

Guidelines for Ethical Research at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna

Vienna | March 7, 2025

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------|
| A | Preamble | 2 |
| B | Procedure | 2 |
| 1. | To whom do the guidelines apply? | 2 |
| 2. | For what kind of research do the guidelines apply? | 3 |
| 3. | The Institutional Review Board (IRB-COM) | 3 |
| C | Ethical principals | 4 |
| D | Provisions for specific types of research | 5 |
| 1. | Types of research | 5 |
| 2. | Research involving human subjects | 6 |
| | 2.1. Recruitment of research participants | 6 |
| | 2.2. Informing research participants | 7 |
| | 2.3. Specificities when selecting vulnerable groups | 9 |
| | 2.4. Screening of research participants | 10 |
| | 2.5. Misleading research participants | 10 |
| | 2.6. Reward / compensation | 12 |
| | 2.7. Protection of (confidential) sources | 12 |
| 3. | Research involving content on human subjects | 12 |
| | 3.1. User information on online platforms | 13 |
| | 3.2. Content provided by individuals | 13 |
| | 3.3. Visuals | 13 |
| 4. | Research involving non-human entities | 14 |
| E | Safeguarding researchers | 14 |
| F | Reporting research results | 15 |
| G | Data management | 15 |
| H | Appendix | 15 |
| 1. | Debriefing and informed consent forms | 15 |
| 2. | Debriefing document | 16 |

A Preamble

The purpose of these Guidelines for Ethical Research is to establish the principles and responsibilities for ethical conduct in research by the members of the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna. The department values and protects academic freedom while safeguarding ethical principles in research such as respect for persons and their welfare and justice. The Department of Communication aims to uphold the highest standards of ethics in its research activities including research by academic staff as well as by students. The policy provides a framework for the conduct of ethical procedures and sets out core principles that inform the duty of care a researcher owes to research participants, research objects, fellow researchers and the public.

The researcher must act responsibly toward the humans and organizations on which he/she does research (research participants and research objects), towards humans with whom he/she collaborates in his/her research (fellow researchers and research assistants) and towards the public when choosing research topics and sharing research results. Thus, the department's Ethical Research Policy covers the whole research process including the identification of research topics, sampling procedures, data gathering, data management, data analysis and research reports. It covers research involving the capture of all-manner of data and materials. The Guidelines for Ethical Research sensitize all members of the department to reflect aspects of ethical responsibility throughout all their research activities and to adhere to the standards of good research – regardless of method, research participants or funding.

Please note that the compliance with these Guidelines for Ethical Research is not equivalent to the conformity with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR/DSGVO). The researchers are obligated to conduct their research in accordance with the requirements of the GDPR.

Feedback on the guidelines is welcome at: irb.publizistik@univie.ac.at

B Procedure

1. To whom do the guidelines apply?

The guidelines apply to all researchers at the Department of Communication including heads of research groups, pre-docs, post-docs, project assistants, and any other researcher who does research under the umbrella of the Department of Communication. Students conducting empirical research for their thesis and as part of research seminar need to be advised by their supervisor/ lecturer to adhere to these ethical guidelines.¹

¹ Students need to also adhere to the guidance issued by the Studienpräses regarding the European General Data Protection Regulation (DSGVO), "[Anleitung zur studentischen sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung: Auswirkungen der DSGVO für die Praxis](#)".

2. For what kind of research do the guidelines apply?

The guidelines apply for all minimal risk research conducted at the Department of Communication. Research is of medium or high risk (and hence needs to be directly submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna) when one of the following applies:

