“Dealing with legal, ethical and admin issues to study the Online Dating phenomena.”

A researcher’s experience

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RESEARCH

Studying the matching process from three different perspectives: developers, users and interfaces

Each object and subject of study implies different legal procedures

Users interviews are pseudonymised, company’s approval is required to interview developers

-> Focus on interfaces for this presentation

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Interfaces’ perspective

Goal: To analyse different structures of dating apps through features available on the GUI’s

A shift in the object of study: understanding how the platforms work instead of analysing user behavior

The method does not rely on personal data even though it would be easily to collect

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FOCUS ON EXPLICIT FEATURES

When the user is searching, preferences are sent
CLUSTERING ANALYSIS

It shows volume and granularity (!)

1- Traditional
- Playing instruments
- Eating habits
- Residence country
- Age
- Speaks mother tongue only
- Manual skills
- Has a full-time job
- Considers family

2- Sexual
- Sexual practices (stripping off, threesome)
- Sex toys
- Gender Identity (transgender, heterosexual)
- Listens to music
- Has fantasies
- Wears visual accessories (piercing, glasses, tattoo)
- Likes extreme sports
- Tries drugs

3- Demographic
- City
- Distance
- University name
- Ethnicity
- Geolocation

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DATING COMPANIES LICENSING

They say what they collect, that they use it for advertising purposes, they share it with other parties, and for sure they do not publish any database outside their network, it's their gold mine!!

Ex. https://www.gotinder.com/privacy#how-we-share-info

https://www.celibataire.ch/privacy_policy.php

GDPR = users should be informed about the object of your study and need to agree on collecting their data, another option is to collect information anonymously (Recital 26 https://gdpr-info.eu/recitals/no-26/ )
RESEARCH LICENSING

SNFS is for Open Research Data

URL: http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/open_research_data/Pages/default.aspx

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COPYRIGHT LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Web scraping features, legal usage for research in United States (Fair use of Copyrighted works)
URL: https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf

In Europe (Copyright, articles 2 and 3)

and in Switzerland (Copyright Act “CopA”, articles 25 and 10)

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CHALLENGES FOR SCIENCE

- Data before research questions and objects of study
- Results rely on aggregated data, do not analyse individual data if it’s sensitive, critical for topics like mine
- Collect anonymous data
- Databases limited in research because it is required a long process approval, critical for practical semester courses (ex. Matrimonial agency)

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CHALLENGES AS A RESEARCHER

- Dealing with sensitive personal data in the dating industry: what to collect, how to collect, trade secrets, access to the field
- Long ethical and admin procedures to fulfil
- GDPR recently applied, the institution hiring new experts and implementing new processes
- Legislation to study, new skills to acquire

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HANDS ON THE ETHICAL AND LEGAL PROCESS

- SNFS has recently implemented data regulation for the researchers.
- EPFL controls the compliance through the ethics committee and provides a certification.
- The Data library provides advice to the researcher.

-> during my first year of research I was requested to provide a DMP, critical when you just started!

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SUBMITTING A DOSSIER TO THE ETHICS COMMITTEE

PROCESS TIMELINE

Investigating about legislation, creating dossier, talking, writing emails, filling in forms, applying, updating dossier

Research start
April 2017

Process started
Sept 2017

1st review
Feb 2018

2nd review
June 2018

Approval with comments
July 2019

Data collection
CHALLENGES WITH THE ETHICS COMMITTEE

● Dealing with multiple intermediaries that do not necessarily communicate
● 5 reviewers comment on the DPO’s report and not directly on the project
● The DPO and reviewers do not have knowledge on your research topic
● A specific language to use for the ethics committee dossier

-> Research is an iterative process, always changing