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EVALUATORS REPORTS CONTENT EVALUATION (NOVEMBER 2005)

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DR CHRIS MANN (OXFORD INTERNET INSTITUTE)

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**Content**

In terms of content I have to say that I was highly impressed with the whole website. I had some recent references in mind that I intended to suggest but I found the site authors were ahead of me. The ethics section (my own area of expertise) offered comprehensive coverage of the issues. The discussion of internet ethics was both subtle and pragmatic and benefited from being set in a wider theoretical frame. There were excellent examples of good practice – and I was glad to see that recent developments in the ‘privacy’ debate were highlighted.

Similarly, the work on online interviews was excellent. Material I am familiar with was presented with clarity and I appreciated being introduced to areas that were new to me, such as the engagement with future audio and video possibilities. I would personally find the site useful in my own work in terms of the good range of weblinks and the very useful section on software for synchronous interviews.

Being a ‘newbie’ in terms of online questionnaires I could approach this material as a more tentative user. I found the technical guide to be ambitious in its range of aims and promised learning outcomes but, nevertheless, confidence inspiring – I felt I was in a safe pair of hands and would progress steadily even in challenging areas such as using new software or handling HTML. The activity sections for the online questionnaires were excellent. I was particularly impressed by the structured prompts to be used when preparing a checklist for comparing software products. There was a real sense of the website anticipating the diverse needs of researchers and helping individuals to clarify and develop their ideas/requirements.

My overall genuine enthusiasm for the website must be clear from these comments and I am happy for any of my remarks in this evaluation to be adapted to be used in publicity. I have also prepared the following material with your publicity in mind (printed in bold type) – please feel free to use any part of it in any way. I shall then move on to the (few) concerns that I have with the training package material.

This is self-study online training of the very best kind: practical and hands-on; theoretically sound; technically exacting; supportive and inspirational. The opportunities and challenges of online research are presented by an interdisciplinary training team with comprehensive expertise in the methods discussed. This team is backed up by virtual access to up-to-date sites of experts in the field and a range of relevant resources world-wide - current best practice and technology reached at the touch of a button.

This website offers flexible training for those who wish to engage with online research for the first time, as well as those who have areas of expertise but wish to develop or extend their skills. Students and professionals alike will benefit from an interactive approach that incorporates case studies, question and answer sections, and learning activities while, simultaneously, supplying the information that is needed for an individual to reach an ambitious range of promised learning outcomes. I wish this facility had been available when I started my own online research career.

### **Concerns about content**

I feel that some of the introductory sections suffer from the curse of many complex pieces of work – which is that well-worked through sections from the main body of the material have to be flagged in a brief form at the start. I have marked places on the hard copy of the material where I feel that not enough care has been taken to make these snapshots – which are often the first thing people will read – clear, concise and engaging. Any sense that early ‘tasters’ are just bits cut and pasted from the main text (with repetitions and muddled syntax) is deeply off-putting.

Linked in with this is a need to anticipate which sections a user might read first in order to spell out acronyms fully – and to be aware of using less common technical terms etc that may frighten someone off before they access the sections that explain them fully. (Perhaps a clear pointer towards the very useful glossaries could be presented at an early stage?).

Two case studies need to be edited to give them a crisper and more professional finish (see p11-13 in hard copy)

### **Technical problems**

The photographic images seem dark – but this may be the local computer’s fault. The slide shows in the Project Development section only offered a ‘save’ not an ‘open’ option –perhaps because Powerpoint was not installed on the local computer.

### **General impressions of the site**

Overall my responses were very positive. I loved the logo, the introductory rolling quotes and the graphics generally. The site as a whole came across as well organised, clear and accessible, thought provoking, confidence inspiring, and exciting – there was a sense that no effort had been spared to offer the user everything they might need to make self-training of online research methods supportive, engaging, informative and, above all, effective and rewarding.

My few concerns about the site centre around aspects of its layout and navigation as I shall now describe.

### **Concerns**

I speak as someone who is not a ‘natural’ on a computer while needing to be competent for my online research work. As a result my first response to a new site is a degree of insecurity and a desire for clear signposting. As I’ve marked on the hard copy I would have liked a clear ‘navigating the modules’ subhead in the ‘about the modules’ section. The information is there but I find it rather randomly presented – if I start feeling I’m having to look for such material I begin to feel nervous.

I would also be inclined to flag the items that will be found on the Help site very early on. The Introduction gives an overview of the site bulleting modules/resources and project background – I would add the ‘help’ section to this list. Perhaps the ‘Help/Site map/Search Site’ tag in the top right hand corner could also be displayed in red to catch the eye?

I am very unhappy about the placing of the Accessibility and Internationalisation section in the main Introduction – I can’t imagine why it is slotted in between ‘Key

issues in online research' and 'FAQ'. What is the reader to make of its position there between these substantive issues? I feel that it would sit much more happily in the 'Help' site where the 'About this website' section already has clear detailed material on accessibility.

