

# Perception of professor-researchers on ethical issues in online research

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the perception of professors on online research ethics. This qualitative study interviewed professionals linked to graduate programs in Brazilian universities, who work with digital information and communication technologies. Data were organized in a dialogic map, whose analysis allowed identifying meanings attributed to research ethics. Respondents recognized the importance of ethics in online research and shared opinions, concerns, and criticisms that allowed (de)constructing discourses to defend a scientific practice aimed at protecting research participants.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Research. Researcher-subject Relations. Qualitative Research.

## Resumo

### Percepção de professores-pesquisadores sobre questões éticas em pesquisas on-line

O artigo investiga a percepção de professores-pesquisadores em relação à ética em pesquisa on-line. Trata-se de estudo qualitativo que entrevistou profissionais vinculados a programas de pós-graduação em educação de universidades brasileiras que atuam com tecnologias digitais da informação e comunicação. Os dados foram organizados em mapa dialógico, cuja análise permitiu identificar alguns sentidos atribuídos à ética em pesquisa. Os entrevistados demonstraram reconhecer a importância da ética em pesquisa on-line e compartilharam opiniões, preocupações e críticas que permitiram (des)construir discursos a fim de defender uma prática científica direcionada à proteção dos participantes de pesquisas.

**Palavras-chave:** Ética em pesquisa. Relações pesquisador-sujeito. Pesquisa qualitativa.

## Resumen

### Percepción de profesores-investigadores sobre cuestiones éticas en investigaciones en línea

El artículo investiga la percepción de profesores-investigadores acerca de la ética en la investigación en línea. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, que entrevistó a profesionales vinculados a programas de educación de posgrado en universidades brasileñas y que trabajan con tecnologías digitales de la información y la comunicación. Se organizaron los datos en un mapa dialógico, cuyo análisis permitió identificar algunos significados atribuidos a la ética de la investigación. Los encuestados demostraron reconocer la importancia de la ética en la investigación en línea y compartieron opiniones, preocupaciones y críticas que permitieron (des)construir discursos para defender una práctica científica orientada a proteger los participantes de investigaciones.

**Palabras clave:** Ética en investigación. Relaciones investigador-sujeto. Investigación cualitativa.

We live in an information and knowledge society, where the digital revolution plays a key role. With advances in digital information and communication technologies (DICT), individuals have access to a large amount of data, from the most varied fields of knowledge. Pierre Lévy<sup>1</sup> states that one must learn to live with it, since we are living in a “flood of information” in which we must identify what is essential, as we cannot absorb everything available. Thus, each individual and group must organize, select, and rank the data to make sense of it.

DICT is increasingly present in knowledge production, as well as the number of publications on online research<sup>2</sup>. Based on a dialogue with professor-researchers in this field, this study aims to understand ethical issues involved in producing online knowledge. From a constructionism approach – which conceives reality as socially constructed – to the phenomenon, we highlight the subjects’ interaction with the context to which they belong in the production of meaning in everyday life.

Spink and Frezza argue that, *in this perspective, language is a social product: constructionism recognizes the centrality of language in the objectification processes that form the basis of human society*<sup>3</sup>. By understanding language, constructionism focuses on discursive practices. According to the authors, such perspective, especially from Jonathan Potter and Ian Parker, seeks to *question the discursive context, without losing sight of interaction*<sup>4</sup>, which *implies actions, selections, choices, languages, contexts, in short, a variety of social productions of which [discursive practices] are an expression*<sup>5</sup>. In this sense, the investigative process based on the perspective of discursive practices shifts interests and explanations to how people speak and what repertoires they use when describing the reality in which they live<sup>6</sup>.

This article also uses bibliography that addresses how constructionist arguments are developed and how the repertoires collaborate to co-produce practices in different social scenarios related to online research ethics. In a literature review, Fare, Machado, and Carvalho<sup>7</sup> found several studies that address different aspects of educational research in general or from certain contexts (special education, physics,

mathematics, music, linguistics), or issues such as school failure and teacher training. Few publications focused on ethics, and even less discussed regulations and guidelines.

Fare<sup>8</sup> points out two perspectives in ethics training: one focused on the operational perspective of ethical guidelines, and the other on the dilemmas that emerge in research contexts. As an alternative to the first model, the author proposes an approach based on the “construction of ethical meaning” of the research itself, which would involve a process of metacognition of ethical issues that includes reflecting about the decision-making process and underlying aspects (circumstances, external help, personal value judgments, emotions, researcher’s motivations, etc.).

