



GREB SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to:

1. Provide researchers with standardized information and guidance related to research involving social media platforms
2. Promote and facilitate best ethical practices when using social media in research

Background

Conducting research-related activities involving social media has become increasingly common among researchers. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. provide researchers with new methods and opportunities to recruit participants, collect and analyze data, and disseminate their research.

Social Media Competencies

Researchers who wish to conduct research activities using social media platforms should demonstrate to the Research Ethics Board (REB) that they are aware of the subtleties of using social media.

Researchers need to be aware of the privacy issues, relevant user settings, privacy settings and terms of

Respecting the Privacy and Confidentiality of Research Participants

Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants typically entails that potential research participants can find out more information about a given study, and are able to participate in a particular study, without having such information made known to individuals outside of the research team. To this end, social media platforms should be examined to understand any suggested limits in participant privacy and confidentiality. It is imperative that privacy and confidentiality is protected unless participants consent to waive such protections. It is also important to understand that as the risk(s) of participation in research increase, privacy and confidentiality become critical requirements.

Facebook

As of January 2022, Facebook has four types of privacy settings for events:

- Private – only people who are invited
 - Guests can invite friends, (Yes and No) If this is set to “Yes,” this would be considered snowball sampling and would need to be clearly mentioned and detailed in the recruitment section of the GREB Standard Application Form
- Public – Anyone on or off Facebook can view the event
- Friends – Only your friends on Facebook can view the event
- Groups – Only Members of a group you are in can view the event

GREB advises researchers not to communicate directly with participants through Facebook, nor should Facebook users be able to post on the event’s feed. Rather, potential participants should be encouraged to contact the research team directly outside of the particular social media platform.

To protect the privacy of individuals you can invite Facebook users to an event, however, the “Show guest list” option would need to be turned off so that other guests cannot see who else was invited.

Protecting the Privacy and Confidentiality of Researchers

The use of personal social media accounts for conducting online recruitment poses unique challenges.

Personal social media accounts tend to include private details about individuals (such as addresses, places of work, religious and political affiliations/ideologies, etc.) as well as details about third parties (such as friends, family members, colleagues, acquaintances, etc.).

Using a personal social media account for research purposes can be problematic because such accounts typically not only share personal information about the researcher, but also share details about the researcher’s friends, family, and colleagues, who may not want such details revealed to potential research participants. Thus, out of respect for those individuals who may indirectly feature in the researcher’s social media account, personal social media accounts are discouraged from being used in research-related activities.

GREB encourages researchers to develop a research-specific Facebook profiles, groups, or other social media profiles.

Avoid using your ppsnsa

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Recommended Settings for Facebook Events

If you use Facebook Events to invite people to participate in your research study, we suggest you use the following settings for your event to ensure the integrity and security of the Facebook Event.

1. Set Event Options-> Show guest list = Off
2. Set Event Options-> Only admins can post in event = On
3. Set Event Options -> Posts must be approved by a host or co-host = ON

Collecting and Analyzing Social Media Data

One of the major misconceptions many researchers have when conducting social media research is that just because social media data (e.g., Instagram posts, Facebook pictures, tweets, etc.) exists on a seemingly “public” social media platform, that researchers are free to use such data as they wish, for their

GREB Social Media Guidelines

For instance, individuals may create and operate a fake social media account that in no way represents the actual user or create and operate a social media account with the intent of bullying, harassing, or exploiting others. Unfortunately, such social media accounts exist, and it is important for researchers to be aware of the precarious nature of social media data, and to think carefully about how using social media data may affect the rights of research participants.