
Q&A Summary & External Resources

Exploring guidance on non-genuine participants in online research

Wednesday 15 October 2025

On 15 October 2025, UKRIO hosted *Exploring guidance on non-genuine participants in online research*, an event in its 2025/2026 [Expert Webinar series](#). In this session, the charity was joined by researchers from the University of Nottingham, who introduced new guidelines to address the growing problem of non-genuine participation in online research.

During the webinar, the project team outlined the guidance, discussed how it can be used to uphold good research practice, and participated in a Q&A with attendees.

This summary document contains:

1. Responses to unanswered questions submitted to the Q&A
2. External resources highlighted by attendees during the session

You can view a full recording and other summary materials from the event [here](#).

Q&A responses

The following contains written responses to questions submitted to the Q&A that were unanswered during the event.

Note that light edits have been made to some questions for clarity and consistency, and questions addressing overlapping themes have been consolidated. Only questions directly relating to the guidance and topic of the event have been included in this document.

Disclaimer: The responses provided in this document are intended as general guidance to support good research practice. They are not a substitute for institutional policies, legal requirements, or professional advice.

1. [How do financial incentives influence the likelihood of non-genuine participation, and are there ways to design fair yet fraud-resistant compensation models?](#)

We do believe financial incentives may be one of the reasons for seeing increased numbers of non-genuine participation. Please refer to the guidelines for information on how this can be mitigated.

2. [How did you determine which participants were genuine or non-genuine, and what measures were taken during sampling and recruitment to prevent or mitigate this issue?](#)

Please refer to the following information in the guidelines:

“Determine which participants are genuine or not is a very complex problem. In the studies we have reviewed or been involved in, different methods have been used and therefore a consistent approach is hard to recommend. Given this evolving issue requiring different strategies as previous ones become obsolete, we would advise looking at the guidelines and using the list of resources to find appropriate examples applicable to individual studies.”

3. [What methods \(e.g., IP tracking, physical address verification\) are effective for detecting non-genuine participants, and how do tools like VPNs complicate this?](#)

Please refer to the guidelines and its resources for information on effective methods for detecting non-genuine participants.

4. [Did you use a screener? Is it ethical to use a screener to screen out genuine participants, and can they be evaded?](#)

In the guidelines, we suggest the use of a screener where appropriate. It should also be considered that it can be an ethical issue *not* to screen – such as when other participants might come into contact with non-genuine responders or if the resulting findings are not representative.

5. [What role should journals, funders, and publishers play in ensuring that participant authenticity is addressed and reported in research outputs and funding applications?](#)

This is a developing area, and we would advocate journals, funders, and publishers take time to consider their role in this.

6. [Do you have any advice on the ethical implications of remuneration with suspected fraudulent participants when they are only suspected as fraudulent?](#)

This depends on each study, but having an agreement in place to check before remuneration (such as a phone call/video call if there is suspected fraudulence) helps mitigate this. Please see the guidelines for further information.

7. Is there a way to be able to statistically adjust study findings to perhaps account for the "fake-ness" of the results?

This is an interesting idea, though this is not our area of expertise

8. How can researchers ensure inclusivity and equitable access (which has been a major focus in recent years) when screening out suspected fraudulent or problematic responses? There is a risk that such screening could wrongly exclude legitimate participants or lead to complaints if payment is withheld in error.

We agree that inclusivity and accessibility are important in research. In the guidelines we suggest working with lived experience groups to ensure decisions are made whilst also considering the community.

9. These are sometimes called 'imposter participants'. Is there any reason for the use of the term 'non-genuine' in this project? Does it matter?

We spent time considering the terminology when developing the guidelines. Because there are instances when issues happen where participants are not imposters, we decided 'non-genuine' was a more inclusive term.

10. Why do non-genuine participants take part in studies, if not for money?

The purpose of the guidelines was not to explain motives for why non-genuine responders may take part in studies. We suggest reviewing the guidelines and resources to understand the aims of this project further.

11. Did the research team include people with lived experience of the effect being researched?

Absolutely. In the guidelines we suggest working with lived experience groups to ensure decisions are made whilst also considering the community.

12. What exactly is a bot?

Please refer to the guidelines for further information on terminology.

13. Is there a directory of fraudulent participants so people could check whether emails or other identifiers have previously been reported as suspicious? Would this be tricky to enact for reasons related to data and privacy?

We are not aware of such a directory. This is an evolving issue, so may be something to consider.

14. You advised that a protocol should be created – how could this help?

In the guidelines we suggest that a protocol will help the researchers consider the steps they should take in the event of non-genuine participants taking part in their research. One of the reasons for this is to be transparent about the process you will follow. Please see the guidelines for further information.

15. I am tempted to explicitly state in recruitment material going forward interested participants will be screen for non-genuine participation. Is this something researchers are doing?

Consideration should be given to how much information is provided on what screening will be carried out, which could subsequently be used by non-genuine participants to prepare for how to bypass screening.

In the guidelines we do propose the following example wording might be helpful to be added to participant information:

“Due to a significant rise in non-genuine participants taking part in research, we have implemented a few steps to ensure the integrity of the data collected. Inconsistent enquiries will be checked by the research team before participation and/or reimbursement. Participants believed to have completed multiple responses will not be reimbursed.”