Our discussion also considers the determinations of the National Research Council (CNS), especially Resolution CNS 466/2012<sup>9</sup> and Resolution CNS 510/2016<sup>10</sup>, which establish guidelines for ethical research practice, setting out terms, procedures, and reflections to the field of education.

Based on this bibliography, the study investigates issues of ethics in research with human beings on the internet, to understand the specific challenges of this context. The analysis posed the following question: how do professor-researchers think about ethics when conducting research in online environments?

## Method

This is a qualitative study conducted with professor-researchers who work with DICT in education. We searched the Lattes Platform and websites of graduate programs to obtain the professors’ contact information, and then sent invitations by e-mail and/or through Facebook. At the end of this process, seven professors agreed to participate and scheduled an interview.

According to the inclusion criteria, we selected professor-researchers who participated in research groups on DICT for face-to-face and online teacher training, or who were linked to graduate programs in the field and contributed to producing knowledge on the topic. Professors from the Universidade Federal de Alagoas,

Universidade Federal de Sergipe, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Universidade Federal do Ceará, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, and Universidade Estadual de Campinas participated in the research.

Interviews followed a previously established, but flexible, script. The instrument comprised two blocks of information: the first included participant information data (time working as a professor-researcher, time working with DICT in education, training in research ethics, means of data collection used); the second addressed questions about research ethics (standardization, ethical care, informed consent in online spaces, ethical rules for electronic communication, etc.).

Each meeting lasted, on average, 40 minutes. Professors linked to the Universidade Federal de Alagoas were interviewed in person, due to geographical proximity; the remaining interviews took place remotely, via Skype or Google Hangouts. The informed consent form (ICF) was read and signed before the interviews. On the online meetings, the signed document was sent by e-mail.

Following Resolution CNS 466/2012<sup>9</sup> and Resolution CNS 510/2016<sup>10</sup>, in all research stages, we sought to protect participants, ensuring their dignity, freedom, autonomy, and anonymity. The procedures offered no greater risks than those found in the routine of professor-researchers, who were not identified, remained anonymous, and were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time, without any prejudice. The survey brought no financial expenses to the participants, nor was there a need for compensation.

The study aims to provide information for the decisions of members of bodies and committees that deal with ethics in research with human beings. We also sought to promote reflection on issues that cause doubts among professor-researchers in education or that are being neglected in scientific knowledge production.

### Data analysis

Data analysis comprised three steps: sequential transcription, integral transcription, and construction of a dialogical map, used as

a tool to highlight meanings produced during research. In the sequential transcription, we identified who is speaking (interviewee) and what they are talking about (topic), to observe the topics that emerged: research ethics, specificities of online research ethics, criticisms, protection, standardization, unfamiliarity, Plataforma Brasil, and coping strategies.

All statements were fully transcribed to preserve their original production in the research. The transcribed lines were enumerated to locate the interviewees' statement excerpts on the dialogical map. To guarantee anonymity, the participants' name were replaced by the letter "E," followed by a number: E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, and E7.

The dialogical map was developed based on the sequential and integral transcriptions. According to Pereira, Schmitt and Dias, this tool has *columns that can be divided according to the themes that, in general, reflect the systematization of the contents*<sup>11</sup>. We created vertical columns with the topics identified in the participants' sequential statement transcription, later filled with the full statement transcript. The map was constructed and organized into two axes: considerations on the concept of research ethics and participant protection; and specificities of online research ethics.

### Ethics in online surveys

The meanings produced in the interviews revealed both common and diverse aspects about the work ethics of professor-researchers. This is hardly surprising, as the statements are based on singular experiences, built, and lived during each interviewee's trajectory. Thus, singularities influenced the interviews, despite the common elements found, such as the absence of training in research ethics, reported by all respondents despite the diversity in backgrounds (E1, biology; E2, psychology; E3 and E5, pedagogy; E4, mathematics; E6, sociology; E7, philosophy).

### Considerations on the concept of research ethics

As a product of social relations, ethics is an unstable concept; both the definition of what is research ethics and its regulation is rooted

in historical and social contexts. In this sense, professors understand that their activity involves another individual in the position of research participant, someone who needs care, as pointed out by Resolution CNS 510/2016<sup>10</sup>. Respondents call attention to the importance of ethics in knowledge production:

*"It is essential because we have subjects involved with different views, with different political and cultural perspectives; therefore, we must be careful. (...) Regardless of how this subject manifests himself in the instruments that I use to collect data, I must be ethical"* (E1).

