

Protocol

Study Title: A survey of social network service users to identify the occurrence and nature of heterophily

Researcher(s)

Peter West (pw9g09@ecs.soton.ac.uk)
Noura N Alomar (nna2e13@ecs.soton.ac.uk)
Steed Crazyq (yqz1g13@ecs.soton.ac.uk)

Funder: University of Southampton

Sponsor (if known): University of Southampton

Background

This study is part of project in Social Networking Technologies (module COMP6051) and participating in this study will provide our team with useful information to help us with our project. We are a group of 3 students at the University of Southampton and we are researching how people communicate on social networks, in particular how they communicate with people which they may not necessarily know in real life about shared interests. This relationship is called heterophily. Researching this will inform the design of a social network which will be based around this concept.

Method

As the target for our product is the general public we are able to approach a random sample of individuals directly. We will approach potential participants and ask them if they have a few minutes to fill out a questionnaire about their use of social networks. We have made the survey short and minimal to maximise the likelihood of agreement. We will also make it clear to any potential participant that no personally identifiable information will be collected and that they will not be contacted about their responses. They will be able to access the survey either by navigating to a URL in a browser if they have an available device or they will be provided with a laptop to use in order to participate.

Materials

3 x Laptop - We will use the personal laptops of the participants to allow participants to fill out the survey.

1 x Survey (Electronic) - A survey has been created using Google forms. It is well protected and will allow us to easily aggregate the collected information. This can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1kHYUCS>

Participants

Participants will be members of the general public, all potential users of social networks, but who may or may not use them.

Procedure

Two weeks of deployment of questionnaire, during which three researchers will ask people to complete the questionnaire as per the participants section above. Following this, the questionnaire will be closed to prevent further responses. Statistical analysis of the results may begin at this point, which is detailed below.

Statistical analysis

There questionnaire collects mostly qualitative data from likert scale questions. This will be used to plot distribution of the importance or use of particular aspects of social networks, allowing us to infer the success and failure of these aspects in particular

contexts. We will also be collecting text for one question. We will code and analyse this using the Nvivo software.

Ethical issues

A person could provide sensitive personal information. We will advise against this. We will only ask trivial questions about how people use social networks.

Data protection and anonymity

The survey is linked to a password protected back-end document which is accessible only to the researchers involved. Any data used from this study will be aggregated and anonymised and all information will be destroyed after the study concludes.

During the study information will be stored only on an encrypted partition on the researcher's computer using TrueCrypt, and a password protected Google Drive document with a randomly generated 50 character password on the account. The computer is password protected. After the study the only data retained will be the anonymised questionnaire responses and collected data in aggregate form which may be published or used by anyone.

Appendix 1. Survey

The survey is anonymous and a copy may be accessed at this address: <http://bit.ly/1kHYUCS>
Please avoid submitting any responses to the survey while reviewing this application.