- When the research is invasive, i.e., when the research involves penetrating into the subject's body, e.g., by taking blood, or when it involves informing participants about physiological parameters that may severely disturb them (e.g., feedback on elevated BMI)
- When the research needs support from specialist outside of communication science (e.g., physician, psychologist). For example: procedures involving EEG, ECG, DNA tests, blood sampling
- When research stimuli include content that may severely disturb participants (e.g., extreme violence, pornography; see FSK rating)
- When persons participate in the study who cannot provide informed consent. For example, if the research is conducted in Austria, persons under the age of 14 are not legally able to give their informed consent. In those cases, we recommend sending the proposal to the Ethics Committee. However, if the topic is clearly unproblematic (e.g., common media use behavior) and if precise strategies for obtaining parental consent are provided, exceptions can be made. If the research is conducted abroad, please check domestic age limits.
- When people are participating in the study that belong to a particularly vulnerable group. For example, clinical samples, persons with learning disabilities, hospitalized or imprisoned persons. However, if the topic is clearly unproblematic (e.g., common media use behavior) and/or if consent can be obtained from guardians, exceptions can be made.

In the case of medium or high risk research the research has to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna: <https://www.qs.univie.ac.at/services/ethikkommission/>

3. The Institutional Review Board (IRB-COM)

The guidelines are supervised by the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Communication (IRB-COM). The IRB-COM is a facilitating body at the Department of Communication that provides guidance for researchers on conducting their research in an ethical manner. The IRB-COM facilitates an audit to test whether the planned research is minimal risk or if it is medium or high risk. If the project is medium or high risk, it needs to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna.

In order for projects to be assessed by the IRB-COM, researchers need to fill out the questionnaire "Assessment of research projects by the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Communication (IRB-COM)". The link to the questionnaire can be found on the [Department's](#)

website. The questionnaire itself is hosted on the website of the Faculty of Social Sciences. All materials submitted will then be reviewed by two members of the IRB-COM. The final decision is up to the (deputy) head of the IRB-COM and is usually made no more than four weeks after all necessary documents have been received.

If the IRB-COM evaluation classifies the research as a “project of minimal risk”, the researcher receives an approval and can start the research process. If the IRB-COM evaluation classifies the research as “medium or high risk”, the researcher is requested to submit the research to the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna.

Please note that the IRB-COM is part of the larger IRB-FACULTY at the Faculty of Social Sciences. The IRB-COM is making an independent decision regarding all submissions. The IRB-COM consists only of members of the Department of Communication. The IRB-COM chairs meet regularly with the IRB-FACULTY. So, while the IRB-COM is responsible for the final decision and the underlying decision criteria, the official certificate of approval will be signed by the Vice-Dean and will be issued by the IRB-FACULTY.

C Ethical principals

All members of the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna do not only adhere to legal regulations but also to ethical principles that guide their research regardless of methods applied. When performing research, the following general ethical principles will be considered:

1. **Minimizing the risk of harm:** Researchers must seek to protect participants from physical and psychological harm during the research process. Researchers should not make frivolous use of participants. Interests of participants and their physical and psychological well-being always prevail over research interests. Research and the pursuit of knowledge should not be regarded as the supreme goal at the expenses of the rights of participants. If the researcher notices that participants feel uncomfortable with the research situation, she/he is obliged to stop (or at least interrupt) data collection. Researchers should ensure that potential risks for the participants are assessed and that adequate precautions are taken to minimize and mitigate risks. Researchers especially have to ensure to prevent vulnerable participants from harm: In this respect, some participants should automatically be considered vulnerable because of a limited ability to provide consent to take part in a research project; e.g., young children or (mentally) ill people. Researchers are also sensitive to the rights and interests of institutions and ensure not to harm their reputation in the course of research.
2. **Protecting anonymity and confidentiality:** As a general principle, those who are made the subjects of research are entitled to have their personal information treated confidentially. The researcher must prevent any use and communication of information that might inflict damage on individuals who are the subjects of research. Irrespective of the duty of confidentiality, researchers have a legal obligation to avoid punishable offences. If, in the course of data analysis,

the researcher encounters chance findings that are highly relevant for the individual participant's well-being she/he tries everything feasible to identify the individual respondent and inform her/him about this discovery. However, generally the norm of anonymity prevails: The researcher has to take care that individual participants cannot be identified in research reports and (in quantitative studies) in the course of data analysis.

