

Ethics

Bamberg Summer Institute in Computational Social Science

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Why care about ethics?

Why care about ethics?

- fear-based reasons
- hope-based reasons
- we have no choice

In the past, what we **could** do has been the limitation, increasingly what we **should** do will be the limitation.

Research ethics will become increasingly central; it will become harder and harder to avoid.

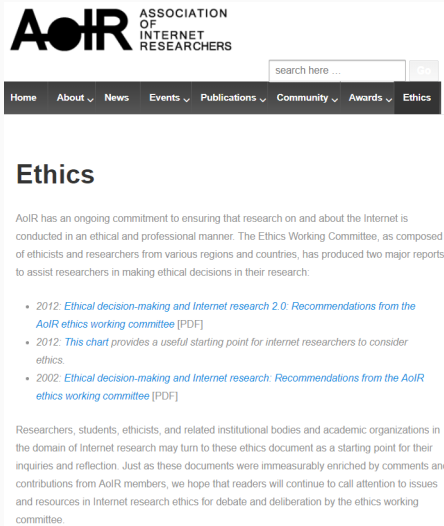
Context for ethics

Context for research varies by country

Two examples:

- United States: Institutional Review Boards (IRB) determine whether researcher meets ethical standards
- Germany: ethics mostly considered by the researcher

Context varies by scientific community



The screenshot shows the top of the AoIR (Association of Internet Researchers) website. The header includes the AoIR logo and name, a search bar, and a navigation menu with links to Home, About, News, Events, Publications, Community, Awards, and Ethics. The main content area is titled "Ethics" and contains a paragraph about the organization's commitment to ethical research, followed by a bulleted list of three reports and a concluding paragraph about the importance of these documents for researchers and students.

AoIR ASSOCIATION OF INTERNET RESEARCHERS

search here ... Go

Home About ▾ News Events ▾ Publications ▾ Community ▾ Awards ▾ Ethics

Ethics

AoIR has an ongoing commitment to ensuring that research on and about the Internet is conducted in an ethical and professional manner. The Ethics Working Committee, as composed of ethicists and researchers from various regions and countries, has produced two major reports to assist researchers in making ethical decisions in their research:

- 2012: [Ethical decision-making and Internet research 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee](#) [PDF]
- 2012: [This chart provides a useful starting point for internet researchers to consider ethics.](#)
- 2002: [Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee](#) [PDF]

Researchers, students, ethicists, and related institutional bodies and academic organizations in the domain of Internet research may turn to these ethics document as a starting point for their inquiries and reflection. Just as these documents were immeasurably enriched by comments and contributions from AoIR members, we hope that readers will continue to call attention to issues and resources in Internet research ethics for debate and deliberation by the ethics working committee.

We want you to be able to:

- design ethically thoughtful research
- explain your decisions to others

Approaches for ethics

Three approaches

- Rules-based approach
- Ad hoc approach
- **Principles-based approach**

Research examples

Examples - Emotional Contagion

700,000 Facebook users were put into an experiment that may have altered their emotions. The participants did not give consent, and the study was not subject to meaningful third-party ethical oversight.



<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1320040111>

Examples - Taste Ties and Time

Researchers scraped students data from Facebook, merged it with university records, used these merged data for research, and then shared them with other researchers.

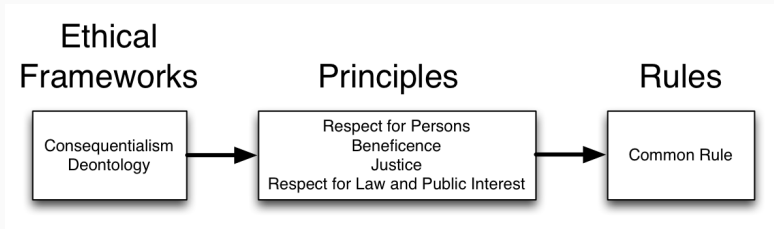
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2008.07.002>

Researchers caused people's computers to secretly visit websites that were potentially blocked by repressive governments.

```
<iframe src="//encore.noise.gatech.edu/task.html"
width="0" height="0" style="display:none"></iframe>
```

- increasing power of researchers
- inconsistent and overlapping rules, norms, and expectations

Principles-based approach



Participants decide not you

Minimize risk, maximize benefits, then decide

Justice: distribution of burdens and benefits of research

- poorly educated and disenfranchised citizens
- prisoners
- institutionalized and mentally disabled children
- old and debilitated hospital patients