The Site Map gives a comprehensive run down of sub-heads – but there was no subhead allowing the user to move quickly to the learning activities/case study materials in each module – which may well be experienced as irritating.

In the 'Create a questionnaire' section there seemed a big visual jump from the enumerated directions e.g. 'create a new page' and the complex screenshots shown beneath. Without more information about the function of the screenshots I found the juxtaposition intimidating – I felt the site assumed my understanding had moved on more than it had at that stage.

Typos on website (other typos noted in hard copy):

Help- Site Conventions – information blue box – 'particular'

Help- Site Conventions – Learning activities – green border box 'activities'

Site functionalities table – 'Alternatives' column – 2nd box down – 'temporarily'

About the website – 'standard compliance etc- first sentence 'standards for we? design'

### **How I would use the site**

To extend my knowledge of the scope of innovatory current research

To embark on the challenge of using online questionnaires for the first time

To be more aware of – and to help choose – the correct software for embarking on new projects

As a knowledge bank for new references and online resources

### **Resources**

The Oxford Internet Institute would be a vital first point of call for anyone seeking to address the impact of the internet on social life. Lectures, seminars, conferences, publications etc cover the most up-to-date thinking in many areas of debate e.g. gender and racial digital divide – providing an overall context for hands-on online research.

## Parvati Raghuram

Thank you very much for asking me to evaluate the project: Exploring online research methods.

Here is a first set of comments on the site. They are not wholly complete as I have not yet read the ethical and interview sections but I thought I would send this to you now as you can begin to think about the issues I raise while I read the rest and prepare the report. The report should be with you by the end of the month as requested. I will also return the copy of the printed version you sent me as I have annotated it.

### **General issues-** Bigger issues:

- Have Help and index on the side rather than the top
- don't really like the pale green of the side panel

Colour the Go box on introduction to modules for greater visibility

Links page is skipping on opening left bar

What does internationalise mean? Quite a loaded term, add to glossary (the paper version has a list of other suggestions to include to glossary)

Site link on module contents is a broken link

Also search site page link from here is broken

No system of closing purple boxes - sometimes it can be useful to have that facility

**Introduction-** (Please note that most of the comments on this are on the hard copy and only some of the bigger points are raised here)

Introduction: about the modules: who should use this site

Needs developing and bullet possible users

Can be used as self-learning package or as part of university training packages

- those who know little
- those who are familiar with the process but want to clarify specific issues
- those who teach research methods

Postgraduates and researchers should not be counterposed - people can be PG researchers. Also, what about advanced undergraduates who want to use online methods as part of a dissertation?

Any possibility of linking this to ESRC research training guidelines and to the Joint Skills Statement?

One obvious advantage of online research is that it is useful for studying topics related to the Internet - online communities and how they interact; use of the Internet etc. Here they may have intrinsic benefit. They are also useful for studying groups who really like to use internet and may be more happy to communicate this medium - young people

The section on advantages and disadvantages of online research is a little thin. Some issues that you could add to the current discussion:

What you miss from online research is understanding of contextual information

- way they sit, facial expressions, what clothes they wear, and so you can miss nuances, and so not use it to study emotions
- but it has different nuances and ways of communicating so familiarity with those nuances rather than simply transferring method of asking questions from one format to the other.

Introduction: FAQs - why is there no technical guidelines for online interviews?

### **Questionnaires section:**

(please note that almost all the comments are presented here. The only exception is to issues of implementation and technical guide as the two links did not work and so I found I had to work with the hard copy and so have also annotated that copy)

#### *Some general issues:*

Sampling - have you looked at things like purposive sampling - Internet research can be very good for that

Use of snowball method may be more appropriate for email attachment questionnaires?

Use of internet for market research means that it looks thin and may be harder to use for thicker research

#### *Comments by pages:*

Identity verification works both ways: respondents too can't verify your identity. One danger of online questionnaires is that interviews and even questionnaires involve trust and it may be harder to build up trust when you are not face-to-face. The notion of the 'face' in society (Derrida) and how the face gives you a sense of reassurance and in itself provides a forum for communication. Our ability to read and analyse how this happens on a screen is not so developed and communication can be linear. What you lose at transcription is already lost in online work - certain kinds of texture but on the other hand new kinds of texture are created.

To improve response rate checklist

Avoid asking personal questions if you can

I would suggest mouse led rather than open ended questions and my understanding is that changing the type of response required leads to a fall in response rates for the new type of question introduced. Response type is habit-forming!

Perhaps you could discuss a bit more the pros and cons of incentives? Because that can skew the response rate towards people who like shopping in the shops where vouchers are coming from etc. almost always incentive based interviews are pre-arranged and have agreement before proceeding to send questionnaire. Also difficulty is that incentives don't travel i.e. can't give incentives to Debenhams and also internationalise so you lose some accessibility issues with incentives.