3. **Respect for** participants: The researcher ensures that in the course of the research process all people are treated equally. Research has to be respectful of gender differences, marginalized and disadvantaged groups and – in general – of all groups in society. In this respect, research is guided by respectful interactions with research subjects, the respectful design of research stimuli (e.g. the presentation of gender in pictures) and respectful reporting of research results. The researcher guarantees that her/his research is always anti-discriminatory.
4. **Voluntary informed consent and the right to withdraw**: Consent is the main rule in research on individuals or on information and material that can be linked to individuals. This consent should be informed, explicit, voluntary and documentable. In giving consent, participants retain the right to withdraw this consent.
5. **Independence**: Research is carried out for the benefit of society and only adheres to scientific criteria and norms. Thus, research has to be independent. Researchers should not distort research design and/or findings to suit funder requests.
6. **Gender balance**: throughout the selection of researchers and composition of research teams it is expected that appropriate gender balance is safeguarded. This also implies that researchers should have equal opportunities to present research results (e.g. at academic conferences) and are provided with equal access to funding thereof.

D Provisions for specific types of research

1. Types of research

Research at the Department of Communication, for which these guidelines apply, can be differentiated regarding

- the subject or object of interest: individuals (human subjects, see D2; content on human subjects, see D3), organizations/companies/brands (non-human entities, see D4)
- the distance to the subject/object of interest: direct contact (e.g., interview of individuals), indirect contact (e.g., analysis of textual content [e.g., social media posts] produced by individuals or organizations/companies/brands; analysis of historical data about individuals or organizations/companies/brands)

and the type of method that is applied for data collection:

- Survey

- Experiment
- Qualitative interviewing (including focus groups)
- Observation (within public domain, outside public domain)
- Content analysis (data collection within publicly accessible media, within private media, of historical content), if the content reveals information about individuals, companies or their brands

As stated in B2, the guidelines apply for all minimal risk research conducted at the Department of Communication. All research of medium or high ethical risk needs to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna.

The guidelines do not apply to theoretical research that does not involve collecting data from or on individuals, companies or their brands by means of empirical methods (survey, experiment, interviewing, observation, or content analysis). They also do not apply for meta-analyses and secondary data analyses.

2. Research involving human subjects

This section refers to research that is conducted with individuals as research participants (subjects). The methods applied for this type of research are survey, experiment, interviewing and observation.

2.1. Recruitment of research participants

Recruitment and screening of research participants form the basis of informed consent. This needs to reflect and ensure the autonomy of potential participants by protecting both the privacy of the individual and the confidentiality of any information obtained.

Recruitment activities need to be undertaken in such a way that participation is truly voluntary, avoiding any explicit or implicit coercion. It is crucial that individuals are provided with sufficient time and information to consider whether or not to take part in a study, with no undue pressure because of when, how, or by whom the request is made.

Awareness of the balance of power between researcher and researched is vital at any stage of the recruitment and screening process. Researchers are thus obliged to carefully consider the appropriateness of recruiting students from the Department of Communication. It must be ensured and clearly stated that those who decline to participate in a study will not face any disadvantages.

In general, research participants need to be selected in a non-discriminatory manner.

Recruitment of research participants includes active and passive recruitment strategies:

- When specific individuals or institutions (e.g., schools, companies, organizations, online panels, etc.) are approached on the basis of knowledge of characteristics that would make them suitable participants, privacy and investigator transparency need to be considered (e.g., deception by fabricating online identities to gain access to specific online communities should

be avoided).

- When printed or digital recruitment material (e.g., ads, posters, flyers, job postings at crowdsourcing platforms, etc.) is distributed in order to attract potential participants to enroll in a study, the general advertising directives apply (e.g., specific rules for putting up posters at a school).

