Research ethics

IN5210 – Information Systems

Petter Nielsen

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Lecture Overview

- Introduction: What is research ethics, and why is it important
- A few examples of ethical dilemmas – research ethics in practice
- The dimensions of research ethics (triangle)
- The research ethical guidelines and norms at UiO
- The institutions at UiO handling research ethical issues

Introduction: Motivation

- Aims to engage and inspire you to consider the ethical dimensions of your research
  - See the relevance of research ethics for your research
  - Know some types of research ethical dilemmas you may experience
  - Know how to address research ethical dilemmas if they occur

Introduction: Literature/readings

- Standard for Research Integrity at the University of Oslo
- The National Research Ethics Committee's General guidelines
- Davison, R.M., Chughtai, H., Nielsen, P., et al. (2024). The ethics of using generative AI for qualitative data analysis. *Information Systems Journal*.

Introduction: Ethics in general

- Ethics or moral philosophy*, the discipline of what is morally right and wrong*
- Different levels of ethical discussions:
  - *Meta-ethics*: The big questions of “What is morality?”, “Is there truth?” etc.
  - *Normative ethics*: Addresses the question of what we ought to do with rules, regulations, frameworks etc.
  - *Applied ethics*: Addresses concrete and practical issues of moral importance

Introduction: Ethical dilemmas

- Different options with both pros and cons
- Difficult choices to make
- Where there are no absolute rights or wrongs

Introduction: Norms vs. Dilemmas

- There are ‘simple’ *rules* to adhere to (“don’t drive faster than 60 kilometres per hour”) - you are expected to know and adhere to them

- How to address ethical dilemmas is the more challenging part

Introduction: Freedom of research comes with Responsibilities

“Research takes place under a significant degree of freedom and trust and thus also entails a significant degree of personal responsibility for the individual researcher. It is the individual researcher's independent responsibility to carry out their research in accordance with recognized scientific and research ethical norms. This requires a high degree of awareness of the ethical aspects of the research. *Ethical self-regulation is a prerequisite for society's trust in research and its results.*”

Note as a part of the revisions of the research ethics law

Introduction: High expectations

“Research activity is a quest for new knowledge, with critical and systematic verification and peer review. Honesty, openness, systematicness and documentation are fundamental preconditions for achieving this goal.”

The National Research Ethics Committees General guidelines

Introduction: Ethics in Information Systems Research

- IS is not considering IT in isolation
  - Those we do research together with and our research community
  - Those we research on (people, communities and organizations)
  - The technology we contribute to developing and their impact on society

Introduction: How to get engaged

- Ethics is exiting once it is about me, what I do and the consequences of it (and not about the unethical behavior of others)

- ‘Virtuous’ people at a ‘higher ethical ground’ doesn’t make much sense (at least to me). But, experience matters

Examples of Ethical Dilemmas

- You are involved in research to develop technologies to ‘track’ people with dementia. This will allow their families and healthcare workers to locate them anytime and find them if they get lost. The ‘tracking’ will allow people with dementia to roam more freely around (and not be ‘locked up’). The aim is to improve the well-being of people with dementia and their families and reduce the burden on the healthcare system.

  - Dilemma: Develop technologies that increase the freedom and well-being of vulnerable people and the intrusiveness of tracking technologies
  - Dilemma: Involve people with dementia in research to develop relevant technologies for them and their ability to consent to participation

Examples of Ethical Dilemmas cont.

- You find out that one of the core papers you use in your thesis is based on the work of a previous master's student. Your supervisor wrote the paper. However, it does not mention the work of the master's student (there is no co-authorship or acknowledgement of the student).

  - Dilemma: Confront your supervisor and the risk of damaging your relationship with your supervisor
  - Dilemma: Report your supervisor for misconduct and the risk of damaging your supervisor's career

Examples of Emerging Ethical Dilemmas with IS

- “Personal data digitalization can help individuals live longer and healthier lives, but it also challenges individual rights
- Social media allows connectivity and supports democratic principle of collective voice, but is also vehicle for manipulating public opinion and spreading fake news and falsehood
- Emerging technologies such as shared electric vehicles are coining a revolution in the mobility and energy sector, but also increase fears of labour substitution
- The datafication of everyday behaviors has led to new healthcare opportunities but also increased surveillance
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) propels new opportunities for automation and decision-making, but also raises thorny ethical issues in terms of accountability, privacy, fairness, discrimination, and further biases.”

https://aisel.aisnet.org/jais/SI-DigitalResponsibility.pdf

Research ethics vs. researcher integrity

- Research Ethics: Safeguarding individuals, society and nature when doing research

