This minitrack addresses the increasing ethical concerns about the potential for harm from the affordances of social media technologies. Social media, as the set of technologies and services that enable the production and consumption of information by individuals, is shifting the locus of gatekeeping and power in society and enabling new choices for individuals and groups to share information and knowledge.

Much of the opportunities provided by social media are viewed as positive. It changes the ways in which we work, live, and play together in communities; it supports an increasing speed and reach for information flows; it enables new ways and paths for learning and exchanging knowledge.

The use of social media, however, has ethical implications, and conducting research on social media data presents ethical challenges.

1) One focus is the ethical concerns for those who either design social media platforms or conduct research on social media. We seek approaches which surface—and might alleviate—the potential harm that might result from combining data from multiple sources (e.g., combining real time Twitter data, metadata, Facebook profiles, real time location-based services data such as FourSquare).

2) A second focus is on the issues associated with the impact of social media use by individuals and groups as they challenge the roles of societal institutions such as law, education, and government agencies. Such actions can result in controversial leaking of secret information (as in the Snowden case) and in spreading information during times of crises that can be useful or misleading (as in the aftermath of the London riots and the Boston Marathon bombing).

This minitrack seeks both conceptual and empirical or case study papers. Conceptual papers would address foundational concepts of ethical conduct in periods of rapid change—e.g., new metaphors for thinking about information exchange in communities and societies. Empirical papers would draw on studies of social media data or case studies that illustrate the ethical dimensions of the use of such data.

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Bob Mason's current research interests emphasize the philosophy and ethics of technology management and the cultural aspects of knowledge management. He is one of the founders of the Social Media Lab at UW (somelab.net). He was previously on the faculties of the College of Business at Florida State University and the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University and is a long-time participant at HICSS.

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