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For marketing research and insights professionals

PLUS

How to choose and manage your research partners

Pro Insights: AI and marketing research

An open letter on data fraud

ADVERTISING SECTIONS

8 Top Segmentation Research Companies

21 Top Health Care Research Companies

OUTLOOK 

2025 RESEARCH TRENDS AND TOPICS

**SEPARATING
MYTH
FROM
REALITY**

Client-side researcher strategies for protecting panel data integrity



Quirk's Marketing Research Review

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

VOLUME XXXIX NUMBER 1

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Dirty facility	296	
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Poor hygiene practices	145	
▼ Equipment and Amenities		
Broken/malfunctioning equipment	305	
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Outdated/poor quality equipment	149	
Disorganized equipment	133	
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Unfriendly/unhelpful staff	300	

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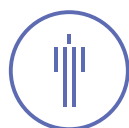
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4662 Slater Road | Eagan, MN 55122
651-379-6200 | www.quirks.com

Publisher • Steve Quirk
steve@quirks.com | x202

Editor • Joseph Rydholm
joe@quirks.com | x204

Digital Content Editor • Emily Koenig
emilyk@quirks.com | x210

Assistant News and Content Editor • Marlen Ramirez
marlen@quirks.com | x212

Audience Development • Ralene Miller
ralene@quirks.com | x201

Magazine Production • Sarah Freske
sarah@quirks.com | x216

Directory Sales • Ilana Benusa
ilana@quirks.com | x213

V.P. Sales • Evan Tweed
evan@quirks.com | x205

Sales • Tammy Slatinsky
tammy@quirks.com | x215

European Sales • Stewart Tippler
stewart@quirks.com | +44(0)7989-422937

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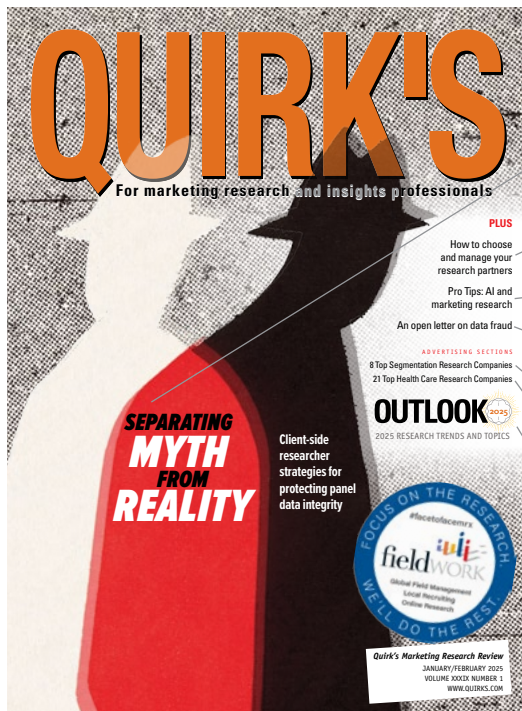
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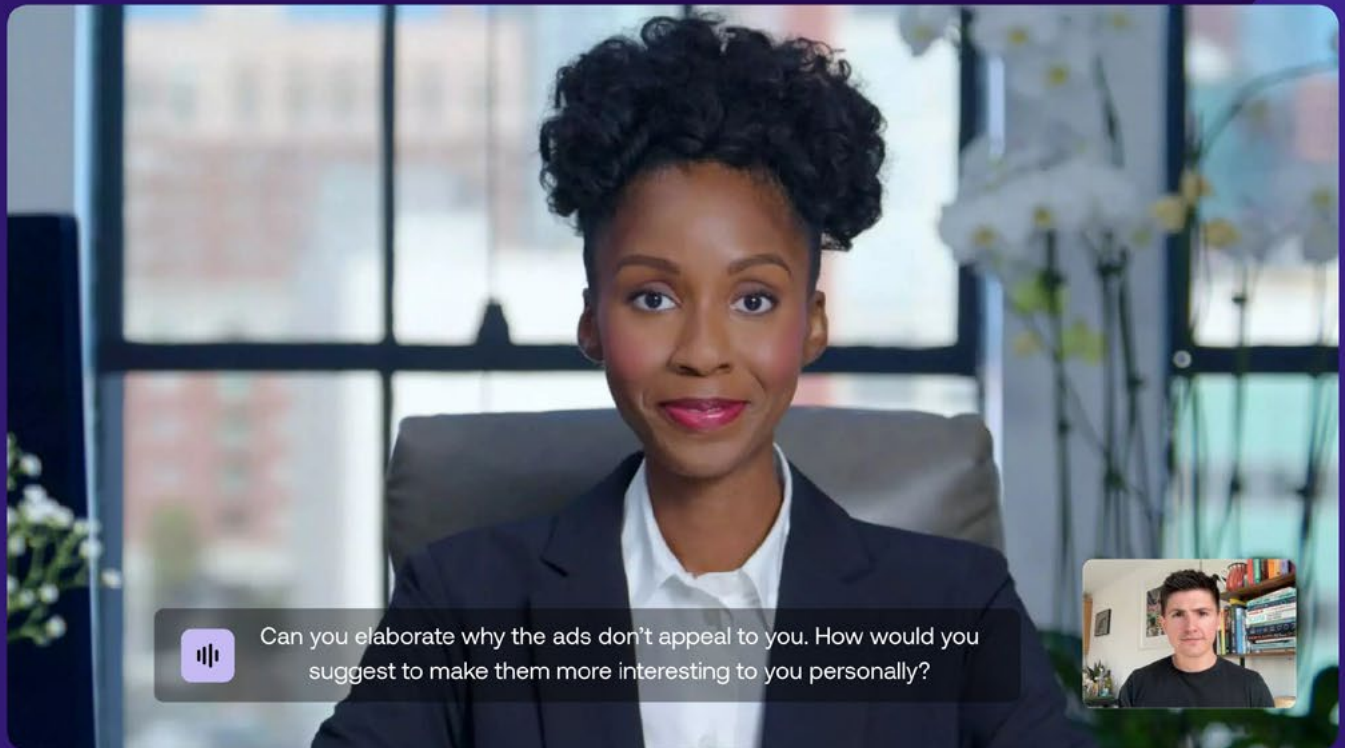
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The End of Traditional Research

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<https://www.quirksawards.com>
- Stay up to date on industry trends with Quirk's e-newsletter!
<https://bit.ly/3R5Zdoe>
- Write for Quirk's!
<https://bit.ly/49UaEAq>

Kick the year off with Quirk's Event – Los Angeles

The Quirk's Event heads back to Los Angeles on February 26-27 and to a new location in Chicago on April 2-3. Fellow researchers will share case studies, innovative ideas and so much more! Don't miss connecting with insights professionals from brands that don't attend any other industry events. Register today with code Discount15 for 15% off your ticket at <https://bit.ly/4fCcNCz!>



// Noted Posts

Quirk's Blog

Research brings real protection for scam victims in the U.K. and beyond

<https://bit.ly/3ZW3asG>

Creating an indispensable client-side insights and analytics team

<https://bit.ly/405BS39>

Ingredients for quality taste testing research

<https://bit.ly/3xhvTh1>

Research Industry Voices

Storytelling in research: How to gain insights from the hidden truths in our stories

<https://bit.ly/3C1bAH7>

10 pitfalls to avoid while strategic planning

<https://bit.ly/421z2P0>

Creating meaningful connections: The hidden power of emotions in marketing research

<https://bit.ly/4gRaoVA>

Research Careers Blog

6 issues challenging Gen Z career advancement

<https://bit.ly/4gVzyCm>

Insights on employee satisfaction, tech adoption and workplace wellness programs

<https://bit.ly/3BMQxIo>

Leadership orientations: How to balance task-oriented and people-oriented leadership

<https://bit.ly/4fCb8gj>

// E-newsworthy

Top marketing research and insights articles of 2024 from Quirk's newsletter

2024 editors' choice articles

Breaking barriers: How investing in girls' sports drives brand growth

Millennials are shaping financial tech's future: A blueprint for brands

Empowering social change through research: How qualitative methods drive a regenerative future

Scan to access all e-newsletter articles.



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January through June 2025

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Market Research Essentials: Real World Applications for Business Success

VIRTUAL: \$3,275
Jan 28-31 Apr 29-May 2

Designing Effective Surveys: A Step by Step Workshop

VIRTUAL: \$3,275
Feb 25-28 May 13-16

Market Research for Understanding Customers, Brands & Products: An Insights Toolkit

VIRTUAL: \$2,880
Feb 11-13

Market Segmentation: From Design to Activation

VIRTUAL: \$3,275
May 6-9

Fundamentals of Pricing Research:

Analytical Techniques for Different Strategies
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June 11-12

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Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning & Text Analytics

VIRTUAL: \$295
Feb 19 May 14

New!

Navigating Today's Online Sample Sources: Debunking Industry Myths to Maximize Confidence in Your Data

VIRTUAL: \$295
Mar 27

New!

Shopper Science Toolkit: Best Practices to Understand Changing Shopper Behavior

VIRTUAL: \$295
May 22

Data Analysis & Reporting

Data Analysis & Interpretation: Turning Data Into Insights

VIRTUAL DATE: TBD

Creating Actionable Research Reports: Insights, Storytelling, Data Visualization

VIRTUAL: \$3,275
Mar 18-21

Moderating & Facilitating

Moderator Training Essentials: A Hands-on Workshop

VIRTUAL: \$3,390
Feb 4-7 June 3-6

IN-PERSON (Cincinnati): \$3,550
Apr 8-10

Advanced Moderator Skills: Tools & Techniques

VIRTUAL: \$3,390
Mar 11-14

Becoming an Effective Facilitator: Ideation to Insights

IN-PERSON (Cincinnati): \$2,925
May 20-21

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In Case You Missed It

news and notes on marketing and research



... employee research

The perils of the passionate employee

When plotting their career trajectories, young professionals are often encouraged to follow their passion. After all, passion is seen as a key ingredient for success. But this drive is not without its dangers – including what researchers call “performance overconfidence.”

When it comes to managing for passion, it’s important to consider the employee’s role, says Erica Bailey, assistant professor in the management of organizations group at the Haas School of Business, UC Berkeley, and co-author of the study “A

potential pitfall of passion: Passion is associated with performance overconfidence,” published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

For example, entrepreneurs, consultants and salespeople may benefit from passion overconfidence. But it must be tempered in roles that require people to have an accurate view of their abilities, like surgeons, pilots or insights professionals.

The challenge is that many managers encourage and even cultivate fervor in their team members. “There are lots of benefits to having passionate employees. They’re going to bring energy to the meetings. They’re going to move things forward,” Bailey says. “But you have to think carefully about how to manage the risks that could come from your own biases towards passionate employees.”

Managers need to also consider the biases of their passionate employees, who are less likely to delegate, see blind spots or be team players. “Managers have to think about how the passionate person is perceived by their horizontal coworkers and how to help them manage that reputation so that these groups can work together effectively.”



... ai

Study: Putting guardrails on AI can actually spur innovation

Corporate efforts to use AI in a more socially responsible way have a surprising benefit – they can often improve product quality, according to a national survey of company officials. The officials surveyed ranked product quality as the area of their businesses that received the most value from implementing responsible AI management (RAIM) practices – even above more obvious choices, such as reducing regulatory and legal risk.

This survey didn’t ask how RAIM improved product quality and this finding will need more study, says one of the leaders of the survey, Dennis Hirsch, faculty director of The Ohio State University’s Program on Data Governance, but the preliminary take is that it improves product quality by promoting AI innovation and better meeting customer expectations, Hirsch says. A separate 2018 study by the Program on Data and Governance may explain how this works. People think of data governance as inhibiting innovation, because it restricts what people can do. But it may be the opposite, according to those interviewed for the 2018 study. “If employees have standards and policies and guidelines about how they can use AI, they can innovate with a lot more confidence. It can actually unleash innovation, rather than dampen it,” Hirsch says.

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Nestlé

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ANORA

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Researchers ready for another busy year

What are your plans for 2025? As part of our most recent Q Report survey of client-side Quirk's readers we asked a variation on that question to get an idea of what respondents saw as happening for themselves and their insights departments in the coming months. The responses highlight a convergence of innovation, efficiency and adaptation to budgetary pressures – pretty similar to responses we've received in past years. Apparently, the more things change, the more they stay the same!

The rise of AI

A dominant theme, natch, was the increasing integration of AI into marketing research workflows. Organizations are exploring AI for various applications, including:

Automating research tasks: AI is being leveraged to streamline mundane activities, such as coding open-ended survey responses, data cleaning and report-generation to reduce costs and improve turnaround times.

Enhancing insights: Researchers are deploying generative AI tools to analyze complex data sets, uncover deeper insights and even generate synthetic data to fill gaps in existing research.

Scalability and efficiency: Companies are turning to AI to "do more with less," a necessity in an era of tight budgets. Whether through AI-powered analysis or agile platforms, efficiency is and probably always will be a key focus.

Budget constraints and resourcefulness

Economic pressures were a recurring theme, with many organizations facing reduced budgets and limited resources. The following trends reflect how companies are adapting:

DIY: Many mentioned conducting research in-house to save costs. This trend includes using DIY platforms and leveraging existing internal resources rather than outsourcing to full-service agencies.

Selective spending: Organizations are becoming more strategic with their research investments, prioritizing foundational studies and recurring programs like brand tracking while cutting back on ad-hoc projects.

Vendor reevaluation: Many are reassessing their partnerships with research vendors, seeking cost-effective solutions that better align with budgets.

The need for speed and agility

Organizations also cited a drive for agility in their research processes. Respondents highlighted:

Faster turnaround times: Speed remains a critical factor in decision-making, prompting the adoption of agile research methods and real-time data analysis.

Hybrid approaches: Companies are blending traditional and newer methods, such as combining survey research with behavioral analytics or integrating primary and secondary data sources.

Streamlined processes: Simplification and centralization were key themes, with many respondents mentioning efforts to create cohesive insights teams or implement centralized research models.

The growing role of technology

Beyond AI, technology is reshaping how organizations conduct and manage research. Key developments include:

Knowledge management: Companies are implementing systems to store and share research findings more efficiently, reducing redundancy and ensuring insights are accessible across teams.

Upgrade those tools: Many organizations are exploring or adopting new platforms for data collection, analysis and reporting, often incorporating features like social listening and real-time dashboards.

Data integration: There's a continued focus on integrating diverse data sources – both structured and unstructured –



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Joe Rydholm can be reached at joer@quirks.com

into cohesive systems that enable more comprehensive analysis.

Shifts in structures and strategies

Changes within organizations are also driving shifts in marketing research. Highlights include:

Team restructuring: Some companies are decentralizing research functions, pushing research responsibilities into other departments like marketing or operations.