- Researcher Integrity: The trust in and credibility of research
  - Breach of integrity (according to the law): Falsification, fabrication, plagiarism and other serious breaches of recognized ethical standards for research that are committed with intent or gross negligence in the planning, implementation or reporting of research

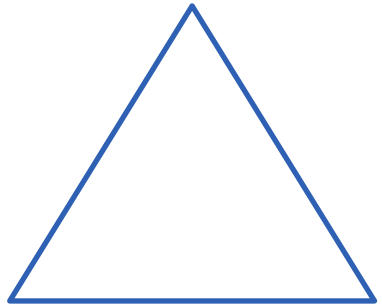
Forskningsetikkloven §8

The Research Ethics Triangle

- The relationship between the researcher and those we do research on
- How we treat people and animals and information about them
- External on the level of individuals

The people we do research on

(welfare of people)



The research process

(research integrity)

- Relationship between researchers and the research community
- How we treat each others as researchers
- Internal on the community level

Impact of Research

(social responsibility)

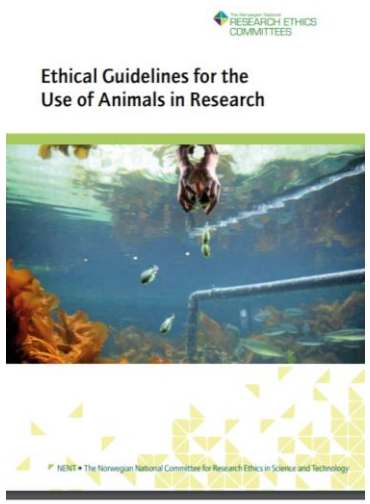
- The relationship between researchers and the society
- The positive and negative consequences of research
- Openness, sustainability, precautionary principle
- External on the level of the society

The Research Ethics Triangle: Norms

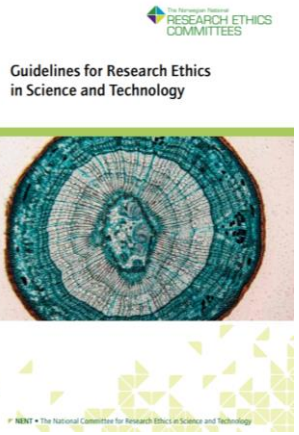


Sikt





The people we do research on
(welfare of people)



The research process
(research integrity)

The Vancouver Criteria

UiOs Standard for Research Integrity

Impact of Research
(social responsibility)





Regulations and Norms

- The *Act on ethics and integrity in research* is the starting point:
  - Researchers must act with care to ensure that all research takes place in accordance with recognized research ethical norms
  - Research institutions must ensure that the research at the institution takes place in accordance with recognized research ethical norms. The institution is responsible for:
    - Necessary training of candidates and staff in recognized research ethical norms and
    - that everyone who carries out or participates in the research is familiar with recognized research ethics norms.
  - The *norms* are not determined by law

https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2017-04-28-23?q=forskningsetikkloven

Regulations and Norms cont.

- The norms are developed and maintained by the national research ethics committees
  - General research ethics guidelines
  - Special guidelines (NEM, NENT and NESH)

https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/

Guidelines, Norms and Institutions at UiO

- Standard for Research Integrity at the University of Oslo
- The National Research Ethics Committees General guidelines
- The National Research Ethics Committee's particular guidelines (relevant to your project)
- The Vancouver criteria (in particular section II, part A.2-3)

Handling Personal Data

- Researchers need clearance from SIKT if they *process personal data*
  - *Personal data* consists of any data relating to an identified or identifiable person
  - *Processing* means any operation performed on personal data, such as collection, recording, registering, organisation, structuring, storage, adaptation, alteration, retrieving, transferring, distributing, publishing, deleting, or destroying
- Candidates processing personal data abroad must also follow local privacy protection regulations
- Health-related research needs clearance from REK (Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics)
- If you doubt whether you will process personal data, you can do a test provided by SIKT

Institutions at UiO

- The *Science Ombud* is an independent and impartial body for all academic staff at UiO for questions and support handling issues regarding good scientific practice, research integrity and research ethics

- Possible violations of recognized research ethics norms in a scientific work prepared at UiO can be reported to the *Research Ethics Committee* at UiO. They will consider:
  - whether the researcher has acted scientifically fraudulently or not
  - whether there are system errors at the institution and
  - whether the scientific work should be corrected or withdrawn

https://www.uio.no/english/about/organisation/science-ombud/
https://www.uio.no/english/about/organisation/committees/research-ethics-committee/

What do we expect from master students?

- Be considerate about your relationships with the researcher community, those you do research on and the potential impact of the technology you contribute to developing
- Reflect on and explicate (in writing) the different ethical dimensions and dilemmas in your project and how you address them

- Act ‘ethically defensible’

Thank you!