How to select a sample: specify a sample population

- some groups may also be over-represented like young people
- internet service to be researched or the one which will be the medium?

Choose a sampling method: remember that some of these issues occur in onsite questionnaires too but just take different shape. Maybe add more explicit links to this at this point too?

Standardise ads/adverts/advertisements

Difficult to read screenshot pages

Email list based samples

Hyperlinks and graphics (including institutional logos) should be used sparingly but on the other hand you do need some of this to help respondents verify identity of researcher.

Really like the use of case studies at the end

How do you verify your identity could be picked up a bit more here too?

Design issues 1

Can the title be a bit more explanatory rather than 1 and 2?

Did not follow what was going on in the box 1024x768 etc.

Font - have you not used verdana? Why?

Do you want to have a box explaining your choices on these issues?

Design issues 2

Not sure about variety of response types because as you say: 'Generally, open-ended questions are less likely to be completed and result in more item non-response.'

Is it possible to have pop-up boxes to show what radio buttons and check boxes are?

Example questionnaire on the internet - really like this but can you bring the start/reset button to the side so that you don't have to scroll up each time to reset. This really reduces its effectiveness

Learning activity: extract 2:

Which of the following do you regularly use the internet for?

(You can select as many options as you like)

Answer the question by selecting the correct option(s). Do this by moving your mouse over an option and selecting the left button. If you wish to select more than one option, hold down the 'Ctrl' key while you select additional options.

I find this method really difficult as I don't know whether it has been chosen or not. Don't know if this suggests that this is a less useful method but I think it is.

Radio buttons on example in multi-media stimuli don't work

'where absolute control over how it appears is less important to the research '  
or more important?

Good design for online questionnaires: a checklist

Use 12 or 14 point Times New Roman or Arial font; can you actually use these fonts at this point?

Implementation and technical guide pages are not yet linked?

Screenshot of web-based questionnaire is very difficult to read


On sampling page, change title of subsection sampling as it is confusing to have two levels of titles with same heading. Rephrase the second?

Colour learning activity - radio buttons don't work

Learning activity review quiz

Say something to suggest that there is only one answer that you can tick

## Project background

User study was undertaken  undertaken

1. Project team page

Clare Madge

Tell us a little about your non-life work

e in Leicester

why double quotes at the end of sad mother?

Tristram Hooley

I will be taking over from Julia or took over from Julia?

Jane's page does not work

2. Acknowledgements: Under others Christine Hine's affiliation is in brackets but not elsewhere

3. On project organisation Early content and Main content area pages you should check that the division of duties was roughly as set out there or add a note to show how it changed

4. Face to face meetings - blackboard have been used as an eryday

5. Key milestones - write out October, not Oct

6. From evaluation process page November 2004 if you press Julia Meek you go to her, but then if you press Back button you go back to the front page of evaluation process, rather than to November 2004

7. Evaluation process Trialling with a group link to pdf file - the header of the project difficult to download

## Interviews and ethics (Parvati Raghuram)

Here I have provided a few suggestions for changes in these sections. They are not comprehensive and should be considered as supplementary to the suggestions made by the main reviewer of these sections.

### Interviews:

Why online interviews - line 1: any reason why the references are in this order?

Advantages: For example, email interviews allow the participants to respond at a time convenient to themselves – the need to arrange specific interview times and dates is removed. Why is this different from a questionnaire? To me synchronicity is one of the things that makes it an interview so both do have to be online at the same time. And this synchronicity is also something which is highlighted in your description of interview as conversation. Also, you may want to think that when you need repeat interviews and costs are multiplied, then these can become much easier online.

Venue: However, the online interviewer has no need to arrange respondents answers to interview questions may be influenced by the setting in conversely if subjects are taking part from a computer located in their own home, then such fear is likely to be less relevant, though not necessarily eliminated

One advantage is that young people, who are used to communicating online, may be easier to reach.

Disadvantage:

Also inappropriate/unavailable for interviewing elites who may be unwilling to put in the effort of typing, for instance.

Types of online interviews

Synchronous online interviews: Researchers who have carried out synchronous chat in this

In the review quiz, it would be useful to have subheads that are more descriptive, rather than simply Part 1 and part 2.

### Ethics:

The sections titled Inequalities 1 and Inequalities 2 should be retitled to give a clearer idea of how the content varies between these two sections. The first seems to touch on the international dimensions of inequalities in access and regulation, while the latter touch upon social stratification within societies. This should be picked up in the titles

The section practical issues seems to be about issues of ethics in the research interaction, while the other two sections on inequalities are about contexts within which those engagements occur. I would title the sections along these lines, rather than 'practical' issues, as naming some things as practice seems to suggest that the others are not practice.

