

Guideline for Online & Social Media- Based Research Ethics

Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Committee – January 2022

This guide aims to provide useful information about ethics for researchers using online tools and social media platforms for studies involving human participants.

1. Online Surveys

An online survey is a Web-based survey that commonly uses an automated questionnaire.

Before starting the survey, information regarding the following should be shared with the potential participant:

- purpose of the study,
- researchers and their respective institution,
- how the results will be used.

A privacy statement (a statement explaining that personal information of participants will be confidential and all the data derived will be used in an anonymous format) should be provided.

The survey and questionnaire should be designed to provide maximum data safety for the participants during and after the research. Personal information (such as name, e-mail, phone number) should not be requested from participants, if possible, in order to reduce the risk of data theft.

Researchers should make sure that the surveys actually reach the target group.

A consent form should accompany the survey. This can be designed in such a way that the participant approves it before proceeding with the online survey.

2. Social Media-Based Research

Social media are communication tools and interactive technologies that are used to share information, ideas, opinions, news, media such as documents, photographs, and videos. Some popular social media platforms are Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

In cases where social media is used for data gathering, social media users are considered as human participants. Therefore, ethical approval is needed before collecting data.

The use of social media to conduct surveys, interviews and other types of data collection methods should ensure that the personal views and information of participants are protected and not accessible by third parties.

Researchers should make sure that they obey national and international laws and regulations or guidelines provided by the service provider.

References

The University of Sheffield, Research Ethics Policy Note no. 14, Research Involving Social Media Data, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.670954!/file/Research-Ethics-Policy-Note-14.pdf, accessed Dec 6, 2021

The University of Sheffield, A guide to research ethics for online survey design, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.283716!/file/AGuideToResearchEthicsForOnlineSurveyDesign-3.pdf, accessed Dec 6, 2021