To ensure that potential participants know what is involved in the research, it is necessary to include at least the following information in any recruitment material:

- Criteria for inclusion or exclusion in the study (e.g., age range, ethnic-religious background, particular news consumption pattern etc.)
- Type of research (e.g., online questionnaire, eye-tracking session, oral interview)
- Required time commitment
- Specific expectations towards the research participants, in particular if the study entails the use of procedures or materials that can be demanding, hurtful, or inappropriate for certain groups of individuals (e.g., racist or sexually explicit content, questions touching on general taboos)
- Contact details of the researcher (university e-mail address) for further information about the study, name of department and university
- Information on whether/under what conditions participants will receive a reward or compensation, and what this reward or compensation will consist of. This information should not be overly prominent (i.e., phrases such as “Do you want to earn 10€??” should be avoided)

In general, information provided in the recruitment material must be truthful, accurate and not misleading. Language and terminology should be informative and appropriate for the target group.

If the research requires it, potential research participants are screened for both common and less common anomalies. Screening refers to any interaction or intervention with individuals in order to determine eligibility for taking part in a study. This includes obtaining data through written screening tools and oral responses to questionnaires (e.g., psychometric tests) as well as accessing information such as grades or medical test results. With regard to privacy and confidentiality, only the minimal information necessary for determining eligibility should be collected. Whenever possible, information obtained from screening procedures should not be connected with subject identifiers.

2.2. Informing research participants

Prior to conducting the planned studies and during the recruitment of test subjects, the researcher collects an informed consent of the participants. To give an informed consent entails that the test subject gives consent to participate in a study based on information about: the purpose; the procedure; the benefits; the potential risks; and the potential obligations of the study; as well as the procedure on how to react if negative symptoms or unwanted side effects occur; the procedure of withdrawal from the study; how the collected data will be used; and whether there will be

reimbursements or remunerations connected to participating in this study.

It is obligatory for every study entailing human participants to give an informed consent form to a test subject to sign. Informed consent forms should only be signed if participants understood and consent with every aspect of the study described in the consent form.

Ideally a researcher is present to answer any questions of the participants regarding all named aspects of the study participation. In any case, information on a contact person has to be provided for participants to inquire further information.

A template for the information brochure and the informed consent form can be two separate documents, or they may be incorporated in one document. See Appendix 1 for standard examples of both forms.

The information brochure should include:

1. An explanation of the purpose of the study.
2. A short explanation about the research procedure.
3. The potential benefits of participating in this study apart from potential reimbursements for the participation.
4. The potential risks of participating in this study. Potential risks should be named even if they are negligible.
5. The potential obligations or long-term effects (i.e., connected to chance findings retrieved in the study) on participant's lifestyle connected to the participation. Some research methods can reveal chance findings related to the physical or mental health of a research participant (e.g., detecting heart rhythm disorders, suicidal tendencies etc.). If the risk of revealing chance findings exists, the informed consent form needs to include a provision that covers the procedure that will be followed when there is a finding that is of importance to the participant (e.g., the researcher contacts the participant's GP).
6. A procedure on how to react if negative symptoms or side effects connected to the study occur. It has to be pointed out that participants have to report any symptoms of complaints, unwanted side effects or injuries that occur in the course of the study to the study coordinator.
7. The procedure on how to withdraw consent from participating in this study. At any point of the study participants should be able to withdraw their consent, without having to give a reason and without this being to their disadvantage.
8. An explanation on how the collected data set will be used regarding the storage of and access to the collected information, anonymity of the collected data, possibility of deleting data after data collection, as well as for what reasons the data will be used.
9. An explanation on whether there will be reimbursements or remunerations connected to participating in this study.

10. The name and email address of the main researcher of the study.
11. The email address of a contact person of the ethics committee of the Department of Communication. This information is given so the participant can approach an independent person with any questions, complaints or comments on the research.

Note that the provided information must enable the test subject to make a good assessment of the procedure, benefits, risks and further risks of the research. This description should be formulated in a language that is easy to understand and free of specific terminology or abbreviations.