Interdisciplinary collaboration: The integration of research with creative, strategic or data science teams seems to be on many readers' agendas, reflecting a desire for more holistic decision-making.

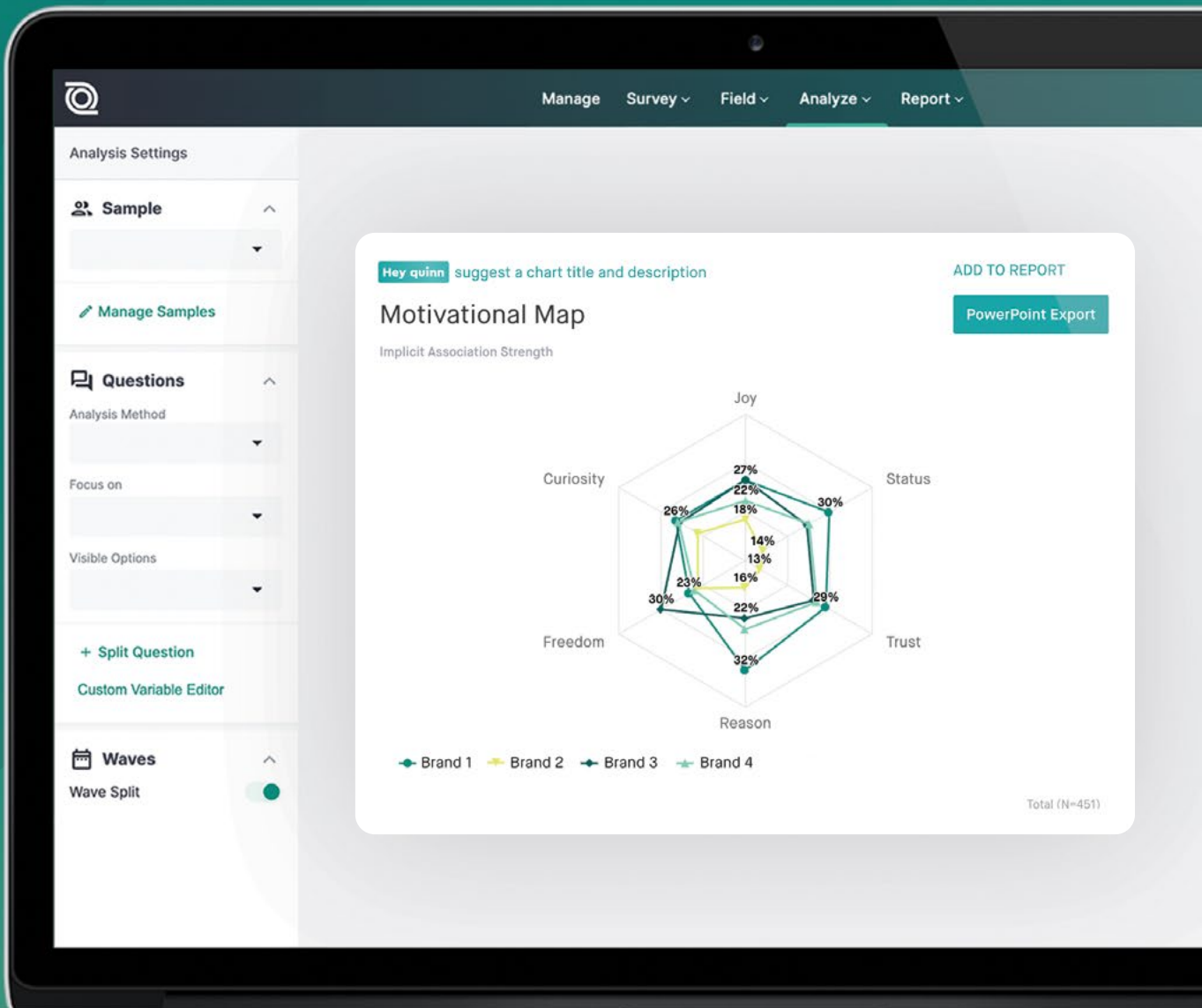
C-suite alignment: Several respondents noted an increased focus on aligning research efforts with strategic goals and ensuring findings influence high-level decisions.

Goal remains the same

The responses to our Q Report question show that researchers have a lot on their plates. From the rise of AI to the ever-present pressures of tight budgets and data quality, organizations are rethinking how they approach the insights process and are asking research functions to balance innovation, efficiency and customer focus. While the factors change from year to year, the overarching goal remains the same: delivering high-quality, actionable insights to drive business success. ①

The Consumer Intelligence Platform

Offering 15 fully automated advanced research methodologies, an easy-to-use tracking solution, and on-going support from a team of expert researchers.



QUIRK'S

OUTLOOK



COMMENTARIES BY INDUSTRY LEADERS ON THE YEAR AHEAD

Welcome to Quirk’s Outlook 2025! We asked research companies to offer their viewpoints on a range of topics to delve into some factors that will make an impact in the year ahead.

Glimpse explores digital twins and AI. CIRQ focuses on how to get certified to ISO 2025:2019. Yasna explains the importance of automated conversational research. CSS/Datatelligence explores the research industry and its potential future.

We hope this section will offer you a peek into 2025 and a sample of tips and tricks to help make this year a success.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Are you digital-twin curious?

Not all digital twins are created equal: Here's what to do about it

NEIL DIXIT

CEO, Glimpse

ADAM BAI

Chief Strategy Officer, Glimpse

Digital twins are virtual extensions of the audiences that matter most to your organization. Imagine a focus group in the room with you 24/7, providing real-time feedback about innovations and campaigns.

When we talk to marketers, innovators and researchers within brands, we're often asked how we can truly know if that feedback is both accurate and useful.

Unfortunately, claims circulating in the industry like "we give you 95% accuracy for a tenth the cost of traditional surveys" aren't helpful; in fact, it's impossible to claim "95% accuracy" across a vast number of radically different use cases.

So, should we abandon all benchmarks and accuracy metrics when it comes to digital twins and other applications of synthetic data? Of course not.

We just need a better report card!

Meet Glimpse

Glimpse is a next-generation audience discovery platform putting AI to work for innovators, marketers, researchers and creators.

From Alphabet to HubSpot, Diageo to McCann Worldgroup, leading organiza-

tions trust Glimpse's enterprise-grade approach to digital twins and synthetic data.

Everything we do is based on a foundation of high-quality first-party data, ensuring best-in-class fidelity and smarter outputs.

The promise and peril of digital twins

The potential benefits of digital twins when it comes to reduced costs, accelerated innovation, enhanced discovery of emerging market opportunities and more impactful campaigns are already clear.

But early adopters are also facing real challenges, including:

- Biased, unrepresentative or overly general results.
- Poor-quality (or outdated) data inputs leading to poor-quality (or outdated) outputs.
- Reliability issues due to badly designed models and algorithms.

We believe that Glimpse has developed industry-leading technical solutions to

many of these challenges. But successful enterprise adoption – regardless of provider – also requires a clear set of standards for evaluating the quality and value of digital twin and synthetic outputs.

A better report card

Glimpse works with clients and partners to evaluate the risks and benefits of adopting digital twins in specific business contexts.

Our digital twin report card is a great place for any organization to start their adoption journey:

- **Fidelity:** Does the data accurately replicate known quantitative distributions?
- **Realism:** How faithfully do the style, tone and emotional content of synthetic responses reflect the responses of real respondents?
- **Generalizability:** Are the outputs applicable to novel scenarios, emerging trends or new stimuli?
- **Utility:** Does the approach help achieve organizational goals (e.g., uncovering new insights, driving product innovation, shaping better messaging and so on)?

At Glimpse, we think it's time for an industry-wide conversation about when and how to adopt innovative approaches to market research, like digital twins. The benefits are potentially transformative but revolutionary technologies are always accompanied by uncertainty and confusion.

We hope that the Glimpse report card is one small step in the direction of trust and transparency.

www.glimpseahead.ai

DIGITAL TWINS—WHY QUALITATIVE DATA IS NEEDED TO BUILD REALISTIC PERSONAS

The better marketers understand the real people behind the synthetic data, the more customers they can reach

By Adam Bai and Neil Dixit. Published on August 19, 2024.



ISO 20252 CERTIFICATION



How do I get certified to ISO 20252:2019?

Be prepared for 2025 and beyond



JULIANA WOOD

Managing Director, CIRQ



ALISA WEINSTEIN

VP, Marketing, Full Circle Research

WHAT IS CIRQ?

The Certification Institute for Research Quality (CIRQ) is a subsidiary of the Insights Association, and was established in 2009 to provide audit and certification services to MRX firms seeking certification to ISO 20252:2019 and ISO 27001.



When P&G sets a July 2025 deadline for its quantitative online sample providers to be certified to ISO 20252, the industry listens – and questions. What is the ISO 20252 standard? Why does certification matter? And what exactly does the certification process entail?

In the simplest terms, ISO 20252:2019 defines best practices for how market research and insights organizations run their businesses. P&G established its requirement because compliance to ISO 20252 standardizes the identification and reporting of data quality – it is a direct response to the continued increase of market research fraud.

As data quality is increasingly becoming mission-critical for vendor contracts, new business and existing clients, it's clear that ISO 20252 will be a key driver of success in 2025 and beyond. To learn how certification can be attained for your organization, read on.

“Achieving excellence requires a commitment to consistently apply best practices. Choosing the ISO 20252 standard as a

foundation for our work has been instrumental in our delivery of insights and analytics our clients can trust.” – *Jorge Restrepo, CEO, EurekaFacts, certified since 2016*

Discovery

1. PURCHASE THE STANDARD

How do you know if you're ready for the certification process? The first thing you'll do is purchase the standard. ISO 20252:2019 *International Standard for Market, Opinion and Social Research, including Insights and Web Analytics* provides all the requirements for a compliant research process management system (Core Framework) and research methodologies (Annexes A-F). This document can be purchased from the ISO webstore for about \$200 – a worthwhile investment, even if you do not move forward with certification.

2. UNDERSTAND THE STANDARD

Your next step is understanding the standard. This is easier if you color-code (highlight) key concepts as you read:

- “shall” means you must do this – this is a requirement of the standard.
- “procedure” tells you which documented processes you need to have in place.
- “record” means you need to show evidence of performing a task/function.
- “document” means that a process must be captured in a written format.

“At first, I was intimidated by the Annexes, but after collecting team feedback on which ones applied to us, I realized the exercise was invaluable. Not only did I better understand the task ahead, I clearly saw the benefits we'd attain once we were certified.” – *Chris Foley, Director, Data Operations and ISO Quality Manager, MedSurvey, certified in 2024*

Most market research and insights firms already have about 80% of the standard's requirements in place. It's a matter of updating documentation, processes and procedures to the applicable requirements.

HOW MUCH DOES ISO 20252 COST?

Your audit and certification program application will provide the information needed for program scope and estimated costs.

3. ESTABLISH TEAM SUPPORT

This level of understanding will help you secure C-level support for certification – essential for initial and ongoing success of your ISO 20252 compliance program (this is not a one-and-done; audits are completed annually to ensure your organization continues to adhere to the standard). You will also need an internal quality or compliance manager to lead an implementation team – this person does not need to be an ISO expert; the education comes as you move through the process.

4. DETERMINE YOUR STATEMENT OF APPLICABILITY

It's also best practice to identify an "Annex owner:" a team member responsible for maintaining the procedures specific to the Annexes identified in your Statement of Applicability (SOA). (The instructions on how to create your statement are included in the standard.) Your SOA is an attestation of the services your organization provides to clients.

"Ensure that your entire team and management are fully aligned and supportive. Certification is not a burden, but an efficiency-builder that streamlines operations, enhances collaboration and ensures we speak the same language, worldwide." – *Angelina Yatsenko, Quality and Compliance Lead, USA, Oracle Life Sciences (formerly Cerner Enviza, formerly Kantar Health), certification maintained through transitions since 2014*

5. SELF-ASSESS YOUR READINESS

Upon approval of the program scope and costs, a signed agreement is required for the establishment of a certification program. Once that's completed, the self-/pre-assessment phase begins. CIRQ will send you a foundational document to complete, indicating compliance with each applicable section of ISO 20252:2019. CIRQ then evaluates your self-assessment

against the components of the standard and prepares a pre-assessment (gap analysis) report that indicates your readiness to be audited.

"Maintaining the ISO 20252 certification proves the provider functions at the pinnacle of impeccable research standards. This helps drive new business, keep existing clients happy and ensure the health and longevity of our respondent panel." – *Elsa Andersson, Compliance and Quality Manager, M3 Global Research, certified since 2011*

Audit

6. CONDUCT YOUR AUDIT

With a successful pre-assessment completed, CIRQ works with you to schedule your initial audit. This is also known as the Audit Planning process. Once all details are confirmed, an assigned CIRQ auditor will perform a full-system audit at your company's headquarters and all other in-scope office locations.

7. EARN CERTIFICATION!

Upon completion of your audit and documentation review and based on audit conclusions outlined in your Audit Report, CIRQ grants certification. This means that your organization has provided sufficient evidence of conformity to the standard's requirements. You'll receive a Final Audit Report Certificate of Compliance; the certification information is also added to the CIRQ Registry – a quick and easy way for brands and other research clients to confirm current and valid certification details.

"We look forward to our auditors' visits! Their role is to help you achieve a successful audit. The fact that the team is very friendly alleviates any stress throughout the entire process." – *Sanjeev Dixit, Vice President and ISO Quality Manager, Reason Research, certified since 2014*

Compliance

8. PROTECT YOUR CERTIFICATION

The ISO 20252:2019 certification is a three-year cycle, and two surveillance audits are performed annually as a system check and to ensure ongoing conformity with the standard. This is how you'll maintain active certification. Then, every three years from your first audit, you'll undergo a re-certification process. Upon every successful completion, an updated certificate will be issued.

"Maintaining certification creates an excellent, and necessary, motivator to continuously review and improve our internal standards regarding client and vendor relationships, project auditing, data management, sample processing, participant confidentiality, staff training and more." – *Eric Thomas, Senior Group Operations Director, Naxion, certified since 2012*

9. GIVE FEEDBACK

Note that after each annual audit, CIRQ will collect your feedback. This is your opportunity to offer any observations on the management and performance of the annual audit activity. It's how CIRQ identifies future improvements – and is highly encouraged and appreciated!

To learn more, contact Juliana Wood, CIRQ Managing Director, at juliana.wood@cirq.org or 202-370-6318.