Online libel

Further, care must take care as any legal jurisdiction under which online research falls will vary with different nation states


In most of this section, the discussion is posed in terms of risks to the researched and how to avoid harm to those you interview. You may want to think about the risks to the researcher too,



at least in terms of viruses and spams. For instance, ensuring that researchers have filters to pick these up so that they don't infect their computer, might be a useful suggestion.

A concluding caution should be retitled as A concluding note of caution

Inequalities 1

Digital divide:  difficulty in writing about the digital divide is the rapid pace of change in internet use may soon render any discussion obsolete.

Censorship: For example, in Singapore, all websites and discussion groups are controlled by the Singapore Broadcasting Authority ([Rodriguez 2000](#)) while government controlled censorship is also practiced in China and the Gulf states ([Grossman 1997](#)). In Namibia the government has tried to quash internet use and Syria has agonized over whether to introduce it ([John and Stewart 2000, 33](#)).

Gender and sexual parity, not sexuality parity

Also, in this section at the end, you say:

Differences have also been explored to some degree on internet use according to sexual identity. This has largely focused on representation online and the use of the internet as a medium for community, information exchange and the expression of identity. ([Alexander 2002a](#); [Alexander 2002b](#); [Groom and Pennebaker 2005](#); [Snyder 2002](#); [Yang 2000](#)).

You need another sentence here to say how you think this links to your topic, ethics and sexuality in internet research.

Lifespan and economic background section does not have enough on lifespan to warrant it being marked out in the subhead

Focus on the academic content that the material provided covers all the areas you would expect to see, references you would expect to see. If you could approach the task as you would a peer review for an academic paper.

This is an excellent web resource. In particular:

- a. advanced undergraduates, postgraduates and more established researchers intending to use online research methods will find the resource useful, especially, the technical guidelines, the detailed discussion of advantages and disadvantages and the reference lists.
- b. those learning research methods as part of their generic training will find the programme is thorough in its coverage and meets the guidelines set out in the ESRC's framework for research methods training. It goes through some of the key issues that have been identified as central to the: principles of research design, data collection and data analyses methods and also offers those going through the programme an opportunity to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each method (E5, 6 and 7).
- c. those delivering training as part of various ESRC research methods training programmes will find it a useful resource in their programme for advanced training in quantitative and qualitative methods (E 9). As this is an area where many institutions are currently short of resources, a much more definitive recognition of the contributions that this resource makes in this area would be good.

The programme also helps to meet some of the requirements set out by the Joint Skills Statement. For instance, it can be pegged under A (research skills and techniques) 3 (a knowledge of recent advances in one's field and in related areas) and 4 (an understanding of relevant research methodologies and techniques and their appropriate application within one's field).

The comments given below should be viewed in light of these general comments and only offer a short supplement to the detailed comments appended in previous emails and the editorial and content suggestions made on the print copy. They are offered in order to make an excellent resource even better.

Suggestions for development:

1. I think the 'About the modules' part of the Introduction section should be part of the welcome page rather than under Modules and that this new section could be renamed to reflect this, perhaps just as Introduction. People would expect 'content' issues in the module section and would not necessarily know to look for an introduction there. Relocation should also help you to draw the visitor to the site 'in' much more persuasively. The material left in the Introduction can be renamed as something like 'Online methods and this resource'.
2. The 'market' for the resource is much larger than is currently laid out. I really think that linking back to the ESRC guidelines and outlining how you meet them will clarify the contributions of what is such a useful resource.
3. It would be really useful for students to have some more examples to work through. As the authors were themselves involved in using some of these methods, perhaps a few problems/issues they faced or decisions they had to make could be posed as problems for students to work through. To begin with, the learning activities could be modified with the addition of 3-4 questions which students have to answer/address after doing the readings suggested. Currently, the instructions on what to read in the articles suggested are not adequately specified. In terms of presentation, the questions that are currently set out should be bulleted so that they become more 'insistent'. Together these changes would also help you to ensure that you meet E7 of the ESRC framework guidelines and that this can be a complete package for Social research methods training.
4. As a research trainer I would find a print version of the material a very useful addition to the web resource. I would therefore, like to urge the researchers to think about producing a textbook to complement the website. Eventually, I would also like to suggest that it be versioned with a different set of links as part of a training package. For instance, the training package could be offered up in the welcome page, as a different way of moving through the material. It could then link to some discussion of advantages/disadvantages of online research and one or two pages from the different modules.
5. In some places there can be a little more bulleting, and within the text a few more of the links should ideally be made 'clickable'? For instance, at the end of selection of software in the Interview section, it would be useful if one could click "Technical guide" in the following statement: "The 'Technical guide' section of this module explores software for online interviews in greater detail.
6. The glossary is currently somewhat underdeveloped. My comments on the print version suggests terms to add to this. Besides, it would also be useful if the glossary could become collectable, like the reference list. Some websites also offer a links basket, where you can collect weblinks - again this is a feature that would enhance the site. However, these may be issues to think about for later versions of the resource.
7. Given the ephemeral nature of weblinks, it might be worth having a disclaimer about the current links provided. This may however, be something that I just missed, so apologies if that is the case. On the other hand, it may also be useful to highlight that the links provided were those available at the time when the web resource went into presentation and that additional resources may become available. And it would be good if some small amounts of funding were to be made available to the project team so that they can update these links and reference lists for the next few years so that the resource does not become dated too quickly.