If there is need for further contact (e.g., for debriefing measures or chance finding reports) the test subject is informed about that in the factsheet and gives further information needed for this procedure (e.g., name, address, e-mail address)

In the case of an online study, the participants are asked to give an implicit permission at the end of the information brochure/ research outline (e.g., by using a checkbox). To give participants the opportunity to withdraw at the end of the study which recorded data anonymously, there should be an open text box asking for “any remarks or feedback on the study”. Here, participants may enter their desire to have their data removed; this will no longer be possible after the final survey page has been closed because of anonymity.

2.3. Specificities when selecting vulnerable groups

Weigh the necessities of collecting data of children and adolescents under the age of 18. If data of this participant group is collected, it is necessary to collect parental/guardian consent if the participant is younger than 14 years old. If research is conducted outside of Austria, the legal minimum age in the respective country/ies needs to be assessed. Thus, if participants are younger than 14 years, the following procedure has to be followed:

1. As outlined above, research with participants younger than 14 years should be sent to the Ethics Commission. However, if the topic is clearly unproblematic (e.g., common media use behavior) and if precise strategies for obtaining parental consent are provided (see below), exceptions can be made.
2. Parents or guardians need to sign an informed consent form on behalf of their children, when parents/guardians accompany their child to the research facility.
3. If the research takes place in a host institution (for instance a school) where parents are not present, informed consent needs to be collected per mail. The host institution will be asked to disseminate the informed consent form plus the fact sheet to the parents/guardians in a timely manner prior to the study. Active consent needs to be collected, hence only children that bring back a signed consent form are allowed to participate in the study. Passive consent (i.e., whereby the parents/guardian can inform the host organization that they do not give permission for their child to participate) is not sufficient.

The parental informed consent form and fact sheet need to contain the same information as the

documents described under informed consent. Additionally, children/adolescents have to be informed orally about the purpose; the procedure; the benefits; and the potential risks of the study. Even if parents have given their consent, voluntariness has to be maintained for the actual participants. Thus, the juvenile participants have to furthermore be informed that they can stop their participation in the study at any point without giving reasons. Also, the researchers are obligated to take the juveniles' reactions and sentiments very seriously and interrupt the study if they feel the participation is no longer of benefit to the participant, even if the participant does not express this him/herself.

2.4. Screening of research participants

If the research requires it, potential research participants are screened for both common and less common anomalies. Screening refers to any interaction or intervention with individuals in order to determine eligibility for taking part in a study. This includes obtaining data through written screening tools and oral responses to questionnaires (e.g., psychometric tests) as well as accessing information such as grades or medical test results.

With regards to privacy and confidentiality, only the minimal information necessary for determining eligibility should be collected. Whenever possible, information obtained from screening procedures should not be connected with subject identifiers.

2.5. Misleading research participants

2.5.1. Deception

In some cases, it might be necessary to deceive test subjects regarding the purpose of the study or regarding the stimulus design employed in the study. This is because knowing the precise intention and procedure of, for instance, an experiment could impact the participant's behavior in the study. Misleading means to provide inaccurate or incomplete information about the aim or procedure of a study as well as to provide manufactured stimuli or factual stimuli taken out of context.

It is important to ponder how and to what extent deception is necessary. Only if misleading the participants is necessary to answer a research question is it valid to not fully inform participants. Misleading however can never go as far as not letting participants know about potential risks of a study. In any case an information brochure and an informed consent form need to be provided, explaining as much as possible about the study.

2.5.2. Debrief

If participants have been misled and/or confronted with manufactured stimuli it is necessary to fully debrief them at the end of the study. This debriefing should include information about all aspects of the study and should address in what regard participants have been misled and/or how the employed stimulus was manufactured.

If it is expected that misleading the test subjects can have temporary negative effects, the debriefing should be given immediately after the study took place. The debriefing should address the possible temporary negative effects on for instance mood, self-confidence, etc. and dispel them. If no

temporary negative effects are expected, the debriefing can be held at a later time. However, debriefing should take place within a month after the experiment ended (for a template of a debrief form see Appendix 1).

