QuestionPro

Ensuring Ethical Standards and Data Security in Human Research with QuestionPro

Executive Summary

As researchers and IRB stakeholders assess the tools used to collect data from human research participants, security, privacy, and ethical stewardship of personal information remain paramount. QuestionPro, a leading survey and data collection platform, offers a comprehensive suite of data security protocols designed to protect research subjects from risks associated with data breaches, loss of confidentiality, and unauthorized access.

This document provides an overview of QuestionPro's security infrastructure and privacy safeguards—framed from the perspective of the human subject. It supports researchers and IRB offices in evaluating whether QuestionPro is an ethically sound and secure platform for conducting human subjects research.

Introduction

Conducting research involving human subjects requires strict adherence to ethical guidelines and regulatory standards to safeguard participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) play a crucial role in ensuring research methodologies comply with established ethical frameworks.

QuestionPro, a comprehensive survey and research platform, is designed to meet these standards with robust security features, privacy safeguards, and extensive compliance certifications. By ensuring both data protection and participant safety, QuestionPro facilitates smoother IRB approvals and ethical research practices.

QuestionPro: A Secure and Compliant Research Platform

QuestionPro is designed to meet the diverse needs of researchers while upholding the highest standards of data security and ethical compliance. Its extensive certifications and adherence to global regulations make it a trustworthy choice for conducting research involving human subjects.

Key Compliance Certifications and Features

- **P1 to P4 Data Security Approval:** The University of California, Irvine (UCI) has approved QuestionPro for handling data classified from Protection Level 1 (P1) to Protection Level 4 (P4), ensuring it can manage highly sensitive information securely. More information here

- **ISO 27001:2013 Certification:** An internationally recognized standard for information security management systems, ensuring systematic management of sensitive data.
- **GDPR and CCPA Compliance:** Ensures lawful and transparent data processing aligned with privacy regulations.
- **HIPAA Compliance:** Safeguards personal health information for studies involving Protected Health Information (PHI).
- **Section 508 Compliance:** Ensures accessibility for individuals with disabilities in accordance with U.S. Federal Accessibility Guidelines.
- **FERPA Compliance:** Protects student educational records in research contexts.
- **Federalwide Assurance (FWA) Number:** Assigned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, signifying a commitment to protecting human research subjects.
- **IRB Approvals:** Over 1,000 universities worldwide have approved the use of QuestionPro for research involving human subjects.

Features Supporting Ethical Research Practices

- **Informed Consent Management:**
  - Customizable consent forms ensure participants are fully informed about the research scope and their rights.
  - Researchers can design multi-step informed consent processes to ensure participants clearly understand the objectives, risks, and data usage before proceeding.
- **Data Anonymization:**
  - Researchers can anonymize data to protect participant identities, aligning with ethical research standards.
  - Advanced anonymization tools allow for secure data masking and randomization, ensuring confidentiality throughout the research cycle.
- **Participant Data Access and Control:**
  - Participants can withdraw consent, and researchers can delete their data upon request.
  - Data retention settings allow researchers to define when participant data should be deleted or anonymized.
  - Researchers can provide participants with a clear method to request data deletion, supporting transparency and respecting participant rights.
- **Encryption:**
  - **Data in transit** is secured via TLS 1.2 encryption, and **data at rest** is protected using AES 256-bit encryption to ensure confidentiality.
  - End-to-end encryption ensures all transmitted data remains private and secure, even during data export or transfer.
- **Access Control:**
  - Role-based access controls (RBAC) limit data access within research teams.
  - Multi-factor authentication (MFA) provides additional security for account access.
  - Customizable access permissions allow administrators to assign roles with specific data access privileges.

- Comprehensive Audit Trails:
  - Detailed logs of data access and modifications promote transparency and accountability.
  - Audit trail capabilities help IRB offices track actions related to participant data and ensure compliance with institutional guidelines.
- **Participant Risk Mitigation:**
  - Researchers can minimize data collection to gather only what's essential for the study.
  - Surveys can be password-protected and restricted to invite-only access to prevent unauthorized submissions.
  - Researchers can apply data minimization principles to limit unnecessary data points while ensuring research goals are met.
- **Data Breach Response Plan:**
  - In the unlikely event of a breach, QuestionPro maintains a documented response plan to ensure transparency and swift remediation.
  - The response plan outlines steps for containment, risk mitigation, notification, and investigation to minimize participant risk.
- **Transparency and Communication:**
  - Researchers can clearly outline QuestionPro's data protection measures in recruitment and consent materials to build participant trust.
  - Transparent data handling policies ensure participants are fully aware of how their information will be managed, stored, and deleted.

Conclusion

QuestionPro's extensive compliance certifications, coupled with its advanced security features, make it a compelling choice for researchers conducting studies involving human subjects. Its alignment with global data protection regulations and ethical standards not only facilitates IRB approvals but also ensures the integrity and credibility of the research process.

By prioritizing participant safety, data protection, and transparency, QuestionPro empowers researchers to conduct meaningful studies while safeguarding human subjects throughout the research journey. For further information on QuestionPro's security measures or to request detailed documentation, please visit the QuestionPro Security Center or contact our team for a consultation.

For further inquiries or assistance, please contact us at
edu@questionpro.com