Any technical problems you experienced broken links etc.
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Location	Description
Please see detailed amendments sent as earlier attachment	

Provide a description of your general impressions of the site.

Overall, I liked the structure of the site and although I found it quite complex in the beginning, I soon got used to it.

Here I would like to highlight what to me were some of the key features of the site:

- The technical guides are invaluable as they are offered in a manner that makes such methods available to people who are not entirely familiar with online research. The links to software and the links to demonstration packages again are invaluable. As technical guidelines are often separated out from the general discussion of methods, the lack of knowledge of technical issues can become a real barrier to those who are interested in doing interviews (the audience for the latter kind of literature) but don't know how to do them online. Bringing them together makes it possible for those with wider interest in methods to envisage using online methods.
- I think the ability to collect references and to transpose them to other bibliographic software is an invaluable aspect of the site.
- Overall, the site is well thought out and covers most of the key issues which one would expect to see with regard to any method. Thus, it provides a comprehensive learning tool for researchers and will I am sure be widely used in the future.

Have they come across a resource like this before?

No. Although there are a range of discussions, websites, articles and some learning materials in journals, on training sites and in books, they have not been blended together into a learning package in this manner. As far as I know this is the first site that brings together the issues, critiques, learning resources such as readings and links and practical advice. Those contemplating online research can use the site as a one-stop resource. Hence, this is a unique resource for a range of users in the research community, trainers, students and practitioners.

Could you describe how you might use the site?

I would suggest that it is offered as part of generic training packages for advanced postgraduate students. Although students may not necessarily use these methods in their own research, some familiarity with these issues is likely to be important in their own further careers and hence some awareness of the issues raised here will be useful for all students.

Focus on the academic content that the material provided covers all the areas you would expect to see, references you would expect to see. If you could approach the task as you would a peer review for an academic paper.

My general impression of the website, and the online questionnaire module in particular, is excellent. The layout and design of the website, the level of detail in its content, the use of examples and references, and the all-round navigation of the modules makes this a valuable resource that will, I am sure, be of use to many social scientists. My overriding concerns about online training resources will still need to be addressed, but most of these are beyond this evaluation and exercise – but they include: access to and visibility of this resource to the research community, the level of updating possible to this resource (particularly where new references are available or new ideas/solutions are created) to maintain its longevity, and how such a resource can be used for bespoke training and integrated into more face-to-face training.

The latter issue, however, could be further addressed in this resource. The use of references, learning activities and tests are very helpful in enhancing the learning process. But I wonder whether there could be additional resources to aide integration into face-to-face teaching and learning. This could include teaching resources, such as learning activities and tests that could be used off-line or guidance on how the existing learning resources could be used off-line. Such resources could also identify individual and group tasks to encourage off-line learning.

#### **Detailed comments**

- Many of the pages on the Modules contain a lot of text within a single paragraph. This would be OK on paper but for an internet resource I felt at times that it became difficult to read. It would also be useful to recommend the width that the browser should be set to to optimise its readability.
- The reference list is an excellent idea with the ability to add your own comments. However, I only realised its potential when I was some way in to the module. This was partly my fault for not reading the information bar at the top of each page properly but there is a tendency to just start reading the content without reading that. Again I think the reason that I skipped this was because the text in the information box was too long (see above) and the user is drawn away from reading the end of the line before going on to the next paragraph.
- It would also be helpful to have direct links from the references to the actual articles (or at least the website for the respective journal). This is available for some references but not those used in citation.
- The section on Measurement Error (online questionnaires) states that responses to the same question vary if online – I didn't really understand that and would like further explanation.
- Throughout it would be useful to distinguish between the issues/problems of questionnaires in general and online questionnaire in particular. There are probably a number of online resources on questionnaire design that could be referred to or linked to.

