Overview Ethical Approaches to Archiving Social Media
What is ‘Ethics’?
What makes something ethical?
Ethics

- Not the same thing as The Law
- Difficult to enforce in principle
- BUT should inform values and policies
- One size does not fit all

- No objective rules or absolute truth
- BUT some shared principles and community agreements
- Change and adapt to context and new information
Platform

Facebook – mostly private accounts, more personal info shared

Flickr, YouTube, SoundCloud – audiovisual content shared that may contain copyright

Twitter – more public accounts, less personal info shared

Instagram – private & public accounts with some copyright content
User Awareness & Consent

User Awareness

• Are social media users aware of how platforms use and share their data?
• Are they aware of how researchers or other 3rd parties might use their data?

Consent

• Does a User Agreement tick box really indicate consent?
• Does this type of collection require informed consent?
• What level of risk is created?

Ipsos MORI: 38% of the public are aware their social media posts are potentially being analysed for research projects
Ownership & Authorship

• Who does this collection belong to?
• Who is entitled to curate, preserve, and share it?
• Who creates the metadata to support how it should be interpreted?

Michelle Caswell’s Feminist Standpoint Appraisal

• Inverts dominant appraisal hierarchies that value records created by those in power at the expense of records created by the oppressed to document and resist their oppression
• Unapologetically assigns value to records created and preserved by those individuals and communities oppressed by capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy
• Shifts our thinking about the position of the archivist, from a “view from nowhere” towards a socially located, culturally situated agent
Example: Documenting the Now

Challenges to preserving social media content in ethical ways that protect already marginalized people:

- Lack of user awareness – or informed consent – about how platforms use their data
- Potential for fraudulent use and manipulation of social media content
- Heightened potential of harm for members of marginalized communities
- Increased risk associated with activities such as civil disobedience, traditionally heavily monitored by law enforcement
- Difficulty of applying traditional archival practices given the sheer volume of data and complicated logistics of interacting with content creators
Economics of Access

• Barriers to accessing and sharing social media data due to monetisation of social media data

• Benefits for-profit corporations and a handful of well-funded (and well-connected) institutions

• Prevents collecting organisations from fulfilling their duty to look after and make available collections to users (researchers, policy-makers, the public)

New Economic Order
‘Data Haves’
&
‘Data Have Nots’

Puschmann and Burgess, ‘The Politics of Twitter Data (2014)’
Summary

- Platform - technology & functionality
- User Awareness & Consent
- Ownership & Authorship
- Economics of Access

- How does the way this platform functions affect ethical preservation?
- How does the form and use of this content affect ethical preservation?
- Are users aware their data is being harvested for this purpose or stored in this location?
- Can I feasibly let them know and how?
- Who owns this content and how can the community be enabled and empowered to make their own archival decisions?
- How does the disparity of access to social media data affect my institution’s ability to fulfil its purpose or legal remit?
Ethical Deliberation: To Archive Twitter or Not to Archive Twitter

- Each group is assigned a proposition regarding the ethical viability of archiving Twitter data
- Each group must develop a set of arguments to defend their assigned proposition
- At the end, each group will share their arguments with the whole group
- If time allows, delegates will anonymously vote for the most persuasively argued proposition using Mentimeter