*"I learned early on that ethics in the profession, whatever the profession, is very important. (...) So, we must work with scientific research within this perspective, and that is how I try to work"* (E2).

*"I think it is fundamental, do you know why? Every day we need to be more careful with how we treat each other in research. (...) I always question this when I'm on an evaluation committee. I think it is essential to clarify for the individuals what the object of the research is, what the intention is, what implications it has for them. I think the existence of informed consent forms is fundamental"* (E3).

*"Research ethics is not only necessary, but the debate has to increase"* (E4).

*"I think it is essential, I support it. (...) I have some problems – not problems, disagreements – with some colleagues who think it is unnecessary"* (E5).

In the statement *"we must be careful,"* about the protection of research participants, E1 addresses care beyond the biomedical sphere. In the field of human and social sciences, care can be understood as the ethical way in which researchers relate to the other, the research participant. This implies considering this other as a collaborator, respecting their contradictions and singularities. As Schmidt proposes, *collaboration or interlocution, as an atmosphere of many examples of participatory investigations, supposes a constant self-reflexive activity from the researcher, as well as an elaboration of the problem of the other, no longer as an "object," but as an intellectual partner in examining the phenomenon we want to know about*<sup>12</sup>.

When talking about ethics in the profession, E2 brings a traditional ethical approach, characteristic of codes and oaths. But in the context of research ethics, as Guilhem and Diniz point out, *only indicating "do this, do not do that" would not be enough to provide the subject with a unified moral system to guide actions*<sup>13</sup>. Such perspective represents a major limitation in dealing with moral conflicts related to human beings, their well-being, and the world they live in.

In this sense, when universal ethical models are adopted, as in the principlist perspective, the intersubjective dimension of research participants is neglected, as are their narratives within specific social contexts. Because of these incompatibilities caused by cultural differences, multiculturalism strengthens the movement critical towards principlism, opposing the universalizing proposals of philosophical ethics. This notion highlights commitment to the different views of the subjects involved in the study, which recalls Engelhardt<sup>14</sup>, who advocates for moral plurality, implying an ethics that accounts for moral disagreements and differences in favor of responsible and peaceful social interactions.

In E3's speech, the argument is based on a perspective that relates ethics and law, highlighting individual rights that need to be guaranteed, especially those related to privacy, confidentiality, and secrecy. In this sense, ICF stands out as a relevant document that shows that the consent to participate in the research is autonomous. The issues present in E3's speech refer to the dilemma of knowledge production, which takes a toll on the so-called "individual freedoms" of the modern human rights protection system. In this context, as Dallari states, *the ethical norms that advise respect for intimacy, secrecy, and confidentiality are joined, in contemporary States, by the legal requirement for such respect, characterized as an individual right*<sup>15</sup>. Such dilemma is undoubtedly a challenge, since it is necessary to balance the social interest and the participant's privacy protection.

E4's statement, in turn, focused on the need to disseminate bioethics training to achieve a greater understanding on the topic. The interviewee showed concern in guiding undergraduate students regarding ethical care,

from their final project. From this perspective, we must encourage students to reflect on their actions in a research situation and what their consequences are for the participants and the community in general. It is possible thus to reconcile research with respect for human dignity from an early stage. In practice, however, we observe a lack of space for reflection among the professor-researchers themselves<sup>8</sup>.

Schmidt<sup>16</sup> defends ethics as a way of inhabiting the world of knowledge production. According to this perspective, research contemplates, *on the one hand, the updating of attitudes and values regarding the direction and use of knowledge and, on the other, the questioning of the political and ideological dimensions of the knowledge produced in dialogue with another. Political dimension means the power relations (domination or emancipation) in research practices, including the geography of places of listening, speech, and decision in conducting all phases of the research. An ideological dimension is understood as the production of effects of recognition, unfamiliarity, strangeness, and knowledge in terms of the representations of the other*<sup>17</sup>.

In fieldwork, for example, the relationship between researcher and participants is fundamental. Thus, according to Schmidt, how research is conducted reflects, at the same time, its method, and its ethics<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, it is up to the researcher to visualize, for each research design, how method and ethics are involved, from its initial phases to its completion. The goal is to deconstruct naturalized practices to protect those who interact and dialogue with the researcher during the investigation.