16. Please can you share your experience with regards to implementing the guidelines and how they have been embraced by researchers who have not yet experienced fraudulent participation?

As the guidelines have only recently been published, we are not yet aware of how they have been embraced by other researchers. We hope to look into this in the future.

17. Have similar issues with suspicious or non-genuine participants been observed when recruitment takes place outside social media platforms – for example, within patient or carer networks?

There have been examples of non-genuine responders being recruited from closed networks. We advise reviewing the further resources included in the guidelines for examples of this.

18. I sense AI is being used to screen online recruitment material and generate narratives. Is there any evidence of this?

In these guidelines, we are not aiming to provide information on motives or strategies used by non-genuine responders. From our knowledge on the area, we are not aware of AI being reportedly used in this way.

19. [Is it a challenge to manage anonymous online surveys and ensure genuine participation? If so, would you recommend moving away from anonymous surveys?](#)

Given this complex and evolving issue, different strategies might be required for different methods. Consideration should be applied to determine if identification methods alone would remove instances of non-genuine participation.

20. [Do you think omitting information about a prize draw in the study advert would be advisable to avoid non-genuine participation?](#)

We do believe financial incentives may be one of the reasons for seeing increased numbers of non-genuine participation and in the guidelines, we suggest avoiding terms relating to this.

21. [How do you manage this issue in exploratory research, and do you find that previously being 'burned' by this problem may taint your view on your data?](#)

The issue of non-genuine responders should be considered for all types of studies. We suggest reading the guidelines for key questions you may consider ahead of your research. As touched upon during the webinar, this issue also impacts researchers at an individual level, and we do believe the experience can impact on your view of conducting research.

22. [What role do you think online data collection platforms should be playing to address this issue with non-genuine participants?](#)

We would advocate that data collection platforms take time to consider how this issue might impact their use.

23. [If incentives are involved in a research project, is there guidance on how to formulate this during the recruitment process – specifically with regards to the ethics application?](#)

We do believe financial incentives may be one of the reasons for seeing increased numbers of non-genuine participation and therefore in the guidelines suggest avoiding terms relating to this in recruitment materials. We also provide guidance on developing protocols ahead of applying to ethics committees to support this. Please refer to the guidelines for more information.

24. [Are strategies for preventing non-genuine participation different for longer online studies or experiments \(for example, those lasting over an hour\)?](#)

We are not currently aware if length impacts non-genuine participation. However, we do believe different strategies might be required for different methods. Please see the guidelines for further information.

25. The presentation mentioned the use of single-use links for surveys. Could the same approach be used for participant registration, and if so, which platforms or tools are available to generate single-use links?

We propose some verification methods could help to reduce non-genuine participation. We suggest looking at the resources in the guidelines for ideas of which platforms other research studies may have used.

External resources from attendees

The following resources were highlighted by attendees as useful on the topic of non-genuine participants in online research and related good practice.

Disclaimer: The inclusion of these resources does not imply endorsement by UKRIO or the University of Nottingham project team; they are provided solely for the convenience of audience members seeking to learn more about the issue and ways to uphold high standards of research integrity.

- Husted, M., Dowrick, A., Porter, R., Velo Higuera, M., Whitmore, C., Evered, J., Kennedy, M., & Scott, S. D. (2025). Imposter Participants in Synchronous Qualitative Research: A Systematic Scoping Review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069251342542> (Original work published 2025)
- Black, S., Connelly, L., Osborne, N., & Terras, M. (2024). Voucher Now Please: How to Navigate AI Bots and Fraudulent and Mischievous Responders in Online Research. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13781881>
- Husted, M., Dowrick, A., Porter, R., Velo Higuera, M., Whitmore, C., Evered, J., Kennedy, M., & Scott, S. D. (2025). Imposter Participants in Synchronous Qualitative Research: A Systematic Scoping Review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069251342542> (Original work published 2025)
- Probert B, Godber J, Drummond A. Too good to be true: Hidden challenges of online research recruitment. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2025;88(8):465-466. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03080226251323062>

- Stafford, L., Pike, A. C., & Preston, C. E. J. (2025). "I feel full with shame": A qualitative perspective on gastric interoceptive sensibility. *Appetite*, 276, 108299. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2025.108299>
- Ching, B.C.F., Ani, C., Pitt, A., Eager, S., Simonoff, E. and Downs, J. (2025), Editorial Perspective: A call for action on imposter participants in child and adolescent mental health research. *Child Adolesc Ment Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.70041>
- Schneider, J., Ahuja, L., Dietch, J. R., Folan, A. M., Coleman, J., & Bogart, K. (2024). Addressing fraudulent responses in quantitative and qualitative internet research: case studies from body image and appearance research. *Ethics & Behavior*, 35(7), 514–526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2024.2411400>
- How the internet and its bots are sabotaging scientific research (July 28, 2025). The Conversation.com Mark Forshaw, Edge Hill University and Jekaterina Schneider, University of the West of England: <https://theconversation.com/how-the-internet-and-its-bots-are-sabotaging-scientific-research-261796>



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