



IRB 360 NEWSLETTER

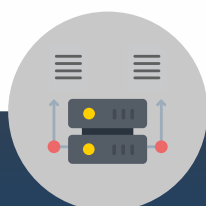
Connecting Research with Ethics

ISSUE 2026/03

USING SOCIAL MEDIA DATA FOR RESEARCH



Although social media is usually public and openly available, use of such data for research often requires ethics approvals. Factors affecting risk levels are as below:



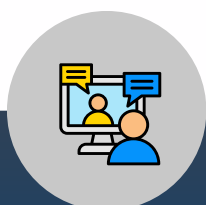
Public or Closed
Channels/
Groups



Identifiability of
Individuals



Sensitivity of
Content



Interaction with
Individuals



Consent
Expectation



Platform Terms
of Service



Use of publicly available social media data does not automatically exempt a study from IRB review.

Find out more on our new Guide Page



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Information



1 What are the ethical considerations when using social media data for research?

While social media data may be publicly accessible, I do not assume it is automatically free for research use. I take a context-sensitive approach, considering how and why content was shared and users' expectations. **Even when posts are public—especially on sensitive topics—I assess content sensitivity, community vulnerability, and risks of identification or harm**, with the goal of minimising harm and respecting individuals' dignity.

2 Is ethics review and consent required when using data posted publicly on social media?

Although consent from individuals is usually not required, **ethics review for each proposed social media study is usually still required**. My general practice is to consult the IRB whenever there is uncertainty, especially when research involves sensitive topics or identifiable content.

3 How should we protect the privacy and identity of individuals when analysing social media data?

Protecting participants' privacy is a central concern in our research. **We remove or mask identifiable information such as usernames and images, avoid traceable verbatim quotes by paraphrasing when needed, and redact identifying details in screenshots**. Access to raw data is restricted within the research team, and only anonymised datasets are shared.

4 Any other advice for researchers using social media data?

My advice would be to go beyond the question of "Is this data public?" and instead ask **"Could using this data cause harm to the people who created it?"** Ethical research requires thinking carefully about user expectations, vulnerability, and potential downstream consequences. Ultimately, the goal should be to balance the scientific value of online data with respect for the individuals and communities behind that data.

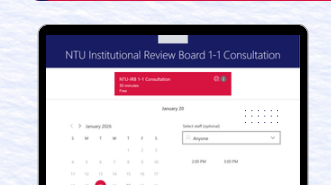
NTU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (NTU-IRB)

1-on-1 Consultation

Every Tuesday and Thursday Afternoons

1-to-1 guidance provided by the Secretariat Team on ethical and legal requirements, query resolution, study design refinement, and efficient completion of IRB applications.

Book your session here



Stay tuned for our next newsletter to learn more!

To [subscribe](#) to our mailing list and for further queries, please write to IRB@ntu.edu.sg

Brought to you by:
Research Integrity and Ethics Office (RIEO)

Refer to our website for more information on IRB Guidelines [here](#).



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