"If you care about quality insights, you should care about the market research standard. ISO 20252 certification is the gold standard for ensuring consistent, reliable and high-quality research processes that enhance client confidence and competitive advantage." – *Alexandrine de Montera, CPO and ISO Quality Officer, Full Circle Research, certified since 2014 | CIRQ Board President*

To read the full comments from these organizations and learn more about their experiences with certification, visit cirq.org and cirq.org/qualityforall.



CONVERSATIONAL AI RESEARCH

yasna

Why conversational research matters for agency owners



ARTEM TINCHURIN

Co-Founder, Yasna

TANYA BERLINA

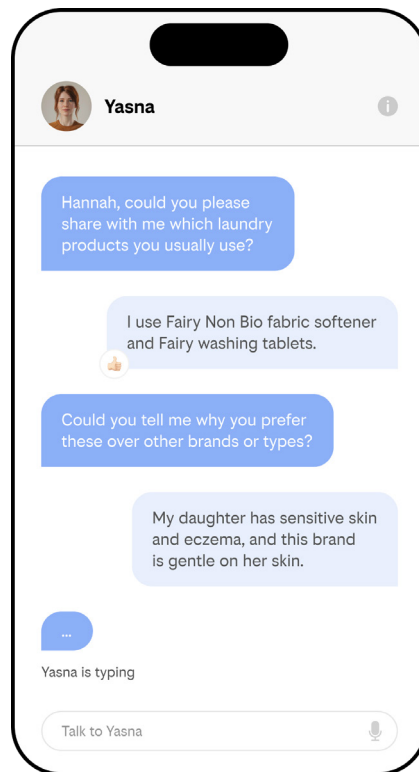
Client Success Director, Yasna

Automated conversational research (aCR) is a hot topic with immense potential, and for good reason. AI has made it possible to automate in-depth interviews, and it works remarkably well: Participants enjoy the process and the quality of data is not just comparable to traditional qualitative projects, it can even surpass it due to larger, more diverse samples. This quantitative sample diversity minimizes the risk of missing critical insights and offers built-in significance assessments for the findings.

However, the true value of aCR extends far beyond traditional qualitative research. While it promises to enhance qualitative studies by reducing routine tasks, this shift is more of a revolution than an evolution. For qualitative researchers, whose work already leans heavily toward analytical and creative tasks, automating processes demands a radical rethinking of methodologies and practices. Similar to the transition from paper-based to online research, this change is transformative but requires significant adaptation. Moreover, qualitative research represents only a small fraction of the entire research industry, limiting the broader impact of automating this segment. That said, those qualitative researchers who embrace this transformation stand to gain a significant competitive edge.

For agency owners and managers, the real opportunity lies in leveraging aCR for quantitative research. This is where the potential for transformation – and business impact – is the greatest:

1. No overhaul of existing approaches: Adding a qualitative layer to quantitative research is now as straightforward as, if not simpler than, running a purely quantitative study.
2. New opportunities for depth and confidence: Many research scenarios could benefit from combining depth (qualitative insights) and confidence (quantitative validation), yet this has historically been difficult to achieve in practice; aCR removes these barriers.



Yasna.ai is an end-to-end conversational research platform for automated in-depth interviewing backed with numbers.

With aCR, quantitative researchers gain access to more efficient and accessible qualitative tools that they can integrate directly (and on their own!) into their workflows. This not only helps solve client challenges more effectively but also strengthens their competitive position.

Applications of aCR

- Qualitative insights supplementing quantitative studies: Before, to enhance the quality of quantitative research, or after, to provide deeper understanding of results.
- Expanding research geographies: While conducting surveys in distant markets like Argentina is now feasible, conducting pre-survey qualitative research in unfamiliar territories is often a real challenge that aCR can address.
- Short, focused projects: aCR makes previously impractical small-scale, targeted studies more achievable.
- Integration into agile R&D formats: aCR enables research within fast-paced, often under-researched settings like workshops and strategic sessions.

With Yasna.ai, our aCR platform, researchers can transform the way they approach both qualitative and quantitative studies, overcoming traditional barriers and unlocking new possibilities. Designed to address the real challenges faced by researchers, Yasna automates routine tasks while remaining flexible and customizable when needed. Offering human-like quality in interviewing and a superhuman ability to analyze unstructured data, Yasna empowers you to seamlessly combine depth and confidence in your research.

Experience the magic of an effortlessly powerful tool – visit yasna.ai and try it for free today.

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EVOLVING RESEARCH NEEDS



CSS/datatelligence
A CRG GLOBAL COMPANY

The evolving research landscape

Innovation, agility, context and consumer closeness

PIPPA BAILEY

SVP Strategy and Innovation,
CSS/Datatelligence

A recent series of client interviews conducted by CSS/Datatelligence across a diverse array of consumer packaged goods categories revealed key insights into the industry's current state, opportunities and the evolving role of research and insights within organizations.

Wanted: Industry insiders: Agency partners who can provide broader knowledge and context are in the greatest demand. Clients need to stay on top of the constantly evolving competitor landscape and consumer trends. Agencies that can bring this understanding to their clients elevate their role from just a provider of research to a true partner.

Desire for storytelling: The desire for good storytelling remains a constant but with that comes the need for researchers to provide a more consultative layer. Agency-side researchers have a huge knowledge base, drawn across numerous categories, countries and research learnings which could be employed more explicitly in guiding clients.

Consumer closeness: The interviews revealed a powerful desire for greater consumer closeness, which was lost during COVID-19. Clients expressed the need to conduct more research set in real-life contexts, spend more time on front-end innovation (FEI) and explore new ways to identify disruptive opportunities. Iterative and agile testing continues to be a key interest, providing not only cost and time efficiencies but also greater consumer closeness and context.

Innovation: There is an openness towards innovation around research approaches and technologies which could be important for gaining more valid insights now and in the future. However,

clear evidence is needed of the value they bring over existing methods. FEI was consistently brought up as an area of research that warrants more focus and time. Categories are being disrupted by new entrants, changing consumer needs/wants or trends from other categories and markets infiltrating the traditional category space. FEI done well can inspire brand and R&D teams to commit more to research.

Augmented intelligence: AI's impact on the research and insights sector is not underestimated and is increasingly of interest to research buyers. However, there is healthy skepticism and interest in certain applications, mostly on the analysis of unstructured data. Many research buyers are still at the start of their AI journey, with many companies focused on driving greater efficiencies internally. The overarching view is that the best solutions will come from augmented intelligence, where humans and machines work together.

Back to basics

Beyond additional and specific insights to help inform better decisions, the interviews highlighted several key attributes that clients value in their research partners. These include:

- **Honesty and transparency:** Clients appreciate when agencies are clear about what can and cannot be delivered within a project. Transparency is crucial, especially when things don't go to plan, as it helps build trust and allows clients to be involved in deciding the best route forward.
- **Flexibility and responsiveness:** Being responsive to client requests, considering different options to address client needs while being mindful of timing and budgets is of key importance.

- **Expertise:** True research category expertise in the research being undertaken is essential. Clients value agency partners who can appropriately challenge assumptions and bring a distinct perspective.
- **Assurance on sample profile and quality:** Ensuring that the research includes target consumers as defined in the brief is vital. Sample quality is one of the biggest challenges in the market research industry today, particularly for online research. Trust in the sample equals trust in the insights.

Summing up

As we move into an ever more connected world, we have access to more data by the very nature of the digital breadcrumbs that we as humans leave behind in everything we do. However, this has not negated the need to understand the "why" of those choices and behaviors. In fact, in this time of complexity and constant change, it can be argued that there is a greater need to get close to and understand people within their everyday routines.

As pressures on budgets continue, delivering insights at-speed is crucial. There is also a focus on what research is done and getting more from each project, with sprints and blended research approaches becoming the norm. The role that agency partners should play in providing wider context and bringing a more consultative mind-set to the delivery of insights is emphasized. AI is going to be disruptive but it will be augmented intelligence (human + machine) that will win out.

To find out how CSS/Datatelligence is addressing these and other evolving research and insight needs, please get in touch.

www.crgglobalinc.com

QUIRK'S IN FOCUS

A digest of survey findings and new insights for researchers

••• travel and leisure research

Taking different paths

Young tourists are budget-conscious while Boomers seek spontaneity

Forget sandy beaches or unrivaled sightseeing: A survey by TD Bank found that 86% of Gen Z, compared to 75% of all respondents, claimed exchange rates were a main factor influencing their travel decisions.

Entertainment was another key driver among younger travelers with 27% of Gen Z and Millennials reporting entertainment events like live concerts as a primary reason for travel, compared to only 7% of Gen X and Baby Boomers. When it comes to travel destinations, it might not be a surprise that after the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, Europe attracted the most travelers with 33% of respondents jet-setting there in the past 12 months.

The data also revealed key differences in how older versus younger generations prepare their finances ahead of going on vacation. Eighty-eight percent of respondents had to save up for their recent travel, and more than half (60%) saved for up to six months before their trip. However, Baby Boomers are much more likely to vacation on-the-fly as 25% reported either spontaneous trips or not needing to save prior to travel, compared to only 8% of Gen Z and Millennials. This approach to travel trickled down into older generations' budgeting habits with 72% of Gen X and Baby

Boomers staying within their planned travel allowances compared to 80% of Gen Z and Millennials.

Ninety-four percent of Gen Z and Millennial respondents exchanged cash for their trip, with just under 30% using local currency as their preferred payment method. In contrast, 75% of Baby Boomers took out local currency for their travel. However, only 14% preferred to spend with foreign cash, as most of this group (69%) would rather use credit as their primary payment method when traveling abroad.

More than half of all respondents (60%) showed preferences for exchanging cash after takeoff. Thirty percent opted to change currencies at a local bank abroad or via ATM, 22% used a local exchange vendor at their final destination and 21% used a local exchange vendor at the airport after landing regardless of rates. Despite generational differences in preferred payment methods, travelers of all ages are still choosing to hold local cash in their wallets rather than use it during their travel.

When it comes to deciding when to splurge, most travelers (82%) prefer to shop for luxury goods when vacationing abroad to take advantage of currency conversions for bigger savings. Clothes (60%) and food products (58%) remain

high on the list followed by bags and jewelry (47%), wine and spirits (36%) and rare or antique items (22%). Despite this, travelers typically prefer to stick to the affordable side when it comes to accommodations, with 73% of all respondents opting for mid-range lodging for their vacations.

Generational differences also account for the discrepancies in luxury international travel, with 19% of Gen X respondents preferring luxe experiences and gourmet cuisines, similar to their Millennial counterparts, of whom 20% prefer luxury travel. Baby Boomers were much less likely to opt for first class with only 13% of respondents indicating they upgraded.

This report presents the findings of a CARAVAN survey conducted by Big Village for TD Bank among a sample of 1,007 U.S. adults from August 30-September 4, 2024.

... pharma research
Safety first

Unregulated weight-loss drugs surge in popularity

Compounded medicines serve an important role in the U.S. health care system when used to meet individual patient needs but compounding pharmacies are not regulated like pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities, which heightens risk for patients.

Independent research firms GQR and Public Opinion Strategies surveyed likely voters across political affiliation and found low awareness surrounding compounded drugs and strong bipartisan desire for more oversight and accountability in the interest of patient safety.

This lack of oversight has become a particular concern as the demand for, and popularity of, GLP-1 medications for weight loss (e.g., Wegovy and Zepbound) skyrockets. The FDA has issued several public warnings about

poorly compounded versions of these medicines.

Ninety-three percent of respondents worry that because the FDA does not review or approve compounded drugs, including compounded weight loss drugs, consumers might not be getting the drug they expect. Ninety-three percent are concerned that online sellers ship compounded, counterfeit or research versions of the medicines (not for human consumption) from unknown or uncertain places of origin.

... consumer psychology
Shoppers want grocery price relief, regardless of market conditions

Willing to share data to save money

Grocery shoppers may understand the potential reasons for the recent waves of price increases but that doesn't mean they like them. Pricing life cycle management company Zilliant found that consumers are increasingly resistant to price increases, even when driven by market forces such as rising costs or supply constraints, with 33% of consumers understanding why prices should increase when production costs rise and 32% explicitly stating that prices should stay the same despite higher costs or supply constraints.

One key trend from the study was how customers felt about changes caused by dynamic pricing, the changes in pricing caused by fluctuations in supply, demand, competitor actions and customer behavior. The survey showed that many shoppers already encounter dynamic pricing, though they may not realize it. Almost half (47%) of consum-

ers surveyed experienced price increases when a product was in demand when grocery shopping in-store. Over two in five (42%) have experienced price cuts when a product expires. And 38% of those surveyed believed the main impact of dynamic pricing was inflated prices when demand is high and supply is low.

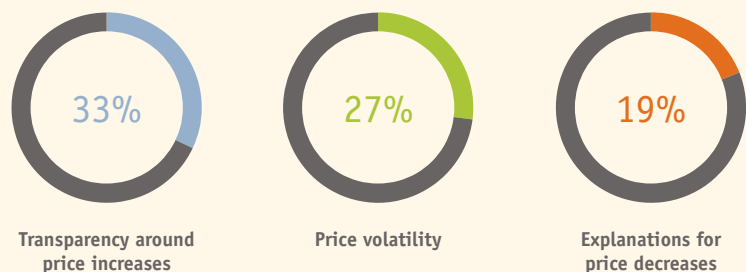
Since a significant number of consumers surveyed felt that dynamic pricing only leads to higher prices, it's clear why they associate it with negative outcomes for them. This highlights how grocery stores already use dynamic pricing strategies without labeling them as such. High-demand products often carry higher prices, while low-demand items typically end up in the clearance section.

Top concerns about pricing practices include a lack of transparency around price increases (32%), price volatility (27%) and explanations for price

decreases (19%). On average, a 30% price increase would make consumers consider switching brands. Consumers show a strong interest in solutions that provide more value and transparency. Seventy-eight percent would share personal data to access dynamic pricing that could lower their costs. Of these, 30% would share their purchase history, 27% would share age information and 21% would share location data or contact information. Forty-six percent would be more likely to shop at stores offering personalized prices through apps or loyalty programs. Twenty-three percent specifically want personalized prices through mobile apps, 29% would like more information on how prices are determined and 42% want more physical store loyalty cards offering discounts.

This research was conducted by Censuswide among 2,003 U.S. consumers between October 16-18, 2024.

Top concerns about pricing practices



Support for FDA oversight and regulation and congressional action has strong bipartisan backing. Even before hearing about the known risks of unregulated compounded weight loss drugs, 94% of Democrats, 88% of Independents and 88% of Republicans indicated that the FDA should make sure these medicines are safe. Tests have shown that some compounded weight loss drugs contain bacteria, impurities and different ingredients and dosages than advertised or indicated on the label. Eighty-five percent expect that

the FDA ensures all injectable drugs are safe for Americans to use but they worry more these days about medicines being tainted or contaminated.

