

Ethical issues
qualitative research
on internet
communities media
essay



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Ethics are always considered in conducting social research. Ethic is a set of principles, moral duties and obligations that guides the conduct of people (American Correctional Health Services Association, 2010). For social research, ethical is to conform to 'the standards of conduct of a given profession or group' (Babbie 2007, p62). Generally, there are four ethical principles should be concerned in conducting social research including no harm to participants, informed consent, voluntary participation, and privacy and confidential.

Here, Qualitative research into internet communities has created new ethical issue of informed consent. Informed consent means that 'subjects must base their voluntary participation in research projects on a full understanding of the possible risks involved,' (Babbie, p64). In fact, the research on internet communities has led to a violation of this principle. Internet communities such as discussion boards, mailing lists, chat rooms, or newsgroups, provide rich information about people's opinion or daily experiences. It is useful for researchers to obtain relevant data, such as some patient self support communities sharing their personal experiences. Researchers can access to those communities for acquiring information and observation. However, it brings a problem that some internet communities' members do not want to be the research subjects and being monitored. Researchers might be 'intruders' and damage the communities. Here, members are not the voluntary participants. Then, informed consent here may not work.

Besides, there is also harm to research subjects on the internet communities when researchers are interested in insight research. For example, some of the members on Breast Cancer Mailing List claim that they do not want to be

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observed. When researchers are gaining insight personal experience about the breast cancer patients, it can recall their negative memories which lead distress to them.

And the second main ethical issue is that there is a risk of disclosing to the privacy and confidentiality of internet communities' member. Privacy and confidential is about the researcher can ' identify a given person's responses but promises not to do so publicly' (Babbie 2007, p65). Since internet contains many of powerful search engines such as Google, it can search anything a user wants. For example, when the authors search for the Dejanews archive to find comments of newsgroup participants responding to researchers' requests, it can show many of related messages.

Another issue on privacy and confidentiality is that there could be various pitfalls for researchers. Particularly researchers may unintentionally violate the privacy of some members due to the blur spaces of internet. For example, even if researchers remove any personal information about research subjects, they may also breach the participant's confidentiality due to the power of search engines. Thus, privacy and confidential on internet community is difficult to achieved.

Words: 482

The authors distinguish three different types of research into internet communities. Summarise them in your own words. (400 words)

Generally, the three types of research methods may include the passive analysis, active analysis, and identifying themselves as such and gathering information in the form of using internet.

First, the first type is the passive analysis which the researchers would not actively participate in the online study. However, they would focus on the studies of information patterns on websites, interactions on discussion groups through observation. They may analysis those studies about helping mechanisms, and content of online self help groups for some patients like colorectal cancer, breast cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and eating disorders.

Second is the active analysis which is the researchers would participant in such internet communications. That means researchers try to be a participant to communicate with others. For instance, researchers would determine whether the responses to healthcare questions on the Usenet accurate or not.

And the third type is that researchers would identify themselves as and gather information by using different forms of online methods. They may include online semi structured interview, online focus groups, or internet based surveys or use the internet to recruit participant for ' traditional' research. Therefore, it is a more diverse way for researchers to use.

Words: 213

Research into Internet communities blur the boundaries between public and private space. Describe the issues identified in the article. (400 words)

In the article, it stated there is a difficulty to dichotomize the boundaries between public and private space appropriately during the process obtaining an informed consent from research subjects.

In fact, research into internet communities is quite different to the traditional research for obtaining informed consent. Traditionally, informed consent is required when the research is occurred in a private context where individuals are expected there is no observation or reporting is taking place. If it is a public space, the research about natural observation is acceptable without obtaining consent from those subjects. And it does not require Research Ethics Board to review when the research is about observation, as it can be expected participants are seeking public visibility. Therefore, it has more clear boundaries between public and private space.

However, research into internet communities may blur such boundaries as people participate in online discussion groups cannot be assumed to be 'seeking public visibility'. And there are various ways of defining 'public' or 'private' space from researchers and internet communities' users. Here, some issues are identified which relate to how to perceive the level of privacy in internet communities.

Firstly, it noted that most of the subscribers are likely to see the group as a 'private space' in cyberspace when a subscription or some form of registration is required to access a discussion group. Therefore, when there is a registration in that internet community, it is a private space.

Secondly, it is pointed out the numbers of (real or assumed) users of a community determines how a 'public' is. The public space is perceived to be <https://assignbuster.com/ethical-issues-qualitative-research-on-internet-communities-media-essay/>

a posting to mailing lists with 10 subscribers here is different 100 or 1000 subscribers in mailing lists. However, the problem now is that it is impossible to determine the actual or assumed users when sending messages as some messages may store in web accessible archives. Therefore, using the number of determining the space is ' public' or not may cause the blur of boundaries.

