THE ETHICS OF DIGITAL DATA COLLECTION IN THE INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CONTEXT

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The Covid-19 pandemic has made it very difficult to conduct fieldwork in the North, which has led researchers to focus on digital data as an alternative. The increasing digitization of society and the growth of social networks provide a rich source of data for researchers. Nevertheless, the unique features of this fast-growing research area and the use of artificial intelligence in such research may not be adequately captured by our ethics guidelines. The sheer amount of content to be found on publicly accessible social networks has increased the opportunities for research, but has also presented many challenges. In particular, social media content may be used by third parties for research without the consent of those who posted it, as highlighted by Gilbert et al. (2020). It is essential to determine whether social media posts should be viewed as public texts or whether the data should be seen as a unique form of communication that requires specific and perhaps stricter ethical considerations. The fact that this form of digital information is freely accessible and does not require the use of a password demands that we carefully reflect on the proper use of this data. In particular, it is important to note that those who post content to social media networks may not be fully aware of the policy governing its online publication.

Respecting the right of participants in research to give free and informed consent is thus a key topic of concern. Respect for confidentiality is also an important consideration of research involving human subjects, which is usually managed through the use of anonymization.

However, even if anonymization strategies were adopted by researchers, total anonymity cannot be secured since it is often possible to find the data by means of an internet search (Gilbert et al., 2020).

This seminar focuses on ethical issues relating to research using digital sources of data in the context of indigenous communities, with a focus on social networks. This seminar will seek to establish best practices for conducting research involving digital data.

We will also consider whether and how this data can be used to supplement or as a substitute for field research (which has been restricted as a result of the pandemic). Finally, we will examine how this novel research can be used while at the same time respecting the right of members of indigenous communities to consent to such use.

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