While not familiar with either compounding pharmacies (10% familiar) or compounded medicines (8% familiar), 75% of Americans assume that compounded medicines are safe. However, upon learning about the unregulated nature of the compound versions of weight-loss drugs available, opinion shifts and an equally large number (76%) express concerns about the com-

pounded medications from non-FDA approved sources. Overall, 92% of all respondents expressed concern about compounded weight-loss drugs and 90% say taking compounded weight-loss drugs would not be worth the health and safety risks to themselves or family members.

GQR and Public Opinion Strategies conducted this research with 1,000 likely voters across political affiliations.

●●● employee research Honesty benefits all

The value of transparency in the workplace

Honesty is critical to almost all U.S. job seekers as 96% say it's at least somewhat important that they can be honest with new managers, while 36% believe open communication is essential. Express Employment Professionals found that more than two-thirds of job seekers (69%) agree that employees should feel comfortable discussing personal issues with their manager if it impacts their day-to-day work.

Eighty-nine percent of job seekers agree that fostering a work environment where employees and managers can be honest with each other is crucial for a company's success. Similarly, 87% believe that employees being honest with their managers is crucial for a productive workforce. A significant majority (82%) expressed that they would be more loyal to a company if they felt they could be candid with their manager.

American hiring managers agree that honesty plays a vital role in the workplace. More than half believe employee morale (58%), productivity (53%) and loyalty (51%) increase when employees can be honest at work. Forty-five percent feel there are fewer conflicts/disagreements, more accountabil-

ity (45%) and lower employee turnover (43%) in an honest workplace.

Unsurprisingly, when employees are not able to speak openly, many believe employee morale (58%) and productivity decrease (48%) and employee burnout (48%) and turnover increase (49%).

Honesty is also a key component in manager-employee relationships, with around three in five hiring managers (61%) reporting employees' ability to be honest with them is essential to their ability to be a good manager. Nine in 10 hiring managers say employees who feel like they can be honest with their leader are more loyal to their employer (90%) and are a critical part of having a productive workforce (89%).

Ninety-one percent believe that it is at least somewhat important for companies to provide managers with resources/training on how to manage their direct reports' personal issues if brought up by the employee, with nearly a quarter (24%) feeling it is essential. In addition, most job seekers (86%) believe it is at least somewhat

important that companies provide employees with resources/training on how to manage personal issues so it doesn't impact their work.

Companies feel they have created a space for honesty among their employees and report that their company has created a safe and trusting environment that encourages honest communication (86%) and has the right systems/tools in place to allow constructive criticism to be received well (80%). Ninety-five percent of hiring managers feel employees can speak honestly with anyone at the company regarding their concerns/issues including their manager/supervisor (68%) and/or peers/colleagues (57%).

The Harris Poll conducted The Job Insights survey and The Job Seeker Report on behalf of Express Employment Professionals. The Job Insights survey was conducted from May 16-June 3, 2024, with 1,003 hiring decision makers and The Job Seeker Report was conducted from May 28-June 10, 2024, among 1,002 adults.

Benefits of employee honesty in the U.S. workplace



... technology research
‘Or press zero to speak to an actual human being’

Customers want a person, not a chatbot

In the age of AI, customers already expect some automation to be ingrained in most customer service interactions. Despite this, there is still a preference and a need for human empathy to be present alongside AI in CX. CX platform Five9 found that 79% of consumers prefer talking to a human in-person or over the phone for customer support.

Eighty-four percent of consumers are aware that some companies use AI to handle customer service interactions, yet nearly half (48%) say they do not trust the information provided by AI-powered customer service bots. Over half (56%) say they are often frustrated by AI customer service chatbots.

Gen Z and Millennials find more value in AI-driven interactions compared to older generations. The use of automated solutions in CX has also led younger consumers to feel that online self-service has gotten better. Fifty-three percent of consumers agree that online self-service has improved in the last three years. This is higher among younger generations, including Gen Z (61%) and Millennials (61%).

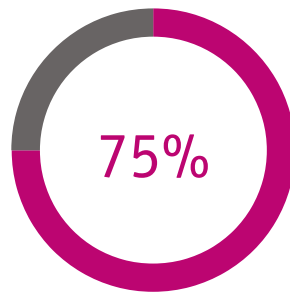
Gen Z is less likely to prefer talking to a real human in-person or over the phone for customer support (66%) compared to Gen X (76%) and Baby Boomers (86%). Sixty-three percent of Gen Z and 60% of Millennials say they trust information provided by AI-powered customer service bots and 33% of both groups are more likely to say they find AI very helpful and efficient.

Five9 conducted this research in partnership with Team Lewis, who surveyed 4,000 consumers across the U.S. and the U.K. from September 25-30, 2024. The survey respondents were independently sourced from Cint.

... employee research
Not feeling it

Gen Z disillusioned by frontline roles

Consumer-facing work isn't impressing Gen Z, and with this cohort slated to become a third of the world's working population by 2030, not improving the employee experience could have a dramatic ripple effect on the labor market. HR and workforce management solutions company UKG found that the frontline workforce feels



75% of frontline employees feel burned out

overworked, underappreciated and tempted to quit for a better employee experience.

Gen Z employees desire more input into when, where and how long they work. This may contribute to Gen Z frontline employees feeling more burned out (83%), compared to 75% of all frontline employees. Thirty-six percent of Gen Z say they'd quit because of their job negatively affecting their physical/mental well-being. Furthermore, 58% of Gen Z employees would rather have more vacation time over a pay increase and 29% say they'd forgo a promotion for an extra week of paid time off each year. Sixty-one percent of Gen Z isn't satisfied with their overall employee experience, compared to 55% across the frontline. Seventy-two percent say interactions with people at work have worsened their mental

health and 71% of Gen Z – and 59% of frontline employees in all generations – say they may quit because of negative interactions with their managers, coworkers or customers.

In organizations where frontline and corporate employees coexist, nearly half of all frontline employees (49%) say there are two separate cultures – one for the frontline and one for everyone else. Nineteen percent of these employees globally say they're never recognized by their manager.

Because many frontline employees can't work from home as often as their laptop-toting counterparts, having greater control over their work schedule is a top desire. Work-life balance/flexibility and work schedules (tied at 55%) are two of the most important factors frontline employees consider when choosing an employer, only behind pay/compensation (71%). Moreover, over a quarter of frontline employees globally (27%) say they'd resign due to a lack of workplace flexibility.

Over half of organizations with frontline employees (54%) offer flexible hours/self-scheduling. Other flexible scheduling practices are catching on, including shift trading with coworkers (41%), part-time work with no loss of benefits (28%), compressed workweeks (27%) and job sharing (18%). However, 14% say their organization doesn't offer any of these flexible work arrangements.

Somewhat surprisingly, in an era of job hopping and attrition, 20% of frontline employees globally say they have been with the same employer for more than 10 years. Eighty-one percent feel psychologically safe at work, 66% of Gen Z and 61% of frontline employees believe their feedback is taken into consideration and 67% say they're treated with respect at work.

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Walr from June 19-July 24, 2024, with 12,715 global workers including 10,915 frontline employees and 1,800 frontline leaders.

●●● special advertising section

21 TOP HEALTH CARE RESEARCH COMPANIES

Health care is a large and often complicated industry. Within the health care market research sector, researchers specialize on many disease specialties, medical plans, patient types and much more. Research findings have immediate consequences for health care practitioners, patients and caregivers. Companies that specialize in health care research can recruit and offer access to a wide range of medical professionals, chiropractors and even veterinarians who can help deliver insight into the medical, pharmaceutical and health care industry through interviews, focus groups, studies and surveys.

While it is important to have expert opinions and responses when conducting research within these industries, it is necessary to also consider how you will gain access to patients. The right health care research firms can help you collect insights from patients, breaking them down by demographic as well as by their experiences with several illnesses and diseases. If you need insights on patients, physicians or medical devices, these companies can collaborate with you from start to finish to obtain high-quality findings.



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Founded 1989 | 40 employees
John Mitchell, President and Managing Principal

Applied Marketing Science (AMS) is a Quirk's Marketing Research and Insight Excellence Award-winning full-service market research consulting firm.



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Carol Fitzgerald, Founder and CEO
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CASA Health Insights

Founded 2005 | 43 employees
Dulce Alonso, Ph.D., Insights Director

Standing at the intersection of health care expertise and multicultural immersion, the CASA Health Insights team is uniquely positioned to deliver patient and practitioner viewpoints to appropriately shape important business decisions for your brand or organization. Our team of multicultural Ph.D.-level health care and pharmacology professionals is uniquely experienced in carrying out insights research among patients, physicians and other medical professionals from specific ethnic backgrounds, such as Hispanics, Asian Americans and African Americans, and language backgrounds including Spanish, Mandarin and five other languages. Beyond North America, our highly trained U.S.-based health care moderators also have experience conducting interviews across the globe. Piggybacking off decades of qualitative health care projects with multicultural audiences, our dedicated practice was formed in order to provide a more science-focused and resource-rich team that fully dedicates itself to the intricacies of the health care space, including innovative pharmaceutical developments, rare patient conditions and complex health policy choices.



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Founded 2021 | 3 employees
Fernando Castro, M.Ed, Founder
Amanda Bagatelli, M.Ed, Communications Director



At Culture Wise Insights we specialize in recruiting for health care projects by seamlessly connecting with multicultural audiences through our innovative approach. Leveraging the expertise of cultural brokers, we bridge gaps to engage diverse communities authentically and effectively. Our tailored recruitment strategies ensure access to hard-to-reach audiences, providing you with genuine insights to drive impactful health care decisions. From in-language qualitative interviewing to inclusive moderation for multicultural audiences, we create respectful spaces for meaningful dialogue. Culture Wise Insights is a full-service market research firm and we excel at finding respondents for health care studies, no matter how rare their ailments may be. At Culture Wise Insights, we believe in equity, fostering understanding and embracing diversity in every interaction. Partner with us to transform your health care projects into a catalyst for meaningful change across communities.

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Decision Analyst

Founded 1978 | 120 employees
Monisha Hatfield, Senior Vice President
Bonnie Janzen, President



The Medical Research Group at Decision Analyst combines deep scientific and technical expertise to address complex challenges in the pharmaceutical, medical, health and wellness industries. Their work, often strategic, multiphase and spanning multiple countries, focuses on patients and health care professionals. The team employs a broad range of methodologies, including qualitative research, strategic survey design, advanced analytics and consulting services. Decision Analyst excels in areas such as strategy research, market segmentation, new product concept testing and forecasting, messaging optimization, innovation services and advertising research. With extensive experience solving intricate marketing problems, the team tailors research approaches – quantitative, qualitative or both – to meet your specific business needs. With the Decision Analyst ISO Certification 27001:2022 being established, the group designs and executes marketing research and consulting assignments in North America, Europe, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and Australia.

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EurekaFacts

Founded 2003 | 25+ employees
Jorge A. Restrepo, CEO

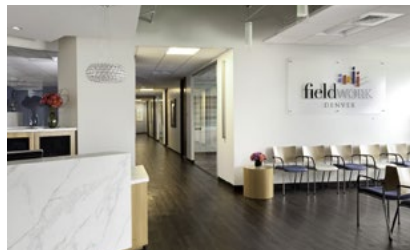
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Steve Raebel, President



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Founded 1983 | 5 employees
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Founded 1991 | 750 employees
Tim Wragg, CEO



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www.wearehuman8.com



Insights Opinion

Founded 2015 | 100 employees
Sharoz Ghauri, CEO

Insights Opinion is a global health care data collection firm specializing in reaching hard-to-access target audiences including health care professionals, health care providers, patients and caregivers across various ailments. We also have unparalleled access to rare disease target groups. Our extensive network of health care professionals is powered by our proprietary panel, a robust internal database and partnerships with patient advocacy groups. As a global leader, we successfully execute both quantitative and qualitative research across 60+ markets worldwide. Our expertise spans methodologies such as online sampling, CATI, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. We are proud corporate members of ESOMAR, Insights Association and the Market Research Society (MRS), reflecting our commitment to industry standards. Additionally, our operations are certified under ISO 20252, 27001 and 9001, ensuring excellence in quality, data security and management systems. Insights Opinion serves as a one-stop shop for all your data collection needs, delivering high-quality, reliable insights tailored to the unique demands of health care research.



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IRONWOOD INSIGHTS

Ironwood Insights Group LLC

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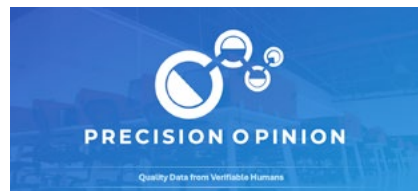


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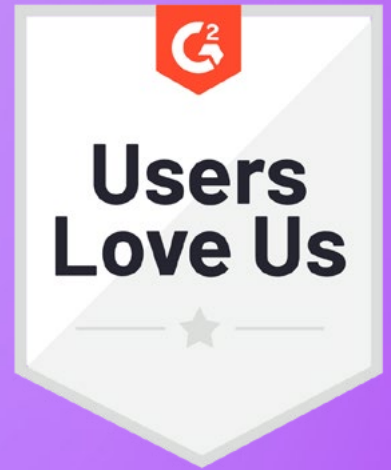
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AI AND MARKETING RESEARCH

...from the Quirk's archives

Welcome to our new feature! In each issue, Pro Insights will offer a handful of tips and commentaries on a single topic, drawn from our vast library of past magazine and e-newsletter articles. Future installments will include customer satisfaction research, health care research and B2B research. Let us know (joe@quirks.com) if there are subjects you'd like us to tackle. As always, you can start your own search by accessing these and thousands more articles for free at www.quirks.com.

Using AI to develop category associations

Diane Lauridsen, head of consumer insights at UScellular, wrote about her team's efforts to assess generative AI's ability to capture category associations and to better understand its ability to replicate primary research ("Leveraging generative AI for research insights"). The overarching lesson: Generative AI (with guardrails) can be used in research to provide insights.

In this case study, AI was used to successfully develop a list of category associations to be used in brand density message strategy research; however, one question didn't provide the breadth or depth of information. In short, generative AI isn't a one-and-done solution. Rather, leveraging AI is more effective for generating insights when asking multiple questions and being specific in how the question is worded, as well as leveraging multiple AI tools to bolster confidence in accuracy.

Open up the black box

In "How marketing researchers can evaluate AI applications," **Lisa Horwich** explored how being able to explain and interpret AI output helps researchers understand the purposes and potential impact of an AI system.