2.5.3. Stimuli

What kind of debriefing measures are necessary also depend on what type of stimuli are employed in the study. In experimental studies, for example, it can occur that participants are confronted with manufactured or disturbing stimuli (see 2.4.1).

If **manufactured stimuli** are employed (in some designs it is necessary to employ authentic, factual information, which is then edited to fit the experimental conditions; or to manufacture information, which is then attributed to an actual source) it is necessary to weigh what has to be provided in a debrief:

1. If the information given is emotionally neutral and the information given is based on facts, debriefing measures can be kept short by just explaining the manipulation and its purpose.
2. Example I Debrief (all information given is based on facts): “The employed stimuli in this study is based on a factual article published in *Der Standard* from 15.06.18. All the information provided in this article are true. This stimulus was chosen to”
3. If the information given is emotionally neutral and the information given is fabricated, debriefing measures should be more extensive by explaining the manipulation and its purpose, as well as to clarify/correct the false information given.
4. Example II Debrief (the employed information given was fully fabricated): “The employed stimuli in this study are based on a manufactured article created solely for the purpose of this study. The researchers created all the information provided in this article. This stimulus was chosen to”
5. Example III Debrief (the employed information is based on facts but was altered): “The employed stimuli in this study is based on a factual article published in *Der Standard* from 15.06.18. The information provided in the articles were slightly changed. Participants either saw an article inflating the numbers of asylum seekers in Austria or deflating the number of Asylum seekers in Austria. The actual number currently officially reported is XX. This stimulus was chosen to”

If **emotionally disturbing stimuli** are used in a study (e.g., disturbing news stories, photographs, audiovisual content) the researcher needs to consider in what way participants might be affected by this. It is important to provide further information on the stimulus and its possible effects and to provide contact information to help facilities. For instance, consider providing the telephone number of a help line or a link to relevant information that supports counteracting any negative effects.

Please note that this information only refers to research of minimal ethical risk; for research of medium or high ethical risk research projects approval of the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna is needed.

2.6. Reward / compensation

Providing research participants with (financial) rewards is considered as initial incentive, as expression of gratitude, and as compensation for commitment and contribution. However, to ensure that financial rewards do not pressure participants to give consent or remain in the study until it has been completed, the amount needs to be kept at a low level and fairly reflect the efforts involved.

Exemplary recommendations for individual reimbursements:

- Study conducted in the lab, 1 hour duration: reimbursement of 10 to 30 Euros or a small gift worth this amount. Travel time is included in the time commitment.
- Study conducted online, 10-15 minutes duration: reimbursement of 2,50 to 10 Euros.
- Study conducted via crowdsourcing platforms such as MTurk or Crowdfunder: the amount per hour is based on the legal minimum wage in the crowdworkers' country of origin.

To ensure anonymity, personal data obtained to identify and inform the winner of the draw needs to be separated from data obtained for research purposes (e.g., participants are directed to an extra survey where they will be asked to enter an e-mail address).

Specific guidelines apply when participating in research is considered as partial performance in a lecture or seminar at the Department of Communication:

Participation in research needs to be mentioned in the syllabus, including information on the reward (e.g., amount of bonus points). To ensure voluntary participation, students need to be provided with the ability to receive an equivalent reward (e.g., same amount of bonus points) by means of an alternative partial performance. This option also needs to be mentioned in the syllabus.

In general, participating in research as partial performance in a lecture or seminar is only valid when students learn from participation and are informed about the results of the study.

2.7. Protection of (confidential) sources

If a researcher has guaranteed research participants anonymity, he/she has to adhere strictly to this assurance. Research participants must remain unrecognizable and unendangered. Confidentiality can be non-binding only if the information concerns a crime and there is a duty to inform relevant authorities. Confidentiality may also be lifted if, in carefully weighing interests, important reasons of public safety predominate.