## Protection

In the context of research ethics, respect for human dignity is directed especially to the protection of participants, although it also aims to ensure the rights and duties of the scientific community. In general, in Brazil, ethical standards, overseen by the Research Ethics Committees, provide that researchers, when designing and executing a given project, must meet certain guidelines. Respect for intimacy, with measures to

protect confidentiality and guarantee secrecy, is one of the main standards addressed.

In some statements, such as E2, the professor-researchers emphasize care for the other, the research participant: *“Taking care and preserving people, groups, is a care that we should all take, even to not identify [the participants], because we are not interested in exposing people”* (E2). Another interviewee, however, shifts ethical concerns to himself, as a researcher: *“I see research ethics as something very important because it ensures that the researcher will not respond to some type of legal-administrative procedure for having used sources without the proper authorizations”* (E1).

In E1’s statement, the importance of ethics matters only to safeguard the researcher; in contrast, E2 emphasizes protecting the participant’s integrity, pointing to the understanding that there can be no disregard for participant care or methodological rigor<sup>10</sup>. Divergent meanings, as shown in the statements, allow us to pose some questions: to whom or for what is knowledge produced? What is intended when it is produced? What are the implications of research for the lives of interlocutors, collaborators, and participants? These questions promote self-reflection on work practices, beyond complying with the rules and procedures evaluated by the Research Ethics Committee.

The professors’ statements reveal the tension that represents perhaps the greatest challenge of research ethics: balancing the preservation of individual rights with the development of scientific and technological knowledge. For Dallari, this balance *will only be achieved when all are aware that the perception of risks and their origin are social*<sup>19</sup>. Thus, understanding ethics as a product of historically constructed social conventions, E2’s argument contemplates the relationship with the research participant based on equality (all are citizens), including respect for freedom and cooperation.

## Specificities of online research ethics

The internet and virtual spaces, designed in dynamic conditions, force researchers to work in new ways, to study society in different ways, and

to rethink their instruments to ensure that they are appropriate for the tasks to which they are applied<sup>16</sup>. In this sense, to develop the questions raised – without, obviously, intending to answer or exhaust them –, we highlight some aspects related to the specificity of online research ethics:

*“Research ethics issues have always been the object of study, discussion, guidance, but today, due to the use of technologies, it is easier to collect data, as well as to have access to different texts, from different authors, at different times. This implies that those involved are aware of the ethical responsibility”* (E4).

From the statement, we understand that ethical infraction is conceived as a socially irresponsible use of what is produced in a research situation with the help of DICT. The challenge lies, however, in the lack of complete awareness of the issues at stake, let alone consensus on the best ways to proceed. The issue of participant’s identification, for example, is a point that deserves to be highlighted, because it is difficult to verify whether the characteristics of oneself defined in the online spaces correspond to reality. Thus, we must ask: how can one be sure of the age or vulnerability of the participant? This point is seen as one of the obstacles to ethical evaluation, as noted in the following statement:

*“A major problem with the use of technology is identity. I do not know to what extent the subject who answers the research instrument is himself. In some cases, I do not know if the person who is there, declaring to be a man, is in fact, a woman; or if the person stating to be 30 is actually 15. I, as a researcher, have no guarantee that this person is him or herself, so this is something quite complicated”* (E1).

Moore and Kearsley emphasize that virtual learning environments (VLE) still lack a way to verify the student’s identity, although the use of cameras on desktop computers (webcams) effectively offers the possibility of seeing the candidate to confirm their identity<sup>20</sup>. In the search for solutions to this issue, E3 points out the importance of confronting information:

*“I need to have additional data, I need to triangulate the information to check if my interpretation of the*

*data proceeds, right? So, I think, in my opinion, that we shouldn’t just use one investigation tool. Even if it is content analysis, I must identify other instruments that can strengthen the information I identified in the content that I analyzed on the forum, for example”* (E3).

Another statement warns about the importance of avoiding apriorisms: *“From an ethical standpoint, I cannot start from the assumption that the other is dishonest. The person can be dishonest, because in the online universe I may not be me, but the research needs to be done, right”* (E7). This interviewee also emphasized the importance of elaborating well the questions to the participants, proposing that focusing on propositional questions would be another coping strategy.