- The use of diagrams and interactive diagrams in particular is very good, and it is excellent that a text-based alternative description is also available.
- I think one of the weakest areas of the online questionnaire module was the analysis section. I thought there could be greater analytical assistance or guidance provided. The link to another online resource is useful but seems to have been used to mask over the absence of more detailed content. In particular I thought it would be helpful to provide some systematic guidance over calculating and dealing with missing data, replication of survey responses by the same participants, arbitrary completion of the questionnaire, etc. These issues seem pertinent to online questionnaires (although how to deal with them most likely already exists for other questionnaires). The Module could also include provide more detailed guidance on low response rates – i.e. how to identify low response rates, how that may affect your analysis and reporting, etc. Another reason why this would be useful is due to the reluctance among many social scientists to engage with quantitative data analysis. Researchers tend to feel comfortable with using questionnaires as a device for collecting data. If this VLE could take the user into the next phase of the research process then perhaps more researchers would be willing to use such research instruments in practice.
- Under the Techuserinfo page the Q box that appears with the example asks whether the user is familiar with HTML etc – it could have direct links to the respective sections.
- The Technical Guide is clearly very important and it is my perception, at least, that this covers all the aspects of setting up an online questionnaire. However, within the timescale to evaluate this resource it is not possible for me to ‘try-out’ this part of the Module so I cannot be absolutely sure that this is (a) correct and (b) is complete. But it is certainly the case that the links to providers (of software and hosts) is very comprehensive. The checklists are also extremely helpful. It would be useful, however, for some example costs in using other ‘sources’, may be based on real projects that used other software or hosts etc.
- I wonder also whether there could be better links made between the design issues of the technical guide and the design issues within the core Module. This could be in the form of a direct link to the other content or remind the user of the issues raised in the previous sections.
- The FAQ and the general Resources are very useful.
- I wonder whether a progress bar of some sort could be provided in going through the modules, perhaps by indexing the whole content by sub-section. The index may be really useful for reference or jumping back to particular sub-sections. But the progress made and some indication of how long it will take to get to the end of each section or the end of the Module could be useful (although I am aware that this would be very difficult to implement and may lose of the ‘cleanliness’ of the resource.

Any technical problems you experienced broken links etc.

Location	Description
QuesIntro	Coomber reference does not open in new window.

All pages	The Next (and Previous) buttons tend to disappear at the bottom of the pages because of too much 'white space' between the content and these buttons.
QuesDesign1	Opening the example of browser sizes was problematic for me as I have turned off 'popups' in my browser.
QuesDesign2 (question type)	The timing results did not work after I had answered the questions.
Implementation (analysis)	Spelling error – "Quantitative" in the last sentence of the main content
Technical Guide – from WITHIN the Online Questionnaire module	None of the links worked! This was resolved by going to the 'front page' and accessing the Technical Guide from there.
Resources from the top menu	Did not work

Provide a description of your general impressions of the site.

My general impression of the website, and the online questionnaire module in particular, is excellent. The layout and design of the website, the level of detail in its content, the use of examples and references, and the all-round navigation of the modules makes this a valuable resource that will, I am sure, be of use to many social scientists.

The content is well organised ensuring easy navigation and progression. The layout is clear and concise, while accommodating an excellent coverage of detail and material. The additional resources, including information on access, how to use the resource, the research team, etc, provides a level of transparency and visibility that gives this online learning environment a 'human' feel.

Although there are a number of sections that could be enhanced the level of detail is excellent for both pedagogical and research purposes. In terms of teaching and learning it would be beneficial if some consideration could be given as to how this learning tool could be integrated into face-to-face or group work.

Have they come across a resource like this before?

Not on the use of online research tools.

Could you describe how you might use the site?

I would recommend this site to research students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and other researchers. I can see how useful this would be as **a resource** to researchers thinking about using online research tools and those that actually want to implement an online questionnaire. It could also be used as part of **formal research methods teaching** within my department (mainly for graduate teaching). But I would need to give some consideration as to how this could be

incorporated into existing teaching modules and how it can be integrated into more face-to-face pedagogy.

In its current form I think the technical guide and references will become a useful reference when developing and using online questionnaires (i.e. of more long-term value). I would also like to think that the analytical section could also be helpful over the long-term, but additional material and consideration may be needed to achieve this.

Focus on the academic content that the material provided covers all the areas you would expect to see, references you would expect to see. If you could approach the task as you would a peer review for an academic paper.

This will be an invaluable resource. It is clear, it's comprehensive, and it makes sensible evaluations of prevailing opinion and practice.

I have a few suggestions for improvements to increase coverage of important issues, add to the interactivity, or lend clarity:

