Sampling and Recruiting on Facebook

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With the rise of new media and social media, a new era of big data has emerged, which has brought about various methodological and theoretical challenges for conducting social research. With over a billion daily active users, Facebook is widely recognized as the leading social media platform in the world. Beyond the use of Facebook to connect people from around the world, Facebook affords various opportunities for academics to conduct research. This presentation will discuss our approach to integrate Facebook data as part of an online survey to study people's privacy concerns, with a particular focus on methodological challenges associated with sampling and recruiting participants on Facebook.

Sampling

Considering, there is no easy searchable directory of Facebook Groups or Pages, how do researchers identify and sample Facebook Groups or Pages? Problematically, it is difficult to systematically sample across Facebook to get a "representative" sample of Facebook users. Facebook Group Directory, algorithmically-filtered search, and custom-curated directories can be used to sample; however, each approach introduces biases and challenges (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sampling Strategies

Source	Description
Facebook Public Directory	Direct list of Facebook Pages
Facebook User-Based List	Personalized recommendations on Groups and Pages by Facebook
Netvizz/API	Extracts data from Groups and Pages for research purposes
Socialbaker	Social media marketing /analytics company that compiles list of top Pages, grouped by industry
Official Lists	Official external lists based on topic (e.g. size, demographics, politics)
Curated/Expert Lists	Unofficial external lists (e.g. by media outlets or blogs)
Researcher-Created List	Ethnographic approach to collect all groups that fit topic of interest

Recruitment

After the selection of the Group/Page of study, how can researchers invite people to participate in the study? Facebook's Terms of Service does not allow contacting users directly unless you have conducted "business" with them. We outline the various options for recruitment, including buying an ad (Figure 1), posting directly to the group/page, and contacting the moderator.

Figure 1: Facebook's Ad Platform
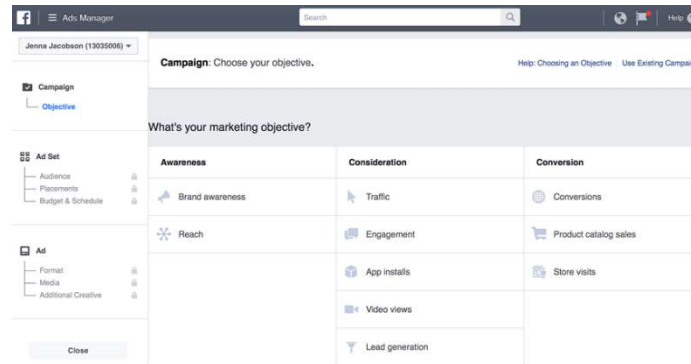
Ethics

As more people are joining and contributing to Facebook, their automatically recorded data are rapidly becoming available to third parties to mine for both commercial and academic purposes. Ethical questions need to be considered throughout the entire research process. This is particularly true of social media research, which presents unique ethical and personal considerations. In this part of the presentation, we will outline the Social API Terms of Service online guide created by the Ryerson University Social Media Lab that social media researchers can use to learn what they can or cannot do with social media collected from sites like Facebook.

The talk will conclude with the presentation of Facebook apps that allows Facebook users to review their own social media data and that can be used to study people's information privacy concerns and help to develop data literacy skills.