3. Research involving content on human subjects

Care needs to be taken not only when collecting data directly from individuals (section D2) but also when conducting research on content that reveals information on identifiable individuals. This material includes behavioral traces individuals leave on online platforms (e.g., comments), content compiled and provided by individuals themselves, pictures or audio-visual material, and historical data.

3.1. User information on online platforms

Before considering ethical aspects of a research project involving social media data, the researcher has to consult all relevant *legal* guidelines. Specifically, he/she needs to check whether a platform's terms and conditions are aimed at third parties wishing to access, store and process data from this platform.

When collecting data in online environments, the researcher needs to contemplate whether the data **can be considered public or private**, i.e., whether the user producing the content can reasonably expect his/her data to be observed by strangers. In general, data accessed from open and public environments present less ethical issues than data which are found in closed and private online spaces. Accordingly, it can be considered ethical to use public data from platforms such as Tinder (though requiring to register) or Snapchat (though data is only available for a limited time) as users can reasonably expect strangers to view their profile and postings. The same applies to information posted by public figures and organizations, which is intended to be widely disseminated. On the contrary, members of a closed forum such as an invitation-only Facebook group expect their data to be only privately shared. The researcher therefore has to contact site administrators or forum gatekeepers to give their informed consent to access and process the data for the research purpose. Once consent is granted, researchers should consider to make themselves known to the community and offer participants the right to opt out.

Careful consideration is needed whether the user information on online platforms originates from young (i.e., in Austria 14 years or younger) or vulnerable (e.g., people with special educational needs) individuals. Researchers must ensure to take all possible precautions to rule out the use of data by vulnerable adults and children, as in these cases, informed consent cannot reliably be given.

Moreover, researchers need to mind whether the data is potentially sensitive and thus might cause harm to social media users should their data be exposed to new audiences. Sensitive data include postings about, for example, mental health issues or (controversial) political opinions.

If there is risk of harm to individuals, researchers must either (a) paraphrase all data which is republished in research outputs, having taken steps to ensure that the paraphrased data does not lead interested parties to the individual's online profile or (b) seek informed consent from people whose data they intend to use in its original form in research outputs. The same applies to data originating from members of a closed forum.

3.2. Content provided by individuals

When content provided by individuals is to be used for research purposes (e.g., material compiled by the individual in form of a diary), the researcher has to follow the guidelines outlined in D2.

3.3. Visuals

When either the researcher or research participants take images (photos or videos) of identifiable individuals (whether in public or private spaces) or of people in private spaces or organizations, where people might reasonably not expect to be photographed or filmed, the researcher needs to obtain

informed consent by the individuals that are visually identifiable.

When disseminating visual data (e.g., in publications, conference presentations, or lecture slides), the identity of individuals needs to be obscured (e.g., by blurring faces).

4. Research involving non-human entities

Non-human entities as the research object include organizations, companies or brands. Research involving non-human entities can use

- direct contact to individuals (e.g., representatives of the company) or
- no direct contact to individuals (e.g., when conducting content analysis) to collect the data.

When the research involves direct contact to individuals all relevant sections in D2 need to be applied for the aspects that regard the human subjects. When analyzing the content on non-human entities the researcher needs to contemplate whether the data can be considered public or private. As stated in D3.1.1, it can generally be assumed that organizations/companies/brands expect their content to be widely disseminated, thus, their content can usually be considered public.

Conducting research on non-human entities requires care regarding effects of the research and its findings on the entity, for example on its reputation, legitimacy or competitiveness. When negative effects on such parameters are likely, care needs to be taken that the harm caused by the research does not infringe on ethical norms or even laws (e.g., §111 StGB, libel/ ueble Nachrede), as this can possibly incur legal consequences for the researcher and/or the university.

