

## Re-exploring the online surveys: Research tools in COVID times

Dear Editor,

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has made pursuing researches challenging in view of risk of transmission of disease from study participants and their caregiver to the healthcare professional or even vice versa.<sup>[1]</sup> This is in addition to reduced number of operative procedures, as many hospitals are engaged in treating COVID patients. Many researchers have found the virus interesting and the literature is now getting filled up with information, publications, and updates as the disease is unfolding itself. While on the other hand, the non-COVID-related studies have taken a brake. Hence, scientists have started to utilize this time for getting the answers of unsolved queries through online surveys and reaching a consensus. The surveys can gather response even from a large number of people working in the same field no matter even if they are geographically widely distributed. The process is simplified and expediated by online tools that have made it time saving. Online surveys cater to a great way to hold audiences engaged and getting meaningful responses. The flexibility in administration in terms of feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and widespread coverage makes online surveys unique in research data collection.<sup>[2,3]</sup> There are many free and paid online survey tools that can be judiciously used to capture the relevant data addressed by the research questions. The paid versions albeit allow for greater flexibility and response options including multiple-choice responses,

radio buttons, dropdowns, and rating scales grids. Majority of the survey software can set up an agreement to participate from the responder and also uses information from the previous response to proceed further in survey.<sup>[4]</sup>

The clinical research in the current year is undergoing a transformation with an increasing trend towards availability and usage of several online survey tools using various web-based data management platforms like REDCap, developed by Vanderbilt university consortium. There also include commercial products like Survey Monkey, Zoomerang, and Qualtrics that provides online easy to use survey development tools and other useful settings for automatic emailing to study participants.<sup>[5]</sup> It is also imperative that the transition from traditional paper-pencil format to Web-based surveys not to ignore the core principles of designing good quality data collection instruments. The most widely used online surveys include SoGoSurvey, Survey Monkey, Type form, Google Forms, Client Heartbeat, Zoho Survey, Survey Gizmo, and Survey Planet. Among these Google forms and Sogosurvey are the widely used online tools that provide options for free skip logic.<sup>[4]</sup>

Amidst to the difference in epidemiology of COVID-19 outbreaks and its clinical presentations across nations and different health systems, online platforms can also play a key role in information exchange and serving a standardized data collection and mutual accordance of response across

hospitals. Remarkably, the clinician-scientists should not undermine the opportunities for developing a sustainable collaborative research network with all service providers by using existing clinical registries or developing research platforms in collaboration with apex bodies such as Indian Council of medical research and other critical care societies.

It is also imperative that the transition from traditional paper-pencil format to Web-based surveys and platforms not to ignore the core principles of designing good quality data collection instruments and adherence to ethical guidelines.

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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