LETTER

Fake Identities in Social Network Research: To Be Disclosed?

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Sir,

The recent discussion by Elovici et al. on "Ethical Considerations when Employing Fake Identities in Online Social Networks for Research (Elovici et al. 2013)" is very interesting (Elovici et al. 2013). Elovici et al. raised an important question "Is it legitimate to use fake identities for studying OSNs or for collecting OSN data for research? (Elovici et al. 2013)" In fact, "fake" is not a reality and this might be problematic. In medicine, "fake" is not acceptable. This is not the same as "placebo", which is a standard method for management of the disorder of the patients. Also, it is not the "blinding", which is the standard clinical trial technique. As a worker in the field of medical journalism, "fake" might be classified as a "falsification". According to the standard international medical journal, the "fake" data is totally not acceptable. However, focusing on the "fake identities", if it is used in researching, it might deviate the research result. This has to be disclosed by the researcher when they report the results and the use of "fake identifies" in research has to be considered case by case by the institutional research committee for protocol approval (Long and Fallon 2007).

References

Elovici, Y., Fire, M., Herzberg, A., & Shulman, H. (2013). Ethical considerations when employing fake identities in online social networks for research. *Science and Engineering Ethics*. doi:10.1007/s11948-013-9473-0.

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