearly 200,000 news feeds broke rules on tests on human subjects, say scientists

Poll: Facebook’s secret mood experiment: have you lost trust in the social network?

Tay, Microsoft’s AI chatbot, gets a crash course in racism from Twitter

Attempt to engage millennials with artificial intelligence backfires hours after launch, with TayTweets account citing Hitler and supporting Donald Trump

Microsoft’s attempt at engaging millennials with artificial intelligence has backfired hours into its launch, with wagish Twitter users teaching its chatbot how to be racist.

Why ethics?
Good ethical practice

Participant Information Sheet
- Project title: [redacted]
- Principal investigator: [redacted]
- Researcher collecting data: [redacted]
- Funder (if applicable): [redacted]

This study was certified according to the Informatics Research Ethics Process, RT number [redacted]. Please take time to read the following information carefully. You should keep this page for your records.

Who are the researchers? [redacted]

What is the purpose of the study?
The study will carry out participatory design of an online course on data visualisation targeted at professionals (i.e., with work experience beyond study). The overall aim is to ensure the course meets the needs of target participants. We aim to identify key learning goals of a range of participants based on their immediate and future needs for data visualisation at work, and current capability for working with and creating value via data visualisation. The study aims also to identify potential stumbling blocks to study in what will be a relatively short, intense period alongside work, to ensure effective, accessible support is provided to students. This will help us identify and manage factors likely to negatively impact performance or lead to dropout, and increase, rather, adoption of the skills acquired in data visualisation beyond the course.

Why have I been asked to take part?

Consent form
- Please tick you or no for each of these statements.
  1. I agree to being audio recorded.
  2. I agree to being video recorded.
  3. I allow my data to be used in future ethically approved research.
  4. I agree to take part in this study.

Data Management Plan Template
This template has six sections based on the University of Edinburgh Research Data Management Policy (http://www.ed.ac.uk/research-data-policy). For each question there is an example question (taken from existing shared plans) and basic University of Edinburgh guidance.

1. Data Capture
What data will be generated or reused in this research?

Guidance
Here you should give a short description of the data you will create, or any third-party data that you plan to reuse.

Consider the types of data your research will generate, for example qualitative survey data, computational models, statistics, measurements, text, images, audio visual data, or samples.

Also consider the longevity of the file formats that you choose, using open standards so your data can be read by a variety of software makes it easier to preserve and share with others.

If you are reusing third-party data, make sure you have sought appropriate permissions to allow for any data sharing or preservation plans.

Example answer
“Every two days, we will subsample [affect] from populations living under our treatment conditions. We will use a microscope to identify the life-stage and sex of the subsampled individuals. We will document the information first in a laboratory notebook and then copy it onto a data sheet. We will maintain our codes and security in a central location of the Centre’s computer lab.”
## What needs ethics approval?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 0: No application required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Involves no human participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Involves no personal data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Involves none of the points mentioned under Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You can still submit an ethics application if your funder / supervisor / … requires it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1: Reviewed by one member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Involves human participants or personal data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Involves none of the points mentioned under Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Issues with regards to data protection good practice (e.g. anonymisation and secure storage of personal data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No explicit participant consent (e.g. social media data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Significant potential for harm – physical or psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vulnerable participants (e.g. children, disabilities, stigmatised minorities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Targeting developing countries (incl. India, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For more, see <a href="https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/research/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-levels">https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/research/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-levels</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 2: Reviewed by two members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Involves human participants or personal data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potentially significant issues with regards to data protection good practice (e.g. anonymisation and secure storage of personal data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential for harm – physical or psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential for significant potential for harm – physical or psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vulnerable participants (e.g. children, disabilities, stigmatised minorities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Targeting developing countries (incl. India, China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For more, see <a href="https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/research/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-levels">https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/research/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-levels</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What needs ethics approval?

Level 3: Reviewed by full committee
- Involving extremely vulnerable populations
- Conducted in war zones
- Potentially serious implications for participant welfare

Level 4: Escalated for review at College
- Intention to observe an illegal activity
- Use of materials which are the subject of legal action against the University

These levels are very rare – talk to use before considering doing such research!
What needs ethics approval?

- Consider a research project in your area, e.g.
  - Your dissertation project
  - An influential paper in your field
  - A hypothetical project
    It has to have human participants or personal data
- Think about the research methods
  - Will you need existing data? What kind of data?
  - Will you collect new data?
  - Will you have human participants / users / data created by or about humans?
Things to consider: Human participants

• Conflicts of interest
• Do you comply with GDPR? (don’t know? take the training!)
• Can the participants understand their rights and provide informed consent? (e.g. are they aged 15 or older?)
Participant Information Sheet

Template at https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/research/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-resources

• Who is conducting the study? That’s you!
• Who is responsible? That is your supervisor!
• Who can people ask if they have questions? That’s the Ethics panel of the School that has approved the study, or an external expert
• Can people stop and withdraw from the study at any time? The only correct answer is YES
Participant Information Sheet

• Why are you doing this study? For your dissertation project. If your supervisor will also use the data for their research, you must say so, and you must explain what that research is.

• What will the study involve? Describe what they will be asked to do, and how long the study will take.

• What are the risks and benefits? “furthering science“ is too vague.

• What will happen to their data? How will it be analysed? Where will it be presented? How will it be stored? Who will have access?
Things to consider: Personal data

- If you get data from other sources, do you have permission?
- Does your intended use comply with terms of use?

Relevant for all who work with speech corpora and language data!

- Treat any data carefully and confidentially
- Only collect and process the data you need
- Is it possible for people to be identified? What would be the harm?
Other things to consider

• If you are working with industry partners or academics outside Informatics, is there an agreement about their / your role?

• Has the research been reviewed in other countries, if (some of) it takes place outside the UK?

• Who will benefit from the research? Will you make findings available to participants?
How do I apply?

https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/research/ethics-and-integrity/ethics-procedure
How do I apply?

https://edinburghinformatics.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0rLxzvBPzntTGsu
How do I apply?

• Ask for advice beforehand, if unsure
• Consider emailing ethics-query@inf.ed.ac.uk if your question is not addressed in the FAQ
• Prepare, if relevant, Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form and Data Management Plan, by changing our templates
• Complete a practice ethics application and forward the completed form to your supervisor; only submit with their approval
What happens after I have applied?

1. Decide if research requires Ethical approval (with PI if student)
2. Submit ethics application form (Qualtrics) (with PI if student)
3. Submit supporting documents to ethics-query@inf.ed.ac.uk (if prompted)
4. Supporting documents & application merged into one RT ticket – requestors (student, PI, co-I) & metadata (AY, ID) added
5. Ticket (application) assigned to one member of the Inf REC

- Edits / more info requested from applicant
- Amendments to application
- Application approved/rejected
- Confirmation sent to applicant and relevant requestors
- Metadata (level, time, approval date) added. Ticket closed.
- Inf REC escalation to CSE REC

- Additional Inf REC member notified if > Level 1. Application discussed.
- Application questions brought to monthly full Inf REC meeting for review (standing item)

Abbreviations:
- AY: academic year
- Co-I: Co-investigator
- CSE: College of Science & Engineering
- PI: principal investigator
- REC: research ethics committee

Optionals:
- Escalation
What happens after I have applied?

• Want to make changes? Email us and quote the reference number
• When recruiting participants, always state who has granted ethics approval and quote the reference number
• Application expected to cover the entirety of the project: one application per dissertation project sufficient
Thanks for watching!