Finally, the perception of privacy sometimes is depended on an individual group's norms and codes, target audience, and aim may lay down in the ' frequently asked questions' or information files of internet communities. In this way, it is firstly not easy for researcher to distinguish whether it is a private or public space. More importantly, researchers cannot access to those individual groups as they have set some norms and policies which not allow them to observe those subjects even researchers interested in. For example, a self support group of sexual abuse survivors has a group policy not allow those who were not sexual abuse survivors participating in.

On the whole, research into internet communities blurs the boundaries between public and private space where it is difficult to determine these two spaces appropriately. The article mainly identified some issues about the level of privacy or the types into internet communities are various.

Words: 480

Using an example of an internet community familiar to you, how might informed consent be obtained to study that community and discuss any problems in the methods you suggest? (800 words)

Internet communities provide conveniences and rich information for qualitative research. However, how informed consent might be obtained is a problem that researchers encounter. Here, an example of internet community will be used to show the method of obtaining informed consent. And also discuss the problem may rise.

One of the internet communities I familiar to is the discussion board from Facebook. It can connect many of different self support groups. Particularly, an example of support group that I know is the ' SoulTalk' which has established within Facebook. ' SoulTalk' is a non-profit organization with website and discussion board in Facebook. It provides professional, personalized care, support and resources for women share with emotional or relationship crisis. In the discussion board, it is a private group which only opens for its members to share emotional and experiences. Moreover, there are professional counselors helping members to solve problems.

There are about 20 members within this discussion board, which they share their experiences about emotional problems. For those who are not the members can only view the basic information and no sharing is allowed. For someone who wants to access this discussion board, they can request for join it but should be confirmed by the group administrator. At first, we should register to be a member of Facebook. And then we can be the member of that community.

While the researchers want to study this community, they may firstly need to register to Facebook and then wait for the confirmation of this community.

Since this discussion board is a private group, it can be expected that all the

information and data from the members are confidential, and they are not seeking 'public visibility'. Therefore, informed consent is required to study this online community.

First, as suggested by McCleary (2007), getting permission to enter the group from the administrators is necessary when studying that community. Since they know that community better than researchers, therefore, it should be a better way to understand the group norms or standards from that community, and what would be the best way to obtain consent from members. To obtain the permission from the group organizer, the researchers should explain their purpose of the research, and what form of the members' data would be analyzed, and how they ensure that there will be no harm to members.

Then, when there is a need to analyze the research result by quoting or using the postings of members, it is important to send emails and ask retrospectively each member of informed consent. Informed consent should note the content of consent form should explain the purpose of the research, and provide a description of any reasonably risks or discomforts to the subjects (Frankel and Siang 1999). Also, it should state the extent of members' confidentiality of records would be used and maintained. In this way, members may know more about the research and the possible risks to them, thus, it can give members the considerations whether to withdraw or not. For example, to explain the obtained of their data would only be used in report with anonymity. If members are still refused to participate in, there are also alternatives to them withdraw from the analysis of research.

Therefore, the ethical principle of obtaining informed consent can be <https://assignbuster.com/ethical-issues-qualitative-research-on-internet-communities-media-essay/>

maintained. Moreover, there will be less intrusive in this way and avoid the artificial of the stories made by participants.

Indeed, the methods bring some problems. First, the method of asking each member of consent is quite time consuming and unmanageable. As said by Eysenbach and Till (2001), the email address may not be valid and some of them would respond to you. Thus, it may cause some troubles where researchers do not know the email is valid or not. And it is quite difficult for researchers to receive all the consent forms and analyze the result. It generally would be a problem of obtaining informed consent.

Also, there would be also a problem that it is possible the administrator does not allow to access the discussion group where the researchers are interested in studying that issue. Therefore, it brings disadvantage to researchers. Besides, even if the administrator allows researchers to enter the group, it does not mean that all of other members agree their information is disclosed.

Although researchers may try to conform to the ethical principles to obtain members' consent, some of the members indeed do not expect and want to be research subjects. They may perceive researchers as intruders as a result of damaging that community. For example, after the members knowing there are researcher 'lurking' on the discussion board, they may decide to leave the community. Therefore, it is a possible problem that this method of informed consent brings out.

On the whole, researcher can identify whether the discussion board as a private space from the example because it has stated that the board would <https://assignbuster.com/ethical-issues-qualitative-research-on-internet-communities-media-essay/>

open to non-members. So, it is clear for researchers to follow the ethical principles. However, it still brings problems that cannot be solved during the process of obtaining informed consent which the above have stated. More importantly, the deeper problem should be considered is there is no a consistent guideline to define the boundaries between ' public' or ' private' spaces. Therefore, it brings difficulty to researchers when conducting online research particularly the different level of measuring private spaces.

Words: 885

Total words: 2060