Research Ethics and HCI

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Ethics

*Moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity*

The *activity*, here, is **HCI Research**
Research Ethics in HCI

● “The need for careful attention to ethics in HCI research is growing”
● “Research in HCI has expanded its subjects and methods to such a degree that aspects of the basic paradigm of ‘human subjects research’ need to be rethought”.
  ■ Why?
“Online studies in particular create new research opportunities, but also introduce unforeseen ethical challenges related to privacy, anonymity, and differing norms.”  

Research Ethics in the Facebook Era: Privacy, Anonymity, and Oversight

- Privacy: public vs private?
- Norms across disciplines
- Pedagogical concerns
Research Ethics in HCI

- “Research ethics involve understanding complex relationships between law, policy, and ethics”
- “Laws shift at political boundaries, polices shift at institutional boundaries, and ethics shift at cultural boundaries”
Obama Administration on Big Data

● “Our challenge is to support growth in the beneficial use of big data while ensuring that it does not create unintended discriminatory consequences.”

Big Data: A Report on Algorithmic Systems, Opportunity, and Civil Rights
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/2016_0504_data_discrimination.pdf
Angela Merkel on Algorithm Transparency

- “I’m of the opinion that algorithms must be made more **transparent**, so that one can inform oneself as an interested citizen about questions like ‘**what influences my behaviour** on the internet and that of others?’”

Approaches to Ethics in HCI Research

Human Subject Research
Approaches to Ethics in HCI Research

● Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment -- biomedical study infamous for horribly unethical approach
● Led to creation of:
  ■ The **Belmont Report**
  ■ Regulations requiring **Institutional Review Boards**
Approaches to Ethics in HCI Research

- Treat others not as means to an end but as ends in and of themselves

*Immanuel Kant*
**Research and Human Subject**

**Research:** “a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge”

**Human Subject:** “According to the US code ..... a human subject is “ a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention of interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information”
Human Subject Research in the USA

- Code of Federal Regulations mandates US universities to maintain an Institutional Review Board
- “IRB members must represent diverse disciplines, and must include a non-scientist and a member of community not affiliated with the university.”
- IRB: protect human subjects as well as their institution from liability and official sanctions.
IRB Process

Researcher must obtain permission by:

- Obtaining certification in Human Subject Research
- **Submitting a New Protocol Form**
What about Class Research & Assignments?

UIUC Regulations and Policies on:

- Class Assignments and Student Research Projects
- Researchers Recruiting from Their Own Courses
- Research with Student Participants
- etc
Ethical Issues in HCI

Terms of Service Compliance
1.5 Honor property rights including copyrights and patent:

“Violation of copyrights, patents, trade secrets and the terms of license agreements is prohibited by law in most circumstances. Even when software is not so protected, such violations are contrary to professional behavior.”
However

Terms of Service Tends to be:

● Unilaterally set by providers
● Can be arbitrary, inconsistent, and can change at any time.
● Designed to protect companies from liability.
● Ensures the company has the maximum possible benefit and the user the least.
Consequently:

Important research problems cannot be investigated while following terms of service.

- **Algorithm Transparency Issue**
- These algorithms function as **Black Box**
- Researchers reverse engineer such algorithms to understand how they work.
- This may lead to violation of Terms of Service.
The Dilemma of Ethical yet Illegal

- Benefits to society vs. Harm of Violating Terms of Service
- Researchers are left with two choices:
  - Ignore code of Ethics and Violate Terms of Service
    - Uncertain of the legality of their work.
  - Or, avoid such Research areas
    - Leave important problems directly affecting our lives
Conclusion
Q & A
Thank You
References

- *Ways of Knowing in HCI: “Research Ethics and HCI”* - A. Bruckman
- “Research ethics in the Facebook era: privacy, anonymity, and oversight” - Bos et al.
- “Agree or Cancel? Research and Terms of Service Compliance” - Vaccaro et al.
- “Angela Merkel: Internet Search Engines are ‘distorting perception’” - Kate Connolly, *The Guardian*
- “Beware Online ‘Filter Bubbles’” - Eli Pariser, *TED*
NOTE:

- IRB approval only needed if the aim is generalized scientific knowledge (research)
  - When in doubt, err on the side of safety