Reviewer’s report

Title: Internet trials: Participant experiences and perspectives

Version: 1 Date: 4 September 2012

Reviewer: Janie Busby Grant

Reviewer’s report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The nature of the questions included in the survey needs to be clarified, and the means by which the ‘trade-offs’ were identified specified.

   The authors state that six trade-offs were identified in participant responses - these are discussed in detail and are the primary contribution of the article to the literature. However it is currently unclear how these were extracted from participant responses (what were the open-ended questions that elicited these responses?), and how these relate to listed advantages and disadvantages. For instance, were these six trade-offs generated by the researchers based on lists of answers to questions about advantages and disadvantages separately (essentially interpretations of participant responses), were the trade-offs specifically listed by participants as such originally (i.e., did a given participant have to provide both advantage and disadvantage), or were they defined by the researchers in the survey and participants merely responded to advantages/disadvantages of each (so the six themes had been pre-generated)? Each of these options engender very different interpretations by the reader and thus this need to be clarified. Although there are some references to the survey that in part address this, it needs to be specified directly to avoid confusion and assist interpretation.

2. Appendix 1 – the ‘star’ system used is not appropriate.

   Use of frequency and percentage data is an appropriate way to summarise the kind of data reported here. It seems as though this data is actually more important than that provided in the earlier tables in terms of contribution to the literature. It needs to be provided in the text and in a more accurate, professional format. This would go some way towards addressing the problems raised in point (1) through clarifying the nature and content of participant responses.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. It is important to note why RCTs are advantages compared to other methods when discussing their increased use.

2. The authors note there are major differences (more a spectrum) in terms of use of the internet within RCTs, whether just for recruitment, recruitment and data collection, presentation etc. Should specify how this study pertains to the different types of trials.
3. Many of the ‘negative’ comments regarding the trial seem to similarly apply to non-internet-based trials (e.g., problems with subjective reporting methodologies). This should be discussed.

4. The authors should expand further on the statement in the Introduction regarding ‘transferability of findings’ – this is an important point that should be discussed.

- Discretionary Revisions

1. Suggest dropping the ‘short survey’ from the paper as the number of participants is low, its relevance is unclear and the data is not well utilised.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interest