Also includes access to benefits of research

- compliance
- transparency-based accountability

Example: GDPR - What is it and how might it affect you?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6wwBqfSk-o>

MapWatch: Detecting and Monitoring International Border Personalization on Online Maps

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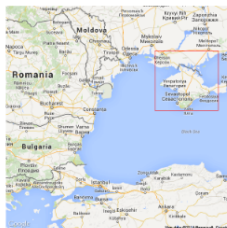
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2872427.2883016>

Abstract:

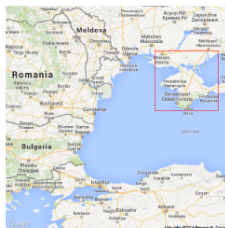
“Maps have long played a crucial role in enabling people to conceptualize and navigate the world around them. However, maps also encode the world-views of their creators. Disputed international borders are one example of this: governments may mandate that cartographers produce maps that conform to their view of a territorial dispute. Today, online maps maintained by private corporations have become the norm. However, these new maps are still subject to old debates. Companies like Google and Bing resolve these disputes by localizing their maps to meet government requirements and user preferences, i.e., users in different locations are shown maps with different international boundaries. We argue that this non-transparent personalization of maps may exacerbate nationalistic disputes by promoting divergent views of geopolitical realities.”

Abstract, part 2:

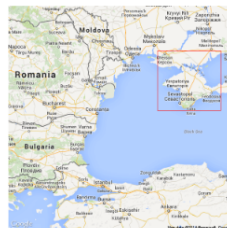
“To address this problem, we present MapWatch, our system for detecting and cataloging personalization of international borders in online maps. Our system continuously crawls all map tiles from Google and Bing maps, and leverages crowdworkers to identify border personalization. In this paper, we present the architecture of MapWatch, and analyze the instances of border personalization on Google and Bing, including one border change that MapWatch identified live, as Google was rolling out the update.”



(a) Russia



(b) Ukraine



(c) All countries except Russia and Ukraine

Figure 5: Border changes separating the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine on Google Maps. Map Data ©2014 AutoNavi Google.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2872427.2883016>

Ethics. Many Web platforms discourage all automated crawling outside the API, and even within the API a platform may prohibit “research” in its online Terms of Service document (usually for competitive reasons). We agree with [57] that non-commercial research for the public good that deals with issues of societal importance must be able to access public Web resources for research purposes as long as automated processes do not produce an unreasonable load. This was our guiding philosophy in this research design.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2872427.2883016>

Researchers have filed a case challenging the CFAA (with the support of the American Civil Liberties Union - ACLU):

<https://www.aclu.org/cases/sandvig-v-lynch-challenge-cfaa-prohibition-uncovering-racial-discrimination-online>

Even if this is legal should we do it?

Deen Freelon at SICSS 2018: “[Surviving the post-API age](#)” (we will watch this talk tomorrow)

If you go “off the grid”:

- you might lose access during your research
- you might struggle to have your research funded, talk about it, and publish it
- you might not be able to share your data with other researchers
- you might make it harder to other academics in the future

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1477506>

Balancing principles

Principles:

- Respect for persons
- Beneficence
- Justice
- Respect for Law and Public Interest

How do you balance these four principles?

- Consequentialism
- Deontology

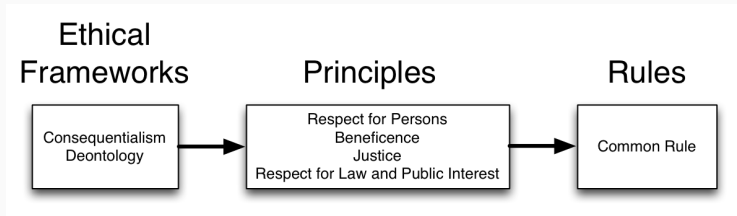
Quick question

In arguing against the Emotional Contagion experiment (Kleinsman and Buckley, 2015) wrote:

“Even if it is true that the risks for the Facebook experiment were low and even if, in hindsight, the results are judged to be useful, there is an important principle at stake here that must be upheld. In the same way that stealing is stealing no matter what amounts are involved, so we all have a right not to be experimented on without our knowledge and consent, whatever the nature of the research.”

This argument is rooted in which ethical framework?

1. Consequentialism
2. Deontology



Applying these ideas can be tricky, and there are 4 areas of particular difficulty, which we will discuss next

Questions?