But is this tension about the participant’s identity justified after all? According to Bauman<sup>21</sup>, the identities of the postmodern individual are fluid and do not fit into a permanent form. New identities are being crafted continuously, and it is impossible to establish a finished and true identity. In cyberspace, with DICT, individuals use new forms of social interaction that hinder (re)creating identities to develop virtual relationships. For Pierre Lévy<sup>1</sup>, this virtual identity is deterritorialized, dissociated from the sense of time and space. That is why it can be simultaneous, that is, the same individual can use different identities without conflicts. It seems here, therefore, that the ethical care of this individual who collaborates with the research does not support such verification, since the researcher is at risk of reducing participation to a rigid and concrete field, incompatible with virtual mobility.

Also, ensuring participant anonymity in VLE surveys is a cause for concern: *“If we are doing research in a forum, the non-identification of that individual is important because what matters is the content I’m evaluating there and not the individual. So we must always preserve the individual in all his integrity, be it moral or physical”* (E2).

Another point that appears in the interviews refers to the authorization to use data stored in the VLE, as exemplified in the following statement: *“You will work with an online course that has already happened, you will work with documents*

from this course, so you will not necessarily collect directly from the students or alumni of this course because the course has already ended. You can even complement the information, but the biggest focus of collection can be the documents, interactions, students' production in this virtual environment, but even in these situations you must have authorization from these people to work with this data" (E4).

This issue converges with another one observed in one of the statements, which addresses the need for consent from participants to use images, photos, and videos collected: "The use of images, in the form of video or photos, must be authorized by those involved. This authorization is usually within the ICF. The problem is that even then some people refuse to make the image available, so this is very detrimental to the research, especially when we use observation and want to prove it using some kind of image. With video we are having a difficulties. Although we clarify, people refuse, thinking that their image will be decontextualized. This is a disservice to research, in my understanding" (E1).

Can one assume, however, that research participants should automatically consent to the use of their image? The answer is perhaps much more complicated than it seems, requiring further investigation before refusal is considered a harmful action to the research. Law No. 12.965/2014<sup>22</sup>, known as Brazil's Internet Bill of Rights, protects personal data and user privacy, which requires even greater care on the part of the researcher.

The professor-researchers also listed doubts and concerns about other aspects: "Another important ethical issue is related to the text that is written in the virtual world, [the texts] that are written in forums, or are written in blogs, all kinds of material that is published on the internet that we can use without consent, and whether we will be required to ask for consent to each of the participants. For example, in a class of 100 students at VLE, will I need their authorization to use the data, or does the fact that they are already enrolled in the discipline grant me the right to use it?" (E1).

According to Bakardjieva and Feenberg<sup>23</sup>, when online data began to be used, researchers treated all content found on the network as open for use;

but over the years this practice was hindered by an ethical view. For Kozinets<sup>24</sup>, this type of practice revealed to researchers the need for care when considering ethical concerns of privacy, appropriation, and consent.

In this perspective, we must raise the hypothesis that members of online communities and cultures may not pay attention to the fact that their texts can be read and used by others. These individuals, therefore, may react with anger or frustration to the use of their communications in scientific publications.

Another issue concerns E5's statement regarding the difficulty in obtaining answers to online questionnaires: "In online research, what I feel is that people do not answer. I think this happened to Professor A: she did an online survey with the tutors, she wanted to cry because there was no answer, she begged, she knelt down. This is what I feel: we Brazilians do not have the tradition of answering any type of questionnaire" (E5).

The excerpt presents another character: Professor A, whose voice emerges from her position as a researcher dissatisfied with the use of these questionnaires, which may be representative of the opinion of those on her field of work. Contrary to her argument, however, one can draw attention to the fact that online questionnaires are increasingly popular in several areas, such as marketing (market research) and social sciences and humanities. According to Freitas and collaborators<sup>25</sup>, two aspects must be considered by the researcher to increase the rate of quick and satisfactory return: the motivation of the participants and their familiarity with the internet.

In line with the search for reframing, ruptures, and the production of new meanings, one of the interviewees states that "we still employ methodologies that are adequate and used in face-to-face environments, and we need to relativize, to think, because neither resolution thinks about this type of research in the online environment. So, my question is: basically, we still don't know how to do it, despite having been working with digital technologies for more than 20 years and even though the internet has been around for a long time. There are already several types of research in these environments, but the

framework is still being built” (E3). Although the development of the theoretical framework on DICT in research is still at an early stage, as E3 puts it, we must increasingly encourage dialogue, to establish guidelines that base ethical practices in this field.