The following remedies can be taken when using an organization/ company/ brand as research object or stimulus:

- Using a fictitious research stimulus (e.g., fictitious brand or company)
- Conducting the study in a protected laboratory setting where participants can be debriefed immediately after the study, or using a password protected survey login
- In case of student thesis: blocking notice/ Sperrvermerk
- Anonymizing organization/ company/ brand in the research report

E Safeguarding researchers

Research may also cause potential harm to the researcher and/or to the research aids employed by the researcher (e.g., student assistants)

The researcher needs to conduct a cost-benefit analysis whether the risks involved warrant the research (e.g., conducting research in radical right-wing or in politically persecutive environment)

When researcher employs aids to conduct research / collect data that may potentially harm the person: Include information on potential harmfulness in job add, address in job interview and get

written informed consent together with contract)

When research is conducted as part of a research seminar (e.g., FOSE): Address potential harmfulness in class description and in first session when student participants still have the chance to leave the class

F Reporting research results

All reports and presentations of should use gender-neutral language and be respectful. This implies that presentations of research results (e.g., Powerpoint) should avoid the use of discriminatory visuals, audiovisuals, infographics and any other type of such graphics. In the selection of data presentation methods, a gender-neutral and respectful approach should be applied.

G Data management

Legal guidelines of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) need to be followed regarding the handling and storing of data.

It is encouraged to store the final dataset at the Austrian Social Science Data Archive (AUSSDA).

Social media data: Researchers should consider whether it is ethically sound to share data sets as well as checking the platform terms and conditions to determine whether they allow or prohibit it. If the data set contains data that could cause harm if re-published, then either the sensitive data should be removed or paraphrased, or the data set should not be shared at all. In cases of aggregate data where the individual units (or postings) are no longer discernible, it is generally safe to share the data set. If the data set does not contain sensitive data, or if it is not possible to identify individuals based on the data set, it is also safe to share.

H Appendix

1. Debriefing and informed consent forms

A template for the Informed consent form and for the debriefing can be found on the faculty website (log-in required) <https://sowi.univie.ac.at/en/research/research-ethics/resources-and-support/>

The documents must be adapted for the respective study.

In case of specific activities carried out during the research the following additional documents are also to be used:

- a. Joint data processing by research partners: Arrangement on shared responsibility for data processing (“Joint Controllers”);
- b. Data processing by Order: Order Processing in accordance with Article 28 General Data

Protection Regulation (GDPR) Agreement.

The forms are available under “Template agreements and policies” (“Musterverträge und Erklärungen”) by the University of Vienna here: <https://wiki.univie.ac.at/pages/viewpage.action?pagelId=168536912>

2. Debriefing document

To comprehensively debrief participants, researchers should apply the following guideline²:

1. **Inform** the participants about the purpose of the study and deceptive elements of the study. The information about the study and deception should be given in 2-3 sentences. Participants should be informed about the purpose of the study, the expected results and why they are important. Explain in what way the participants were misled (e.g., by referring to the stimulus given, or the information provided to the participants). The information should be given in a non-technical, understandable language
2. **Explain** to the participants in 1-3 sentences the reason of the deception. Give the participants reasons for why the deception was necessary in this study and why it is generally used in studies of this kind (e.g., state that for this line of research it is standard procedure).
3. **Leave** the participants **with a good feeling** about the research they participated in by putting emphasis on the value of the research in 2-3 sentences. Furthermore, **reassure** them, that the information on the requirements and reassurances given in the study is true and not deceptive (e.g., confidentiality, anonymity of the data, information about long-term effects, promised reimbursements).
4. **Share** the **correctness** of your procedure. At this point take one sentence to ask participants not to share information about the debriefing with other people that are going to participate in the future. Make sure that they themselves were not informed beforehand but reassure them that their participation reimbursement is not affected by their answer to ensure they answer honestly.
5. Give the participants **space for questions and concerns**.
6. **Ask for confirmation** of the debriefing procedure by requesting a signature or an electronic approval.
7. Lastly, **give thanks** for the participation and again provide them with **contact information** (not only the researchers contact but provide information to the ethical committee or other relevant web sites).
8. **Offer** the opportunity to get **insights into the results** of the study at a later point in time.

² These ideas and examples have been inspired by the ethical and debriefing regulations at a number of other universities (e.g., the University of Amsterdam).