1. It might be useful to include some possible research scenarios as an exercise for the user, offering them the opportunity to make a decision about the appropriate course of action in terms of confidentiality, informed consent etc. I use these in teaching and they work quite well to bring issues to life for students. It might make this module more accessible for someone who doesn't have a particular piece of research that they want to do in mind. You could even start with them, ask people to make decisions, and then offer them up again at the end of the module so people can judge whether they've changed their minds about what they would do.
2. There isn't much discussion of the issues surrounding research with minors. Bruckman has faced up to this issue – see also the Buchanan book, and also Sonia Livingston's work for a broader background on children using the Internet.
3. I didn't see a mention of Elizabeth Buchanan's book, <http://www.idea-group.com/books/details.asp?id=4210>, which would add to the coverage of some important issues, like the question of minors.
4. It would really help if the readings for all of the learning activities were available online. I think the ones for the exercise on models of ethics are on the web – any chance of linking to them more directly, or gaining permission to include them on the site?
5. The glossary is a bit under-used. Any chance of including more terms, or at least making sure that the relevant terms are connected by links from the text to the glossary, to allow for jumping to the relevant definition? Actually, hyper-linking could be much more used throughout to make links between sections of the text, e.g. to link between discussion of informed consent guidelines and discussion of privacy.
6. In the guidelines on informed consent you say that in open access forums "informed consent is not essential" – but in the discussion on privacy you show that it is much more nuanced than that. Could you say "informed consent may not always be essential" to leave it more open?
7. It might be worth saying a little more about processes of ethical clearance. Institutional Review Boards and the like are mentioned a few times in passing, but it might be worth giving a little more detail on how the process generally works, since often readers of this resource will be inexperienced researchers.
8. In the discussion of deception, it is worth explaining that the boundaries are not clear cut. A researcher may set out to tell everyone concerned about their research, but as new participants join a forum and as existing participants forget, the research can effectively become more covert as time goes on. The issue can be particularly troubling in online forums with high turnover, like chat rooms.
9. It's not entirely clear what relevance the discussion of flaming and the exercise on different forms of flame has for an understanding of ethics. Could you be a bit more specific about why it's there, and what it adds for a researcher?



10. The section on online libel is rather selective – for example mentioning the ECPA, but not giving much context, country or subsequent developments. What are the implications for researchers?

Minor points

- The description of models of ethics is a bit opaque – could you clarify, or define terms in the glossary?
- The description of Hudson and Bruckman (2004) under “Deception” isn’t clear – how could members ask them to leave when they hadn’t posted a message?
- Under “digital divide” the figures are a little odd – is it really 60% for Sri Lanka? – and I’m not sure that they transparently make the point that you want to get across.
- Under “The Racial Ravine” the sentence beginning “Racist practices also proliferate...” is too long.
- FAQs – first question, last line – should that be “global reach” instead of “global research”?

Any technical problems you experienced broken links etc.

Location	Description
N/A	

Provide a description of your general impressions of the site.

I like it. I found the interface a bit busy on first impression, but I got used to it, and also came to accept the style of arrows opening up new sections of text. There is a lot of scrolling down through text, but I guess that’s inevitable for a content rich resource. The print version was invaluable – I suspect this will also get used a lot. The personal reference list is a great feature, particularly the facility for endnote download. Perfect for the magpie researcher, picking up interesting bits to read here and there.

Have they come across a resource like this before?

There is nothing quite like this – and I know from queries that come to me that a lot of people are looking for sound advice about online research. It will serve a real need.

Could you describe how you might use the site?

I’ll certainly recommend it to students etc. I’m not sure how many will work through the whole thing, but I’m sure many will dip into it and find it invaluable. Those who do complete the whole thing will gain a vast amount from it. I think both kinds of user will want to cite your work and your advice – there should be clear guidelines on how they should do so on the site.

Focus on the academic content that the material provided covers all the areas you would expect to see, references you would expect to see. If you could approach the task as you would a peer review for an academic paper.

## Technical Guide

### 1. Aims and outcomes

OK.  
Clear.

### 2. Introduction

OK.  
I loved the examples. I always think examples set everything into context and somehow immediately make things interesting and comfortable.  
The tables showing the knowledge and skills are very useful.

### 3. Choosing software

OK. Very useful information.  
I loved the 'Creating a checklist' activity. I think this would be immeasurably helpful especially for new projects.

### 4. HTML 1

OK

### 5. HTML 2

OK.  
I think it might be helpful to mention HTML versions and deprecated tags.

### 6. CSS

OK.

### 7. Web forms

OK.  
This is excellent, it is very important to understand what can be done and be able to decide and communicate exactly what is required, and we can only do this if we are all speaking the same language.

### 8. Javascript

OK  
Would it be worth mentioning that javascript can be very browser specific i.e. what works in one browser or browser version won't always work in another?

### 9. Form validation

OK

### 10. Design issues

I think it would be useful to put in some more design, layout and usability information here, by this I mean the concepts of alignment, proximity, repetition and consistency that will ensure users find it easy to find their way around the questionnaire and be sure that a certain heading refers to a certain set of check boxes etc. Most off-the-shelf packages come up with good layout but it's not always a given. (OK I just realised it is included in another section of the site but it might not do any harm to repeat)

### 11. Participant info.

OK

### 12. Server-side 1

In development.

### 13. Server-side 2

In development

### 14. FAQ's

OK

## 15. Glossary

OK

Could be expanded perhaps?