Right now, for systems that are obscure (remember many AI foundation models are proprietary to preserve their IP) data goes into a "black box" and a result comes out, often without any rationalization. AI systems that are explainable can answer the question of "how" a decision was made within the system. They can rationalize the output by giving us the steps it took to reach the answer. My favorite example is an AI system which has an input of a bug and says it's an insect without any explanation vs. one that shows the bug and

To be a bit more specific, when asking a simple question of, "What comes to mind when you think about [category]?" AI generates broad, rational (head) themes that are scattered and lacking commonality. In comparing results from AI to results from primary research using the same question, consumers provided descriptive words, images, colors and emotive phrases to describe the category. This led to a learning that it is best to ask very specific questions, drill down to get to specific words, associations and imagery that consumers would use to describe a brand until all variations are exhausted.

By doing this I was able build a full understanding of a category using AI – asking questions such as, "What images come to mind when you think about [category]?" and, "What specific features come to mind when you think about [category]?"

explains that it has six legs, therefore it is an insect – not an arachnid.

The advantage of explainable systems is they can be debugged and monitored more easily; and they tend to have more thorough documentation, auditing and governance. This is especially important for highly regulated industries like health care and finance.

One thing to keep in mind is that systems don't necessarily have to be explainable during processing – we can interpret them after the fact. Ask yourself, does the analysis or output make sense? In the case of qualitative research, is the output consistent with what you heard in your interviews or focus groups. For quantitative research, does the analysis match the data collected?

Laddering-up helped hone a survey chatbot's performance

In "How to successfully approach generative AI applications," **Rachel Dreyfus** wrote about what she learned after completing two quantitative projects for two different clients, where the surveys embedded an AI chatbot to converse with respondents.

I had the option to provide coding terms and topics upfront to create the large language model. We would then be able to update the model with additional terms and topics after the soft launch. I lost time trying to guess the likely conversation themes and topics. When we pretested that survey version, the chatbot probed on the model terms that I fed it rather than follow the organic terms surfacing from the respondent conversation. I ended up abandoning my preset terms.

What worked better was to structure the conversation to use the moderator's "ladder-up" approach, whereby the chatbot repeats the response and probes a step further on feelings and perceptions provided by the respondents. With this technique, which nearly imitates a focus group modera-

tor, respondents feel "listened to" and provide more detailed responses than we'd typically get from flat open-ended questions, such as, "Why did you rate the ad 'very high' appeal?" We also had the opportunity to ask "why" questions designed to investigate emotions, including, "How did the ad make you feel?" and "What images or phrases in the ad made you feel that way?" Connecting the respondent's side of the conversational probes creates a rich and more insightful paragraph than a traditional open-ended verbatim response.

Infrequently, the chatbot missed the mark; fortunately, conversations quickly recovered. It usually happened when a respondent answered a question with another question (possibly using sarcasm). For example, one response about the ad's copy was, "What does this even mean?" and the chatbot promptly responded with the textbook definition of the tagline. We would have preferred, "What do you think it means?" So, the tools are not quite human, yet. And, because the themes can be both positive or negative in sentiment, the multiple-choice questions act as the guardrails needed to filter and separate the likes and dislikes on the back end.

How do corporate researchers feel about AI?

As we reported in "Q Report respondents opine on AI, pain points and future plans," when asked several questions about AI, respondents to the 2024 Quirk's Q Report survey were generally clear-eyed and realistic about the technology's threats and promises, as evidenced by these two open-end responses:

"AI (if it can deliver on the promises made) will likely have a big impact on the function. Inside client companies, DIY survey platforms were the first wave that democratized the insights tradecraft. That made the process of conducting quant research doable for the average marketer. They still needed guidance. They needed to understand best practices. They needed to understand the philosophy and underpinnings of good research. AI is the second wave and MAY provide the guidance and thought leadership to execute good research. If true, the

average insights person is going to have to redefine the value they are bringing to the table. This disruption may bring good."

"It depends on what your MR team is doing. If you're spitting out rote tracking reports every quarter/month/etc., then AI absolutely puts your team/role at risk. But if your team is trying to synthesize and elevate a blend of primary, secondary, cultural trends, behavioral data, etc., into actionable insights for specific business needs/decisions, I think AI elevates that type of team/role. Insights and MR roles are likely going to have to evolve, but on balance, I think AI will elevate the industry. None of us got into MR/insights because we loved doing those big tracking reports! I think AI will free up many insights professionals to do more of what many of us love about being in insights – telling deep, human stories with data that will impact our respective businesses."

Where do you begin with AI?

For brands looking to dip their toes in the AI water, **Thor Olof Philogene** ("A guide to generative AI for insights") suggested that a good place to start is by examining the areas where you're naturally drawn to using these tools.

Before you invest in any solution, you want to make sure that generative AI will actually fit into your workflows. Likewise, it's a good idea to gauge how open you and your team are to incorporating these technologies. This will help you determine if there need to be more guardrails in place or, conversely, more encouragement to experiment responsibly.

Sketch out the inefficiencies in your workflows and explore whether it's something you could automate in whole or in part. These are likely areas where generative AI could offer your team a major productivity boost.

Chances are you don't have time for endless experimentation. A good way to focus your exploration is to look at the top priorities for your team and your organization and focus efforts where they will have the most impact.

Be sure to clearly outline the risks for your function and organization and don't hesitate to get advice from relevant experts in tech or security. Once the main risks are defined, you can align on the risk level you're willing to tolerate.

While minding the risks, also don't be afraid to ask the good kind of what-if questions. If you see opportunities, be brave enough to share them. Now is the time to voice them. Likewise, listen to other parts of the organization to see what opportunities they've identified and see what you can learn from them.

AI's impact on research agency staffs

Of course, research firms are also seeing their worlds upended by AI and its related technologies and in his article "How AI will transform research agencies and their offerings" **JD Deitch** highlighted the impact AI is having and will have on company headcounts.

Since the dawn of market research, there has been one and only one way to build scale: through labor. Even in the digital age, the largest research firms have been those with the ability to muster battalions of researchers to design, run and interpret research. There was hope that insights platforms might change this. Yet while upstart firms have built competent, user-friendly, more labor-efficient platforms to execute research, they essentially transferred the labor problem to the client.

Advances in AI are now eliminating large labor pools as a necessary factor for scale in a way that even non-AI-based automation and DIY platforms could not, including those that

It's our firm belief that the future of insights will still need to combine human expertise with powerful technology. The most powerful technology in the world will be useless if no one actually wants to use it.

previously required extensive human oversight. Today, there are already viable companies commercializing AI products that span the entire research process: interpreting clients' business questions; creating a research brief; designing the research; fielding the research; processing the data; and reporting and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative findings

This means that AI can now effectively replace a full research and operations team, operating at a scale previously unattainable with human labor alone. This evolution from labor-intensive projects to AI-driven products marks a pivotal transformation in the industry. First-movers and disruptors who are not starting from scratch but are instead leveraging AI throughout the entire workflow have a significant advantage. These firms are positioned to take market share by integrating AI comprehensively, rather than using it for specific elements only, which ensures long-term success.

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AI probing gets respondents talking (or typing)

Contrary to expectations, **Eric Tayce** argued in “How AI can actually make research more people-centric,” AI has much to offer in terms of adding some warmth to survey-taking.

Researchers have long acknowledged the limitations of survey research and its inability to re-create the experience of making real-world decisions. This is an area where artificial intelligence can help. For starters, AI allows us to minimize the unnatural artifice of survey research through conversational experiences via chatbots, even if just for small portions of the survey. For instance, our own experimentation shows that following open-end responses with conversational AI-powered probing leads to an average of 270% more unstructured data being collected from respondents.

Organizations can also use generative LLMs to mimic natural conversation through iterative questioning techniques that can capture a much wider range of consumer perceptions and opinions than traditional approaches. In

fact, we’ve found that properly trained chatbots with well-defined guardrails can reliably identify optimal price levels, investigate decision drivers and generally deliver a richer experience for the respondent. The humanizing trend sets the tension and artificial intelligence solves for it.

In addition, AI tools can more effectively analyze unstructured data versus traditional methods, parsing out more organic, more human insights. Unstructured data has traditionally held limited business value for organizations, simply because the methods for analyzing it are either computationally too complex or logistically too time-consuming. However, AI’s massive computing power has removed this barrier. Researchers are unlocking new value by using AI-powered algorithms to execute techniques like sentiment analysis and theme detection on unstructured data. These deliver respondent-level indicators that can be used to predict behaviors or to develop targeting strategies. 

Is there a topic that you'd like to see featured here? Reach out to Quirk's Editor Joe Rydholm at joe@quirks.com.



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How researchers' mental shortcuts open the door to online survey fraud

| By Sebastian Berger

abstract

From plain-old denial to brand loyalty bias, there are factors at play surrounding the purchasing of research products and services that buyers may not even be aware of. Here are five mind-sets to avoid if you want better data quality.

Alongside the buzz surrounding artificial intelligence, the issue of data quality in online surveys has attracted more attention in the market research industry. The rise in both the scale and sophistication of fraudulent activities has contributed significantly to this concern. For instance, Kantar reports that researchers are discarding up to 38% of collected data due to fears over panel fraud and data quality.

Fortunately, increasing awareness of this problem has led to the emergence of numerous solutions. Efforts such as the Global Data Quality initiative have taken a broad approach to tackling the problem, while a growing body of research offers insights into potential remedies. At the same time, technological tools aimed at protecting data integrity are becoming more widely available. Given these developments, one might assume that the industry is well on its way to solving the problem. However, the reality is quite different. In fact, our data-cleaning efforts last year revealed that instances of fraudulent data had actually doubled.

From my work with market research agencies, fieldwork providers and research buyers, I have noticed that cognitive biases – mental shortcuts we as humans take – can make us more vulnerable to online survey fraud. To address this situation, it is crucial to critically challenge five prevailing mind-sets that leave us exposed.

1. The head-in-the-sand phenomenon

Too many industry professionals tend to ignore or downplay the risks of survey fraud to avoid confronting uncomfortable truths about data quality. This denial is often rooted in cognitive dissonance, where acknowledging the possibility of extensive fraud conflicts with prior assumptions or expectations. One such common belief is that fraudulent responses will cancel out over a large enough sample size, yielding an overall accurate result. While this might hold true if fraud rates were extremely low – just a few percentage points – in reality, with fraud rates commonly starting at 10% and above, this assumption no longer holds.

Another example is the argument, “Survey fraud has always existed,” which is technically true. However, past fraud detection methods – such as monitoring response speed, straight-lining or using geolocation tracking – have become increasingly ineffective as fraudsters employ more sophisticated techniques. For instance, anyone can now easily create a customized GPT to automatically generate realistic survey responses, including colloquial language, short answers and errors in spelling, capitalization and punctuation. When coupled with software that inputs these responses while simulating natural typing behavior, such fraud becomes nearly undetectable. This evolution demands more advanced and proactive approaches to fraud detection.

2. The price-competition dilemma

In the past, the drive for convenience, speed and affordability in online surveys has overshadowed concerns about data quality – a phenomenon known as outcome bias. Buyers have prioritized low costs and quick results, often at the expense of data integrity. On the provider side, strict quality controls have been seen as an added expense, reducing competitiveness in a price-driven market with tight deadlines. The absence of strict quality controls has turned online surveys into a commodity, creating opportunities for survey fraud.

Given that primary research is conducted to inform crucial decisions in complex environments, where much is at stake, it's essential to follow the golden rule of risk management: never risk a lot to save a little. Tia Maurer from P&G illustrated this principle during her presentation at the International Quality Day, an event we hosted to explore survey quality challenges from multiple perspectives. She shared how poor data led P&G to launch an unsuccessful product, underscoring the costly consequences of poorly informed decision-making.

3. The “If I pay for it, it must be good” bias

This price-quality heuristic represents the flip side of the price-competition dilemma, fostering a misunderstanding between buyers and providers. It reflects the belief that paying for something guarantees quality, a mind-set especially prevalent with premium brands, known as brand loyalty bias. When buyers rely solely on price and brand reputation to trust survey data, without demanding concrete quality checks, they risk exposing themselves to survey fraud. This can lead to a dangerous assumption: “I’m paying them, so it’s their responsibility.”

As the saying goes, trust is good, but control is better. Buyers should demand transparent evidence of quality control measures down to the level of individual interviews, understanding which interviews were flagged or removed and why. This level of scrutiny is essential to safeguard data integrity and prevent costly missteps.

4. The “If I like it, it’s good” mind-set

This fallacy, driven by the affect heuristic, leads buyers to question survey data quality only when the results do not align with their preferences (e.g., in pre-tests of various ad designs). Similarly, confirmation bias causes doubts about data quality to

arise only when results contradict expected outcomes. Both biases distort objective decision-making by letting personal preferences, expectations and emotions dictate whether data quality is to be questioned. However, data quality must always be critically monitored, regardless of whether the results align with the buyer's expectations or preferences.

5. The abstraction dilemma

Professional survey fraud is invisible, intangible, complex, constantly evolving, difficult to localize, automated, highly technological and hard to define or detect. These factors contribute to its perception as abstract, making it challenging for market researchers to fully grasp the scope of the problem. This complexity often triggers oversimplification bias, a mental shortcut that reduces intricate issues into overly simplistic terms and solutions in order to achieve cognitive ease – a mental state of comfort that arises when processing easily understandable information.

Terms like “survey bots” and “click farms” are frequently thrown around in discussions of survey fraud, often lacking a deeper comprehension of their true complexities. A commonly used image in presentations and articles about survey fraud – depicting rows of people seated in front of computer screens in a dimly lit room – has shaped the perception of click farms. However, this image, popularized by the U.S. television series “Silicon Valley,” does not reflect the reality of modern click farms.

Today, click farms are more accurately described as phone farms, where multiple smartphones are interconnected and highly automated to carry out various online fraud activities, including surveys. These operations are typically run by an individual from home or a small group in a shared apartment, rather than in large, centralized call-center-like settings as the popular image suggests.

The oversimplification bias manifests itself also in the quality control measures used to combat fraud. Because survey fraud is so abstract and complex, many resort to simple solutions that provide a false sense of security. Reliance on tools like CAPTCHAs or trap questions is a prime example. These methods are easy to understand and implement but they fail to address the more sophisticated forms of fraud that occur today. This reliance on familiar, easy solutions is akin to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic – a superficial fix that doesn't

address the root of the problem. Tackling advanced technological survey fraud requires a comprehensive, multilayered approach that provides a 360-degree view of behavioral patterns and input data. Only by employing a wide range of quality checks and leveraging modern AI technology can survey fraud be minimized to a level where it no longer impacts results.

