

Call for papers

Recent Ethical Challenges in Social Network Analysis

(RECSNA17)

Paris, 5-6 December 2017

Interdisciplinary research on social networks is experiencing unprecedented growth, fuelled by the consolidation of the field of social network analysis and the increasing availability of data from digital networking platforms. However, it raises formidable ethical issues that often fall outside existing regulations and guidelines. New tools to collect, treat, store personal data expose both research participants and practitioners to specific risks. Issues surrounding political instrumentalization or economic takeover of scientific results transcend standard research concerns. Legal and social ramifications of studies on personal ties and human networks surface at an unprecedented pace.

The aim of this workshop is to bring together researchers in the social sciences, statistics, computer science, law and philosophy, as well as other stakeholders, to further advance the ethical reflection in the face of new research challenges.

Organization, dates, and venues

This two-day workshop is hosted by the MSH (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme) Paris Saclay (*) and organized by the Social Network Analysis Group of British Sociological Association (BSA-SNAG), in collaboration with: the European Network on Digital Labor (ENDL) and the Social Networks group of the French Sociological Association (AFS RT 26 – Réseaux Sociaux).

(*) Financial support from the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris-Saclay is gratefully acknowledged.

The workshop will take place in Paris on Tue. 5 and Wed. 6 December 2017. The venues are:

- On 5 December 2017, it is organized as a full-day, small-attendance workshop bringing together presenters, discussants and chairs to discuss contributed papers in depth. It takes place at the Cachan campus of the ENS (École normale supérieure) Paris Saclay: <http://ens-paris-saclay.fr/en/campus>.
- On 6 December 2017 (morning only), it consists in a keynote session and a roundtable in which highlights from the previous day will be summarized and presented to a larger public. It takes place at the Hôtel de Lauzun, a splendid 17th century palace situated in the heart of historic Paris, home to the Paris IAS (Institute for Advanced Study): <http://www.paris-iea.fr/en/presentation-of-the-institute/the-hotel-de-lauzun>.

Background

The study of social networks long predates the advent of the Internet. Since the 1930s, sociologists have used surveys to detect relationships between individuals and groups, for example advice between employees of a company, or friendship between pupils in a school class. In all these cases, there are ethical issues regarding informed consent (as relationships reported by participants may concern non-participants, possibly unaware of the research) and anonymization (which cannot be achieved at the data collection stage, which must include personal identifiers, but only *ex post*).

While researchers have already engaged with these issues (notably with a special issue of the leading journal *Social Networks*, 2005), new challenges arise today with the increased availability of relational data from digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The boundaries between “public” and “private” spheres blur, platforms’ algorithms affect users’ behaviours in ways that are not always transparent to researchers, and information sources are often owned by commercial firms unwilling to share them. Issues surrounding the ownership and accessibility of personal data via proprietary apps and APIs are the center of huge controversies as well as of regulatory efforts such as the new European GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). Paid “crowdsourcing” (recruiting people through platforms such as Amazon Mechanical Turk to perform tasks that may range from answering questionnaires to downloading their full online contact lists) enables researchers to produce extra data, but raises formidable issues in terms of contributors’ working conditions.

In short, the data do not speak for themselves, and we must consider the conditions of their use, production and extraction as well as the software architecture imposed by commercial platforms, scientific publishers, tool developers and institutions. Possible consequences include barriers to data access, inequalities between researchers (with a potential advantage for corporate R&D over publicly-funded research), and a general sense of uncertainty which may hamper otherwise beneficial social studies.

Themes

The following is a non-exhaustive list of themes:

- Social network research and individual/fundamental rights
- Ethics and codes of conduct of innovative fields of research in social network analysis
- Culture and values in international and comparative social network research
- Respect of participants in research on sensitive populations, problematic behaviors, covert networks
- Anonymity, privacy, and security in social network analysis
- Impact and risks of publishing network data
- Psychological impact and other risks for research participants
- Dialogue between public and private sector researchers
- Complying with regulatory efforts in social network analysis
- Dealing with risks and threats for the researcher
- Personal and institutional responsibility in research

The aim of this workshop is to offer a space for researchers in social network analysis to discuss these issues on the basis of reflective accounts of their experiences, in consultation with other stakeholders in research ethics committees, regulatory bodies, and businesses.

We invite scholars and other professionals to submit papers that critically engage with ethics in research related to social networks, preferably on the basis of one or more case studies (which may be problems they encountered in their own research activity), taken as concrete illustrations of the general principles at stake, the attitudes and behaviours of stakeholders, or the legal and institutional constraints.

We are particularly interested in novel, original answers to some unprecedented ethical challenges, or the need to re-interpret norms in ambiguous situations.

Target audience

We welcome contributions from academics (at both senior and early-career levels, also including postgraduate research students) as well as researchers in corporate R&D services, business leaders, representatives of platform companies, policy-makers and members of research ethics committees.

We are open to diverse disciplinary backgrounds (such as the social sciences, economics, digital humanities, computer science, statistics, philosophy / ethics), research approaches (qualitative / quantitative) and empirical settings (online / face-to-face social networks).

The workshop welcomes the participation of stakeholders, general public, and non-presenting attendees, who **can attend both days (5-6 December 2017: see below) or day 2 only (6 December 2017)**.

Deadline for submissions

- **15 October 2017:** submission of a 300-word abstract (submit link: <https://recsna17.sciencesconf.org/user/submit>).
- **20 October 2017:** expression of interest to be panel discussants and chairs (send to: recsna17@msh-paris-saclay.fr).
- **31 October 2017:** acceptance notifications.
- **15 November 2017:** deadline for speaker registration (paper presenters, panel discussants, chairs)
- **30 November 2017:** deadline for general attendee registration.

You may contact paola.tubaro@inria.fr with questions about scholarly contributions to this conference.

Registration

- Registration is free and includes: venues, lunch on day 1, and coffee breaks.
- However, registration does not cover travel and accommodation costs for participants.
- Registration form (open from 15 October 2017 to 30 November 2017): <https://recsna17.sciencesconf.org/registration/index>

Keynote speakers

José Luis Molina, Autonomous University of Barcelona, *HyperEthics: A Critical Account*

Bernie Hogan, Oxford Internet Institute, *Privatising the personal network: Ethical challenges for social network site research*

Scientific committee

Antonio A. Casilli (Telecom ParisTech, FR), Alessio D'Angelo (Middlesex University, UK), Guillaume Favre (University of Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, FR), Bernie Hogan (Oxford Internet Institute, UK), Elise Penalva-Icher (University of Paris Dauphine, FR), Louise Ryan (University of Sheffield, UK), Paola Tubaro (CNRS, FR).

Contact us

Email: recsna17@msh-paris-saclay.fr

Webpage: <http://recsna17.sciencesconf.org>

Twitter: [@recsna17](https://twitter.com/recsna17)