To produce new meanings for this discussion, one of the participants was asked if he thought it possible, within online surveys, to create specific ethical rules for each technological resource. The interviewee said he believed this to be unfeasible, since the rules would not keep up with the speed of technological advances: “Look, when you are talking about these rules, you are talking about computerization, regulation. If you do this for each instrument, [for each] technological resource, these standards will be continually out of date. Now, you must do something more generical, that serves different resources, interfaces, and technologies. (...) You cannot consider all the same, you need to think about the specifics when you talk about VLE, blog, Facebook and other social networks” (E4).

One sees, then, the need to broaden the debate in the field of online research in search of solutions and general positions to resources, objects, places, or research instruments. On the possibility of specific ethical rules for each resource, E7 emphasizes: “I think that the researcher must be informed about what is available and what already exists. I start from this principle: why am I going to create something new if the researcher doesn’t even know what already exists? (...) I think that researchers, much more than the users, cannot afford to say that they do not know the legislation. The point is that the researcher doesn’t know either, because they were not informed, educated, we don’t have a culture of bioethics yet, it is a rare culture” (E7).

This lack of knowledge highlighted by E7 appears again in E6’s statement: “And where can I help more specifically? Since I don’t know these intricacies, nor this legislation that you mentioned there [Resolution CNS 466/2012], that is why I asked you to do a synopsis of each one” (E6). E6’s lack of knowledge regarding the Brazilian legislation on ethics in research with human beings can be due to time since his graduation, when Resolution CNS 196/1996<sup>26</sup> was not in force yet.

According to Fare<sup>8</sup>, a study on the teaching of research ethics in the country – more specifically in a graduate research programs in health, where the debate on the field is more intense – is surprising for showing little concern is given to the ethical training of future professors and researchers: only 0.78% of the courses evaluated had the topic of research ethics as an autonomous discipline in the curriculum.

## Final considerations

By analyzing discursive practices, we focused on the perspective of professor-researchers who work with DICT on online research ethics. From the dialogue with the participants, we produced meanings about ethical issues both in general and specifically regarding online knowledge production. The relevance of the topic was clear, especially concerning the recognition of research participants as a citizen with rights.

The participants’ statements showed a variety of meanings attributed to the word “ethics,” which generates different attitudes towards a given research situation. On the one hand, there is a discourse that recognizes the importance of ethics from a procedural approach, which reproduces the system of conduct present in codes and oaths in the field of health. Its presence indicates the need to strengthen the discussion on research ethics from the undergraduate level on, to disseminate a vision of care more focused on human dignity. On the other hand, there is a more directed approach to care, with emphasis on protecting the research participant beyond the biomedical sphere, aiming to guarantee individual rights. In this perspective, interpersonal relationships and trust outweigh legal agreements.

We also observed that, for some interviewees, the notion of protection refers to the judicial safeguard of the researcher, although most statements put greater emphasis on the care of research participants. A concern in line with Resolution CNS 466/2012<sup>9</sup> and 510/2016<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding the ethical implications of online research, we discussed conceptual and practical aspects inherent to knowledge production in this medium. The complexity of the theme became

clear, mainly due to the rapid advancement of technologies, which expand communication between social actors and increase access to information, requiring more care on the part of researchers.

The identity of the participant in online surveys was a recurring topic, given that in cyberspace people can disguise their identity by providing unrealistic data or even posing as someone else. To face this lack of reliability, which represents a problem of ethical evaluation, the professor-researchers interviewed suggested two strategies: search for other sources of information to confront the data; or develop propositional questions.

Finally, another important point was the use of images, photos, and videos, in which interviewees recognized the need to obtain consent from the participants. As for texts and data available online, we observed the same concern among professor-researchers.

We hope that the results presented can contribute to the debate on ethics in online research, helping professor-researchers to deal with ethical aspects inherent to the online knowledge production. We propose, thus, to (de)construct discourses in favor of a more ethical scientific practice, aimed at protecting research participants.

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Luiz Wilson Machado da Costa e Silva Neto collected and analyzed the data and wrote the article. Deise Juliana Francisco supervised the work and contributed to the writing of the text.

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