Significant gap remains

While online survey data quality has rightly become a central concern in the market research industry, a significant gap remains between acknowledging its importance and taking meaningful steps to safeguard it. Despite growing awareness and the availability of advanced tools to combat survey fraud, the issue persists, showing that awareness alone is insufficient. To implement concrete, proactive measures, the five mind-sets outlined in this article must be actively challenged, as there is no viable alternative.

For instance, relying solely on synthetic data is not a solution, as these models are only as accurate as the data they are trained on. If fraud compromises that data, the results will be flawed – garbage in, garbage out. Likewise, blaming poor data solely on survey incentivization is misguided. While removing incentives may reduce fraud, it risks skewing the sample toward those with extreme views, undermining research integrity.

Additionally, attention must also be paid to data quality issues caused by inattentive or frustrated participants. Factors such as questionnaire length, fair compensation, screen-outs and thoughtful survey design are crucial in maintaining participant engagement and ensuring data accuracy.

To effectively address these challenges, research buyers need to accept that their questionnaires may require changes, demand detailed insights into the inclusion or exclusion of interviews and be willing to invest in higher-quality results. Quality must take precedence over cost and speed! Market research agencies and fieldwork providers, in turn, should implement rigorous quality control measures and offer complete transparency in these processes. The era of black-box quality control is over – only those who offer full transparency and evidence of quality will succeed in the future. **1**

Sebastian Berger is head of science at ReDem GmbH. He can be reached at sebastian@redem.io.

Fake jobs, fake excuses

Navigating unemployment in the marketing research industry

| By Marlen Ramirez

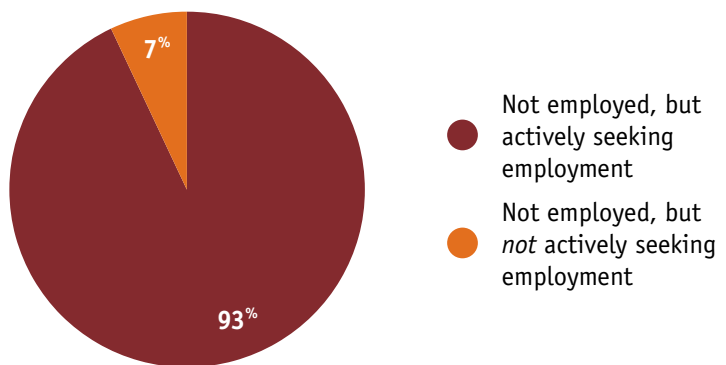
Findings from the Q Report, an independent study, written for and developed with the help of client-side marketing research and insights professionals

abstract

Job-seeking Q Report respondents express their stress over the high number of applicants for open positions in the insights industry and list the challenges they're facing while finding employment.

The Quirk's Q Report looks into a range of topics including hiring trends and shifts in employment. Quirk's has collected unemployment data from 2017-2024, excluding 2020 due to COVID-19. Out of those unemployed in 2024, 93% were actively seeking employment while 7% were not. Those unemployed have been so for an average of eight months and 65% have looked for roles outside of the research industry.

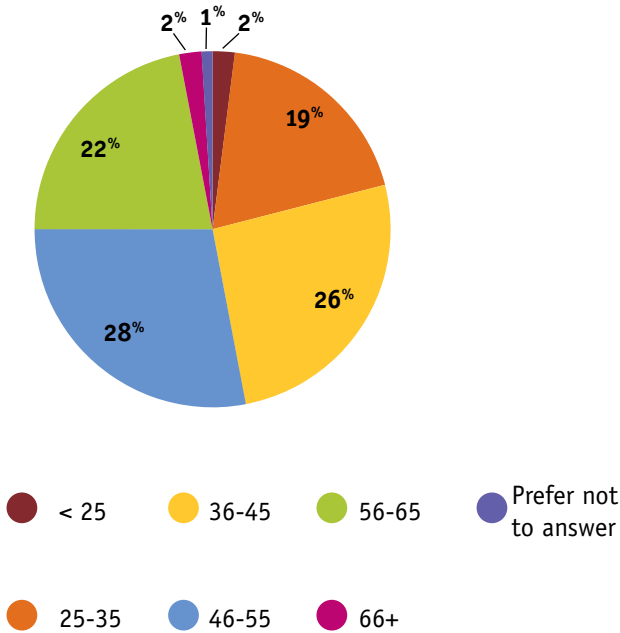
Which best describes your current job status?



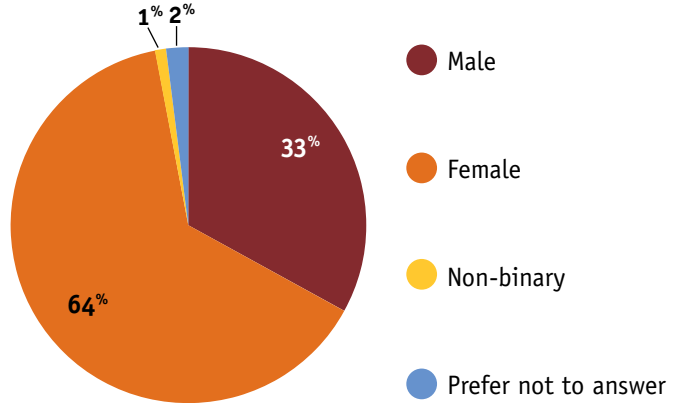
Unemployment demographics

Over half of those unemployed (54%) are between the ages of 36-55. Two percent are under 25, 19% are 25-35 years old, 22% are 56-65 years old and 2% are 66 or older. Nearly two-thirds of those unemployed are women (64%), with men making up 33%.

What is your age?



What is your gender?



The challenges of finding employment in the marketing research industry

Many qualified job candidates find it difficult not only to find a new role, but also to make initial contact to secure an interview with a company they don't have a previous connection with.

Too many applicants for too few positions. Which is probably the most common answer among job seekers. Hard to break through the clutter and when it does happen, there seems to be a lack of urgency to make hires.

Huge amount of competition for every role so most of the time I don't think anyone even looks at my application.

Playing the numbers game. While there are opportunities, there seems to also be a large candidate pool.

Increased number of unemployed people. Oversaturated market.

Hundreds of applications and I hear nothing back.

The amount of unemployed talent is very high, so competition is great. Demand is MUCH higher than supply. Also, for us who want to work for a brand, agencies suck up so much of the work in our industry.

There are over 400 applying to one posting.

To paraphrase one respondent: The jobs just aren't out there.

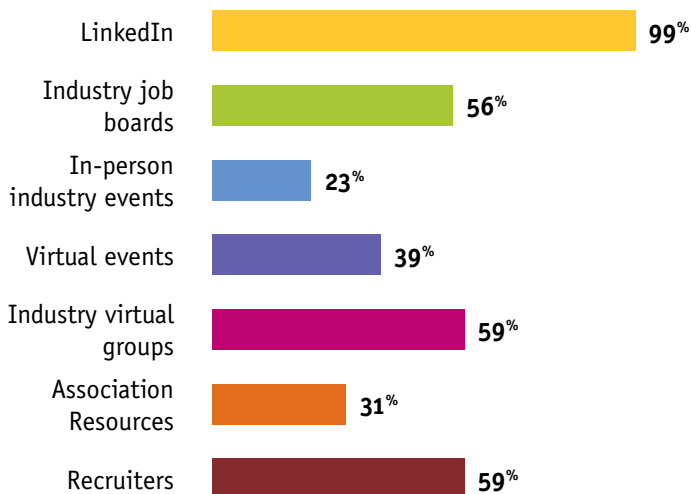
Researchers have started to tailor their résumés to the roles they are applying to and have tried to stand out by writing cover letters showing their enthusiasm. Many say the interview processes are complicated and they often are left in the dark. While many have spent plenty of time adjusting their applications – and expectations – respondents believe you must have a

The top resources used by job seekers

LinkedIn was the most helpful platform, used by 99% of unemployed respondents. Industry virtual groups (59%), recruiters (59%), industry job boards (56%) and virtual events (39%) were also helpful when searching for a job. Thirty-one percent found association resources beneficial while others turned to in-person industry events (23%).

Others have taken advantage of their personal networks by contacting former colleagues while others say they've visited Facebook groups and company job boards and websites.

What resources are you using to help with your job search?



connection with someone at a company to get a foot in the door.

I have found it incredibly hard to even get an interview without having an "in" at a company no matter how hard I work to match my résumés to job descriptions and use key words. There's so little transparency in the process and even once in contact with the company I have been ghosted countless times by HR teams. It feels incredibly unprofessional at times and frustrating.

Ghosting/being ignored by connections, recruiters and HR. Your application goes into a black hole and you never hear back.

While I am able to get interviews and am sometimes in the final, companies seem to be extremely specific. If there is someone with that specific experience, they are prioritized, even if from an interpersonal perspective I would be their choice.

Not enough genuine opportunities. Extremely lengthy and convoluted interview processes.

Capturing the attention of recruiters and getting the first foot in the door, especially if you are looking for market research-adjacent roles or don't have exactly the background in the job description (but still feel confident in being successful at the job).

Getting an interview and passing an interview as there seems to be more supply than demand in the current market situation.

I have had trouble landing interviews and with ghosting. Employers can screen you and you can have initial interviews and they don't get back to you either way.

How saturated the seeker market is. I've been told a few times for roles I have applied to that they have received over 900 applicants. Unless you know someone there is no way to stand out.

Some respondents believe the roles they are applying to are not real and fear they are competing with bots.

Every vendor in the market research industry is posting fake jobs to look like they are growing. If they aren't posting fake jobs, they are posting jobs in hopes they win a big piece of business and then not filling it if they don't get the business. I know dozens of people in the industry who have run into these issues with multiple companies. It's making so many of us want to leave the industry and making job hunting insanely hard. I know reports are coming out saying this is happening in many fields but it seems market research is one of the worst hit. Also, some of these professional networking organizations are giving detrimental, outdated advice. Those who know, know. But they aren't helping the industry. There's a reason so many of the truly great people are retiring or taking a step back.

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Getting a résumé even noticed in what appears to be an endless sea of bots and competition.

Companies are unreliable. Many job postings are not real openings. I had many interviews cancelled because the company decided to not hire for the role anymore. It's really a waste of time and energy.

Companies have started to implement different AI-based technologies and new application-tracking systems, leading some job seekers to struggle to navigate the tech and make it through the initial filter.

HR at hiring companies having the time and adequate resources to filter candidates. There are many openings but also many applicants, making for chaos as HR looks for the right candidates. And AI seems to be making the résumé review worse, not better, based on what I've seen.

The heavy usage of AI [applicant tracking systems] in filtering out highly qualified individuals. Add on the use of assessments prior to speaking with the HR recruiter, then follow-up assessments before a video interview. That's if you actually get through the ATS platform with your résumé, which you have spent hours tweaking to ensure you score high on the résumé scanner sites. Automatic e-mail rejections within a minute of applying for a role, knowing that a physical person did not review your qualifications. Jobs that you spoke to recruiters about are continuously reposted, yet you are ghosted by HR. It's a very different environment than three years ago when I was researching a new role.

Older respondents say their age is a challenge when applying to roles they are qualified for.

In my case, age appears to be the most significant roadblock. I interviewed with nearly 30 organizations. Each opportunity went through the complete interview process, including at least five interview rounds. Many interviews concluded with a meeting with senior leaders such as the CMO or the COO. To date, I have yet to be selected to fill a vacancy. There appears to

be a lot of interest in my experience and expertise but there is no appetite for a 62-year-old expert.

Age. I am constantly told I'm too experienced. This is positioned as concern, I will be bored or not challenged or not utilizing my full capabilities. I also see many job descriptions that ask for deep experience in a specific category and people management experience and then suggest applicants have five years of experience. They want everything but aren't willing to pay for it.

Not sure how heavy ageism is right now, but certainly tough for long-tenured research leaders to find a good fit.

Ageism. I have 25 years of amazing experience in market research with the world's biggest entertainment companies as well as other industries. I get interviews with network contracts, the hiring manager is younger than me, but the interview goes great. Then they either say "You were amazing, but we have other great candidates" or "This position is below you, I'll let you know if something more appropriate comes along." Clear age discrimination.

Honestly, my age. On top of my executive-level experience, I prepared to stay relevant in my 50s by implementing AI to develop insights for premier brands. But still, I am finding it hard to even get interviews. I have come to the conclusion that even AI experience does not make a 57-year-old female a desirable hire.

What's working in your job search?

Contacting connections has helped the job search process. Respondents have reached out to former colleagues, LinkedIn contacts and employees from companies they are interested in working for in hopes of making a breakthrough.

My network has been very supportive but I'm still unemployed. But networking seems more encouraging than submitting e-mails online that seem to go into an abyss.

Networking with others and with people higher up in the target company.

I send a letter of introduction directly to either the hiring manager or senior leader in talent acquisition via e-mail. I identify a contact via a search on Linked Premium and then use e-mail finder by Hunter to locate the correct e-mail address. This approach is significantly more effective than leveraging LinkedIn messaging.

Leveraging my network at companies where I see openings.

Continuing to reach out to every contact I have at companies I would like to work for. It certainly doesn't work all the time but has a far better success rate than just applying online.

Getting more focused about my desired role and business criteria. Reaching out to reconnect with older contacts e.g., former colleagues. Developing new networking strategies to broaden my connections. Commiserating and brainstorming with others in the same boat.

Getting referrals, people looking out for me.

Being open to other roles has also helped people stay afloat in difficult times.

Connecting with old colleagues and using my own network. Focusing on freelance to get a foot in the door.

Being open to contract roles has been a lifesaver.

Expanding to both mid- and higher-level positions, looking for remote opportunities.

Expanding my search to other industries.

Others have advanced in their job search by looking through job boards and company websites.

I have gotten a few interviews applying to postings on job boards, so my résumé seems to be working.

Recruiters reaching out via LinkedIn after identifying my profile on the platform.

Going to specific company websites that I'm interested in working for instead of going through other job board sites.

I've had the best luck with opportunities represented by headhunters. Otherwise, targeting my résumé and cover letter to the position and paying special attention to ATS, now powered by AI, seems critical – even though I don't yet have enough confirmation on whether I've been successful with passing ATS screening.

What's not working in your job search?

Job seekers are still figuring out which methods are the most effective but have found job boards challenging.

Submitting to job posts. Recruiters haven't been helpful. Some have mentioned jobs that don't exist (after talking to employee contacts at the company) and others are so focused on unicorn candidates or those with a narrow-focused background (vs. valuing diversity of experience which often brings better thinking).

Applying through job search portals or LinkedIn. It's been better, somewhat, applying directly on the company website.

Applying for jobs online – seems like these just go into a void and you never get any feedback about why you were or weren't selected for an interview.

Submitting applications to job boards has not been as successful due to the number of candidates.