## 16. Print version

Very useful

## 17. Resources

Good

Any technical problems you experienced broken links etc.

Location	Description
<b><u>Example of 'once-only' text box validation</u></b>	METHOD NOT ALLOWED
<b>If you hit the enter key rather than clicking with the mouse you get the error opposite, this also happens with other similar form examples</b>	The requested method POST is not allowed for the URL /onlinerm-tmp38163/technical/techvalidation.htm. <i>Apache/1.3.27 Server at mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk Port 80</i>

Provide a description of your general impressions of the site.

I think the Technical Guide is absolutely excellent. It is clear, well written and easy to navigate. I only found one minor error detailed above and did not spot any typing or spelling errors.

I'm not a big fan of Flash generally but loved the way you had seamlessly incorporated the Flash interactions into the page. Really well done.

The content is comprehensive, clear and well researched.

I would have liked to see some diagrams showing how client-side and server-side scripting differs. I think it is very hard to grasp for the non-technical person and so I would include this.

I also think the difficulties for a novice in developing and coding their own surveys from scratch has been rather downplayed. In general I would say that a non-technical developer would have enough problems with an off the shelf system.

At first I thought accessibility wasn't included and then I found references in various sections. I think I would include it as a separate heading as well, somewhere near the top and give a more general view, then speak specifically about the issues in html, javascript etc. as you have done.

Overall – a super resource.

Have they come across a resource like this before?

No I haven't come across a resource like this before.

Could you describe how you might use the site?

I have only really looked through the technical guide but I have already found it very useful myself and would have no hesitation in recommending it to anyone who is thinking of developing an online survey.

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**COLIN HYDE (EAST MIDLANDS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE)**

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Any technical problems you experienced broken links etc.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Description</b>
<a href="http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/onlinerm-tmp38163/questionnaires/questechnical.htm">http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/onlinerm-tmp38163/questionnaires/questechnical.htm</a>	Links not working on page, although menu on left is working okay.
<a href="http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/onlinerm-tmp38163/ethics/ethconfidentiality.htm">http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/onlinerm-tmp38163/ethics/ethconfidentiality.htm</a>	In the learning activity, it's not clear the citation is a link, and it doesn't open in a new window
<a href="http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/onlinerm-tmp38163/intro/introkeyissues.htm">http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/onlinerm-tmp38163/intro/introkeyissues.htm</a>	First section, second line – 'enables' not 'enable'
General	When a text section is closed using the 'close' feature, the whole screen seems to leap/blip in a way it doesn't if the icon to the left of the heading is used. While not the end of the world it's a bit disconcerting.

Provide a description of your general impressions of the site.

My general impressions of the site are very good. The layout is straight forward, navigation around the site was simple, and I found the whole thing easy to use. The content is very thorough indeed.

In particular, I like the way the different sections opened and closed (as good a way of handling large chunks of text as I've come across), the notes from the case-studies and the Q&A sections are useful, the interactive learning elements work well, and the ability to collect a 'basket' of references is also useful.

However, the site's comprehensive coverage of the subject may be a slight weakness. Despite the admirably reader-friendly sections into which the text has been divided, and the intention to make it easy to dip into – both of which are well done - there is a huge amount of information here. To take it all in properly from scratch I would have to spread the reading of it over several sessions, and might find it easier to use a printed version of some sections (the print versions looked very good).

There are only a few spelling mistakes I spotted – my apologies for not having noted them better.

Have they come across a resource like this before?

I haven't seen any other resources for online interviewing, and more generally, this is the first time I have used a website which presents such a large amount of material in the way this site does. However, I have used sites before which have interactive elements, similar to the 'learning' sections, and which enable you to collect references as this site does.

Could you describe how you might use the site?

Although I have no plans to do so at the moment, should I do any research online I will undoubtedly consult this resource, and I would have no hesitation in referring students to it. I will probably direct history students to the Ethics section, as much of this applies to any form of research involving interviewing.

I like the design of the site as well, and may be tempted to incorporate some of its features into any web work I do in future, or recommend it to anyone I know who is putting together a website.

Also, the technical section is a useful reference for developing websites, regardless of whether they're for research or not.

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**DR ROB NEGRINE (THE WOMEN'S HOSPITAL, BIRMINGHAM)**

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Focus on the academic content that the material provided covers all the areas you would expect to see, references you would expect to see. If you could approach the task as you would a peer review for an academic paper.

Excellent content.

Large amount of references.

I liked the section on interviews – very useful and reassuring of what to do and how to them

Good content with regards to confidentiality and ethics

Any technical problems you experienced broken links etc. - nil

Provide a description of your general impressions of the site.

Nicely put together.

Attractive. Good use of pictures to break up text.

Easy to use bullet points and drop down headings.

Have they come across a resource like this before?

No

Could you describe how you might use the site?

For gathering background information for research, answering questions when stuck in setting up/ organising a project.