I have not yet identified a specific strategy that is working. I do know that even compared to a few years ago when I was last on the market – and secured a position I saw in the Quirk's job listings – there are many, many more applicants for each position. Some of the positions I have seen on LinkedIn will have a number of applicants well into four figures.

Algorithms have taken any human component out of the job search process – which means it is about key words, not skills, and very talented people are being discarded really early in the process.

Some say it is challenging to connect with companies without already having a contact there. Applicants have also struggled to get a response from recruiters.

I have submitted nearly 185 applications and have heard back from roughly 30% of positions I've applied to with a rejection. I've gotten an interview from five and haven't heard back from the remainder at all.

Recruiters not responding or actively posting a job so you have an actual chance of the right person seeing your résumé.

Continuing to just apply online without a connection. I've received maybe two interviews in the last six months from applications to jobs where I did not have an "in" and recommendation at the company.

Job applicants say finding time to apply to roles and positions that fit their skill sets is not working in their favor.


Applying to many jobs that only fit my skill set peripherally. I've gotten zero interviews from doing so.

I'm finding plenty of job postings; I have 272 open tabs at the moment, the vast majority of which are related to my job search. The trouble is, it takes so long to actually read through and cognitively process each job posting to determine if it's worth my time to apply and even then, to actually apply. If I have to answer a bunch of additional questions (like what interests me about the company, or to explain my experience with XYZ) as part of the application and/or if the application requires a cover letter, it often ends up being such a high barrier to entry that I don't end up applying. I'll often intend to circle back a little later to do all that work, but in reality, I don't actually get back to it, or worse, I'll circle back a week or two later and find that the position is now closed. It's frustrating: Job applications require a LOT of heavy cognitive load kind of work, even with AI helping out, and it can be really exhausting. Throw in a pretty severe case of ADHD, and some days it feels pretty hopeless.

When I do get an interview, I am told after a few rounds they decided to go with someone with more experience, but then the job is reposted in the next week or so. It seems like the experience required for specific jobs are also priced extremely low based on my experience level and jobs I've been interviewing for.

Casting a broad net, I am very flexible and an agile learner and can adapt to pretty much any industry (I have done this twice) but convincing hiring managers of this doesn't seem to work.

CREATED NEW BARRIERS

The job search experience in marketing research reveals a paradox: while technology has made it easier to apply for positions, it has also created new barriers between qualified candidates and potential employers. Job seekers who have found success are those who have managed to bypass automated systems through networking and direct contact with decision-makers. This suggests that while the industry continues to evolve, the human element remains crucial in making meaningful employment connections. 

METHODOLOGY

The Q Report work life and salary and compensation study of end-client/corporate researchers is based on data gathered from an invite-only online survey sent to pre-qualified marketing research subscribers of Quirk's. The survey was fielded from June 17 to July 23, 2024. In total we received 1,504 usable qualified responses, of which 502 were from end-client researchers with 126 respondents indicating they were unemployed. (Not all respondents answered all questions.)

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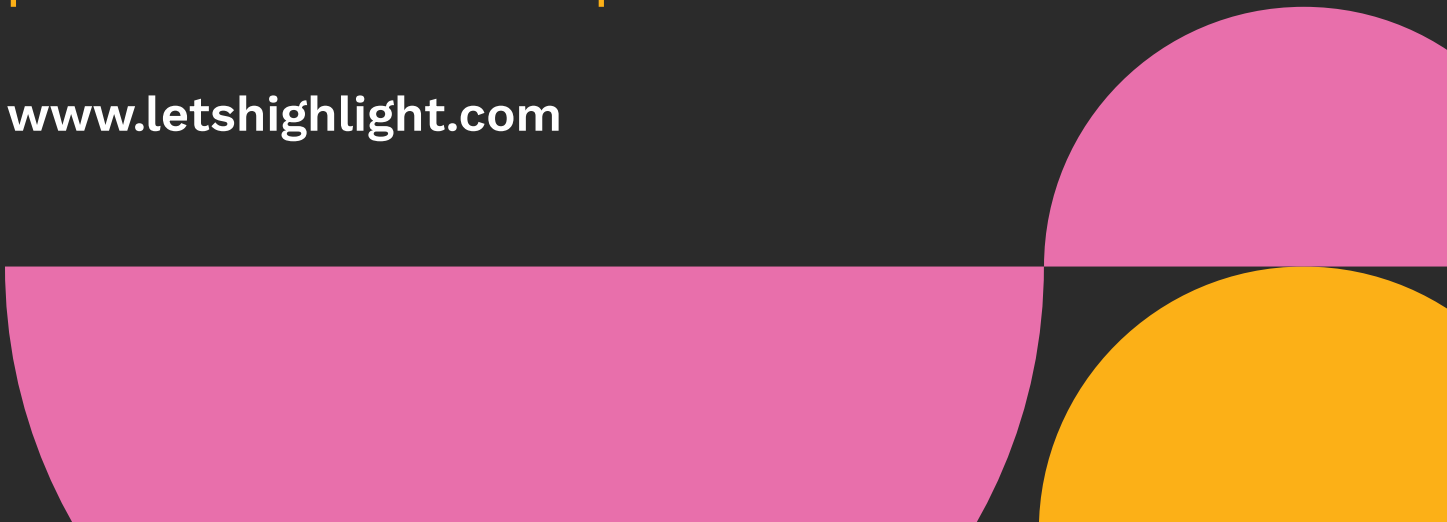
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SEPARATING

MYTH

FROM REALITY

**Client-side
researcher
strategies for
protecting panel
data integrity**

Evolving sampling practices have compromised online panel data quality through issues like fraud, low-quality respondents and lack of transparency. This article debunks myths about online panels and offers advice on ensuring transparency and advocating for higher quality standards.

By Karine Pepin,
Mary Beth Weber,
Efrain Ribeiro,
Tia Maurer and
Carrie Campbell

The online panel landscape has undergone a seismic change over the past two decades – and not for the betterment of our industry. With the introduction of new sampling technologies, the underlying methodologies used to recruit participants have fundamentally changed, leading to the commoditization of sample. Once dominated by well-managed double-opt-in panels, the sampling ecosystem has devolved into a hotbed of fraudulent activity and low-quality data which prioritizes volume, speed and cost. These structural shifts, largely unnoticed by client-side researchers, have resulted in unintended consequences for research quality.

This article aims to empower client-side researchers by exposing the realities of the industry and providing them with the knowledge to demand transparency and accountability. By understanding the true state of the sampling ecosystem, researchers can advocate for higher quality standards and drive positive change.

MYTH 1: SUPPLIERS HAVE VALIDATED AND VERIFIED THEIR MEMBERS TO ENSURE REAL, UNIQUE AND AUTHENTIC PARTICIPANTS FOR MY SURVEY.

At the turn of the century, circa 2000, the initial online panels adopted tried-and-true offline methods to establish a solid foundation. This involved gathering key identifying information and profiling details to verify the authenticity of recruited participants. This process was primarily used to match respondents with appropriate surveys and to ensure incentive checks were accurately delivered to their physical mailboxes. Additionally, it served as a means to validate respondents through third-party databases.

By 2010, most firms had transitioned to digital incentives and stopped collecting personally identifiable information, as it significantly reduced the number of willing participants. Today, in most cases, participants create a panel profile with just an e-mail address. Few, if any, panels require proof of identity or conduct checks to ensure authenticity.

“Most sample providers run almost no checks on their respondents as they sign up to the panel or throughout the lifetime of the respondent on their panel. The onus

is instead on you, the researcher, to make sure that you are building in sufficient checks to your study.” – ANDREW GORDON, PROLIFIC

Although methods exist to detect and prevent fraud – such as tracking payment methods or mailing incentives to

earlier this year for research-on-research purposes.”¹ – MARC DI GASPERO, POTLOC

Further highlighting this issue, a CASE4Quality study found that a small subset of devices accounts for a significant portion of survey completions (3% of devices completed 19% of all surveys).

TODAY, IN MOST CASES, PARTICIPANTS CREATE A PANEL PROFILE WITH JUST AN E-MAIL ADDRESS. FEW, IF ANY, PANELS REQUIRE PROOF OF IDENTITY OR CONDUCT CHECKS TO ENSURE AUTHENTICITY.

physical addresses – control over these measures lies with the suppliers, not the researchers.

To minimize the chances of participants misrepresenting themselves in your study, researchers can implement several design-related strategies. These include: crafting a robust screener questionnaire that effectively masks the research topic; using custom recruits with identity verification for B2B and hard-to-reach audiences; using panels that track digital behaviors and location data; and incorporating audio or video questions to assess participant authenticity.

MYTH 2: SUPPLIERS HAVE EFFECTIVE PROCESSES IN PLACE TO LIMIT RESPONDENT PARTICIPATION, THUS ENSURING THAT MY SURVEY IS SENT TO FRESH PARTICIPANTS.

In the past, some suppliers imposed limits on how many surveys a respondent could complete within a given time frame. Invitations were targeted at those who met specific screener criteria, and large CPG clients expected a minimum three-week period in which respondents would not receive surveys in the same category (e.g., beverages, haircare, cereals). This practice helped ensure the integrity of the research.

Today, those standards have largely disappeared. Most panels now rely on a self-selection model. Potential participants can browse available surveys on offer walls, reviewing the topic, time commitment and incentive before deciding to participate. There is no limit on the number of surveys a participant can complete per day.

“How many surveys is too many? What about 21.8 survey attempts per day? This is the average number of survey attempts per survey entrant we captured across 26,000+ survey entrants on a study we ran

Even more alarming, 40% of the devices entering over 100 surveys per day successfully passed all other quality checks.² Research from CASE and others show that frequent survey takers can skew results. A higher number of survey attempts is linked to lower brand awareness, higher brand ratings and higher purchase intent, demonstrating how these respondents can distort overall findings.³

Using third-party fraud detection software can help researchers mitigate this issue. While these tools primarily monitor participant behavior within their user base and may not detect all high-frequency survey takers, they offer a valuable layer of protection.

MYTH 3: SUPPLIERS HAVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR MEMBERS AND ONLY USE THEIR PROPRIETARY SAMPLE FOR MY STUDY.

In the early 2000s, sample recruitment strategies differed quite a bit from today's highly optimized approaches. Companies like e-Rewards primarily relied on partnerships with established brands and loyalty programs to build their panels. Members were invited to join through e-mails, newsletters or co-branded partnerships with airlines, hotels and other loyalty programs. This approach led to mostly exclusive sample pools for each supplier.

Today's sample landscape is significantly more complex. While some traditional methods still exist, suppliers now employ a diverse range of recruitment strategies to meet the increasing demand for sample (e.g. affiliate networks, mobile/gaming platforms, online traffic sources, programmatic algorithms and so on). Each of these sources introduces potential vulner-

abilities for fraud and disengaged respondents.

“While many suppliers may promote their proprietary panels, most have transitioned into an aggregation model, sourcing from various providers to meet quotas, timelines and budget constraints. In my previous

the uncovering of the Paid For Your Say group.⁶ Additionally, poor data quality can also stem from honest yet disengaged respondents.

“Survey fraud has evolved from simple bots used over a decade ago to more advanced methods that mix human input with

formal and include intentional spelling mistakes, making them no longer easy to identify.” – FLORIAN KÖGL, REDEM

Researchers know their data best.

While many quality control measures can (and should) be programmed directly into the survey, data cleaning cannot be fully automated.

UNFORTUNATELY, SAMPLE AND DATA QUALITY WERE AN AFTERTHOUGHT AS THE INDUSTRY FOCUSED THEIR EFFORTS ON “FASTER AND CHEAPER” FINDINGS. WITH TRUE TRANSPARENCY, REVELATIONS WILL PUSH THE ENTIRE SUPPLY CHAIN TO REINVENT ITSELF AND TRANSFORM THE CURRENT BUSINESS MODEL.

role as VP of partner network and quality, I closely monitored frequent survey takers and the overlap of respondents across panels. Over the past 4-5 years, duplication rates have significantly increased – not just because more people are joining multiple panels but due to suppliers blending sources to scale. As a result, researchers cannot confidently trust the origin of their sample without rigorous partner-vetting and building strong relationships with suppliers that demonstrate transparency and reliability.” – MARY DRAPER, EMI RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

A key change is the breakdown of sample exclusivity. Most suppliers now act as aggregators, even those touting their proprietary panel, by sourcing sample from various providers.⁴ Without transparency and accountability, it’s hard to see any differences in quality.

To ensure the integrity of their data, client-side researchers must proactively take ownership of the data quality process, even if suppliers implement basic fraud prevention measures. This involves demanding transparency from suppliers regarding sample sources, using their own fraud detection systems and implementing rigorous quality control protocols before, during and after the survey.

MYTH 4: FRAUD IS EASILY IDENTIFIED AND REMOVED.

While traditional bots are a known factor in data quality issues, human-assisted fraud poses an even greater challenge.⁵ This type of fraud ranges from large-scale operations like click farms to smaller-scale efforts by individuals with malicious intent, as evidenced by

browser extensions and form-fill technology. Although the goal of claiming survey incentives remains the same, the focus has shifted from just completing as many surveys as quickly as possible to ensuring that (fraudulent) survey completions are accepted.” – RICH RATCLIFF, OPINIONROUTE

Numerous studies have shown that bad actors can easily blend into a dataset.⁷ They are familiar with typical quality checks and can exploit any weaknesses in the system. Moreover, advancements in AI tools have made it easier than ever for them to go undetected.

While there are external factors in the ecosystem that researchers cannot control, they do have significant influence over many aspects of the research process that can help mitigate poor data quality through careful planning. Being intentional and proactive from the outset is crucial, as it is far easier to prevent data quality issues than to rectify them after the fact.

A comprehensive approach to data quality involves multiple layers of protection, each addressing a distinct threat. Our best chance of preventing poor data quality lies in applying all these layers collectively, from design (e.g., selecting a reputable sample source, employing robust fraud detection software) through fielding (e.g., incorporating rigorous screening questions and attention checks) and analysis (e.g., reviewing the data to ensure consistency and coherence). While reviewing verbatim responses should be part of this process, they have become increasingly less reliable for assessing quality.

“With simple prompt adjustments, AI-generated answers can be shorter, less

MYTH 5: MARKETING MATERIALS ACCURATELY REFLECT THE SUPPLIER’S CAPABILITIES SUCH AS QUALITY, PANEL SIZE AND PROFILING INFORMATION.

The online sampling ecosystem is rife with marketing materials that promise large, high-quality panels at cheap prices. In an attempt to differentiate themselves, suppliers often make exaggerated claims that can mislead buyers.

Suppliers often overstate the size of their panels. A common misconception is that panel providers have large, readily available pools of highly engaged respondents. While some panels may boast millions of registered members, the active pool is typically a small fraction of this number, ranging from 5% to 10%.

“The vast majority of all respondents registered on online panels are inactive (i.e., are not regularly taking part in research) and the size of the pool you can actually recruit into your study is often as much as 5-10x lower than the number the panel will advertise.” – ANDREW GORDON, PROLIFIC

Moreover, when suppliers advertise access to millions of people in their promotional materials (including responses to ESOMAR 37 questions), this figure often includes multiple sources, not just their proprietary panel. While this expands their reach, it doesn’t guarantee a reliable and consistent supply of high-quality respondents.

• **Panelist profiles may not be accurate.** Another common misconception is that panel providers maintain extensive profiling data on their panelists. “Panel companies advertise hundreds or even thousands of pre-profiled data points on their panelists. However, this total includes many data points with low opt-in rates (around 1% of the panel), those that are not updated frequently enough, some that contain errors (e.g., a panelist may have mis-clicked their gender), and others based on leading questions.”

– BENJAMIN ELLIOTT, SR. RESEARCH STRATEGIST

While some providers do gather demographic and psychographic informa-

tion, the quality and consistency of this data can vary significantly. Many panelists do not complete profiling surveys, turnover rates are high and panelists' information can change over time.

- **Quality claims often lack rigor and transparency.** When sample companies produce white papers comparing their panels to others, the findings always favor their own offerings, often with limited transparency around methodology. Buyers should approach such marketing materials with a healthy dose of skepticism and seek out panel-agnostic research for a more objective evaluation.
- **Quality pledges are not effective in advancing quality efforts due to the lack of enforcement.** Quality pledges (i.e., formal commitments by a company or organization to uphold specific data quality standards, transparency and ethical research practices) are often seen as a positive step toward improving standards and fostering trust in the industry. However, the lack of enforcement and accountability means that many companies may sign these pledges more as a marketing tool than a true commitment to quality.

THREATEN THE FOUNDATION

Over the past 20 years, the landscape of online sampling has shifted drastically, with profitability often prioritized over ethical standards. The scale of data quality issues in online sampling has grown so significant that they now threaten the very foundation of research integrity. Only through transparency can we address and fix these deep-rooted problems.

Transparency will lead to eye-opening realizations around the extent that demand is exceeding supply. It will also highlight areas in the current sample ecosystem that need further investigation by our industry to fully understand the implications and impact (e.g., respondents attempting an average of 21+ surveys per day, panels aggregating other panels who are aggregating other panels, etc.).

The existing online systems and processes that produce ready respondents for survey participation were mostly designed by technologists and business interests who were seeking efficiency and to quickly maximize

their profitability. The rampant re-use of sample is one of the most salient "efficiencies" in place today and researchers have yet to understand the repercussions on accurate findings. This is extremely difficult to see in ad hoc studies but becomes very obvious when trying to have consistent, sensible results across a tracking study. In fact, many companies have given up on trackers for this reason.


Unfortunately, sample and data quality were an afterthought as the industry focused their efforts on "faster and cheaper" findings. With true transparency, revelations will push the entire supply chain to reinvent itself and transform the current business model.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

The blinders are finally coming off for client-side researchers when it comes to the state of online research and sampling but what can they do? Should researchers sit back and rely on the supply chain to correct the issues that suppliers created for their own benefit? The tide is turning and now is the time to come together and drive change:

- **Unite and speak with one voice.** Brands can come together as one voice, driving industry-wide and global initiatives that promote transparency and accountability.
- **Proactively ask sample suppliers to provide quality metrics.** For each study, brands can demand transparency on the source of the sample, amount and type of targeted sample, fraud rejection rates and reasons for terms. In addition, they should request that any fraud system information be passed to their dataset (including the type of device used to take the survey as well as device frequency, if available). These metrics will help researchers assess the true quality of the sample they are purchasing.
- **Track sample supplier performance across all studies over time.** Brands can monitor these metrics over time and include any in-house cleaning statistics. This will allow researchers to evaluate each supplier systematically and determine whether quality is improving or getting worse in their studies.
- **Help build industry benchmarks.** Brands can contribute this data to

benchmarking efforts like the Global Data Quality Initiative or collaborate with other brands to publish a regular report on industry fraud levels. This collective approach will help us understand, as an industry, whether fraud is becoming more or less prevalent based on real data.

- **Ask for evidence-based research from the industry and suppliers.** Don't accept vague promises – insist on clear, data-backed proof of sample quality and a robust, transparent methodology. By focusing on the real issues, we can make progress. Many client-side researchers are already coming together through CASE4Quality to ensure their voices are heard. Through collaboration, we can help create a more accountable and transparent research ecosystem. Learn more at www.case4quality.com. 

Karine Pepin is the co-founder of The Research Heads. CASE4Quality is a branded coalition created to ensure a quality foundation for marketing data intelligence. E-mail info@case4quality.com for more information. Mary Beth Weber is the founder of CASE and a senior account executive at Lucy by Capacity. Efrain Ribeiro is an online research consultant. Tia Maurer is R&D group scientist at Procter & Gamble. Carrie Campbell is former head of data and analytics at Ketchum and National Geographic.

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••• the business of research

How to beat the bots

An open letter to the insights industry on data fraud

| By Keith Rinzler



abstract

As bot technology grows more sophisticated, the insights industry is experiencing a data quality crisis that threatens to eventually replace human-generated responses with synthetic data. Forward-thinking researchers are proposing comprehensive solutions that eliminate fraudsters' ability to game the system through innovative technological and structural approaches.

The consumer insights industry should thrive in this digital age, where connecting with consumers has never been easier. Instead, we're facing a data fraud crisis, initiated by years of neglect toward the respondent experience. This crisis is undermining trust and threatening our future. Despite advances in fraud detection, bot attacks are escalating. We must shift from defensive measures to proactive, structural change to move forward.

Kantar's report, *The State of Online Research Panels*, reveals that "researchers are discarding on average up to 38% of the data they collect due to quality concerns and panel fraud...with one prospect citing they had to return 70% of data provided by a leading panel provider." And this report is not an outlier. A study by Greenbook found that up to 30% of online survey responses are fraudulent and a LinkedIn Pulse article pegged the number at 40%. Data fraud is a subset of data quality but it's the focus of this letter because it represents the biggest single threat to our industry. Fraud alone has been estimated at 15%-30% of responses, costing the industry billions annually, financially and reputationally (Fast Company, 2022).

The secret's now out and our industry's data fraud issues are getting public attention. The rise in survey bots and the resulting data quality crisis is no longer under wraps and media coverage is making clients – and their leadership – fully aware of it. With budgets and jobs at stake, clients are taking this more seriously than ever. Every day we delay in solving this problem brings us closer to a major data fraud scandal that will shake the industry.

Years of mistreatment

So, how did we get here? Price pressure from the commodification of sample responses has resulted in years of respondent mistreatment, driving away high-quality participants. Meanwhile, sample providers' business models require constant respondent recruitment, often by any means, just to maintain sample pool size. So they resort to open-source recruiting, where shields at the



The alternative “push” model, used by companies like IQ, aims to drastically decrease the incentive for fraud. In this model, surveys are only delivered (pushed) to individual, prequalified members based on n-size. There are no lists or “take survey now” options for bots or professional survey takers to abuse. There is nothing a respondent can do to take more surveys and they never know when they will get one. So that removes all the incentive.

Additionally, while there are many ways to commit to this principle, companies like IQ also have 100% of surveys answered via app or SMS from a validated mobile phone. Single panelist per physical, validated mobile device removes much of the opportunity for bot responses by design.

So the incentive and opportunity are eliminated. This is how we became 100% bot-free but ours is not the only solution. Other companies, many of whom have signed below, have made great strides in combating data fraud and should be looked at as examples as well. We commend all companies in the space who see the data fraud challenge with clarity and invest meaningful time, attention and capital to its solution.

Offense vs. defense

Almost all data fraud problems disappear if the ability of respondents (human or otherwise) to choose to take more surveys is eliminated. Offensively eliminating the fraudsters' capability (and motivation) rather than defensively trying to detect them after the fact is a far more efficient investment in the long run.

The switch from “pull” to “push” will take time and resources, including a technology investment, but the industry has no choice. This is a proven solution that anyone can implement. In the meantime, some steps can be taken immediately:

- **Treat and compensate consumers fairly.** Use only permission-based panels. End the use of river sampling or other non-opted-in respondents. (If we don't, regulators will make this decision for us.) Focus on an optimal respondent experience. Mobile-only design and the push model are great first steps. So is a “pay-per-response” approach, which discourages unnecessary survey questions with a financial penalty. Provide immediate and tangible compensation without hidden pitfalls. Fair cash compensation is essential for establishing trust. Quality data comes at a higher price.
- **Reduce open-source recruitment.** Invite-only panels with rigorous screening should become standard. Start building these panels now and

top of the funnel are lowered, making it easy for bots to join panels and find surveys with minimal verification. Continuous survey opportunities from routers further incentivize bots and professional survey takers.

Since many clients haven't been fully aware of these intricacies, they've trusted insights partners to “handle it,” all the while advancing the “pricing race to the bottom.” This has devalued the cost of high-quality data and perpetuated a lack of fair compensation and robust respondent validation. This repetitive cycle ensures the industry remains stuck in a defensive mode, with bots and other fraudsters continuing to invade panels in droves.

We are now fighting a data fraud battle against bot software writers and other fraudsters that we cannot win with just defensive (reactive) methods alone. Seasoned and determined insights professionals and consumer research firms using the latest anti-fraud tools still struggle to match the sophistication of bots, some now enhanced by AI. To borrow an analogy from the 1983 film “War Games,” “We're deep into an arms race where each side keeps enhancing their capabilities and the only way to win is not to play the game at all.”

The root cause of fraud

At its most basic level, the fraud problem is not just about compensation. Sample providers and platforms use routers that direct respondents to posted lists of surveys or offer a “take survey now” button that lets fraudsters choose to take more surveys.

This “pull” model where sample providers/marketplaces try to pull in as many responses as possible exacerbates the data fraud problem because the posting of these lists or the otherwise offering of an almost unlimited supply of surveys to take at will is the mechanism that incentivizes bot creators and other bad actors with outsized rewards for those who crack the code. In other words, the “availability of choice” provides the fraudsters with their primary incentive: the ability to earn more compensation by taking more surveys.

shift work to existing “guaranteed 100% human” panels.

- **Move from online to mobile-only** (to the greatest extent possible). Mobile phone only-based registration and response is vastly more bot-resistant than web-based options and increases validation. Most data fraud is web-based, not mobile.

The true cost of low-quality data

I'd like to say that quality shouldn't be negotiable and that we as an industry shouldn't sell low-quality data at any price but this is not realistic. There will always be companies who seek to sell lower-quality data at a lower price and there will always be clients who take them up on that offer. There's nothing we can do about that in a free-market economy, nor should we. What we can do is educate insights customers on the true cost of low-quality data and its externalities and begin to charge what high-quality data costs. Clients must understand the real cost of quality data and cheap data should come with clear disclaimers about limitations.

If you provide high-quality data, lean into it and join initiatives that promote and uphold these standards. Join the Insights Association's data quality benchmarks initiative. Seek ISO 20252 certification. Practice radical transparency concerning respondent-level data, results testing, your answers to ESOMAR's 37 Questions to Help Buyers of Online Samples and your efforts to move from pull to push. It's up to us to educate sample-buyers and help them better understand modern sample practices and the ramifications of different approaches to those practices.

Yes, I'm suggesting that the industry split into two groups: those who provide high-quality data and can prove it (at a higher price) and those who focus on providing more directional survey results at the lowest-possible price. There's nothing wrong with the latter approach, as long as buyers have transparency and know what they're (not) paying for. Contrary to many sales pitches, I don't think high quality can be provided at the lowest cost.

Enter synthetic data

There are two questions in consumer research. First, are respondents who they say they are? Second, are they answering truthfully? If we can't consistently an-

swer yes to both questions, the prognosis for our industry as we currently know it is poor. And if we don't solve this problem quickly, the writing is on the wall...enter synthetic data (many budgets are already being reallocated here).

We no longer have the luxury of downplaying the simmering data fraud crisis because we are well past the tipping point. Fraud concerns have now spread beyond our industry to our customers, who are well aware, are deeply concerned and are demanding accountability.

We have an opportunity to bring forward a solution that will restore data integrity, create efficiencies for the bottom line and allow for faster and more reliable decision-making but it requires a commitment to change the model. Building a thriving, engaged, low-fraud panel is very possible. We and others have proven it.

A call to action

I'm passionate about this and so are the leaders of many other companies, including those who have signed below. We're all happy to help others start the process and share what we learned as we implemented push vs. pull, online to mobile-only and other solutions. We all need to talk about this, perhaps in ways we haven't before. So, let's talk. Reach out to us, we'll get back to you.

Join us and other companies in aligning with initiatives like IA's data-quality benchmarking initiative, Global Data Quality and CASE4 Quality and collaborating toward a bot-free future. Get on board with these initiatives, now!

And to our fellow sample providers, let's collaborate. Many of us are willing to share our own best practices on this and so are others. Together, we can expand task forces, devote conferences to this topic and significantly reduce if not eliminate the bot/fraudster problem. Solving this and bolstering our industry's reputation benefits everyone. Let's build a bot-free, transparent insights industry that restores trust and secures our future. Together we can turn the tide on data fraud. 📌

Keith Rinzler is founder and CEO of 1Q. He can be reached at 1@1q.com.

We, the undersigned, support the need for industry change and commit to being an agent of change in our respective roles.

Tona Alonso

Director, Category Management and Insights
– North America
Hasbro

Simon Chadwick

Managing Partner
Cambiar Consulting

Melanie Courtright

CEO
Insights Association

Bob Fawson

Co-Founder
Data Quality Co-op

Angela Glowienke

Senior Manager, Consumer Insights
Pura

Cynthia Harris

Founder
8:28 Insights

Kerry Hecht

Founder/CEO
10k Humans

Brad Larson

Founder/CEO
Ironwood Insights Group

Bob Lederer

President
RFL Communications

Dana May

Manager, Customer Research and Insights
Sally Beauty

Wes Michael

President and Founder
Rare Patient Voice

Lenny Murphy

Chief Advisor for Insights and Development
Greenbook | Gen2 Advisors | Veriglif | Savio

Adam Roberts

Senior Product Manager, Survey
Numerator

Colson Steber

Co-CEO
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Brett Watkins

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••• the business of research

Partnering for insights

How to choose and manage your research suppliers effectively

| By David Soorholtz and Terry Grapentine



abstract

The authors, who have worked on both sides of the research process, offer tips to help client-side researchers vet and work with the right vendors.

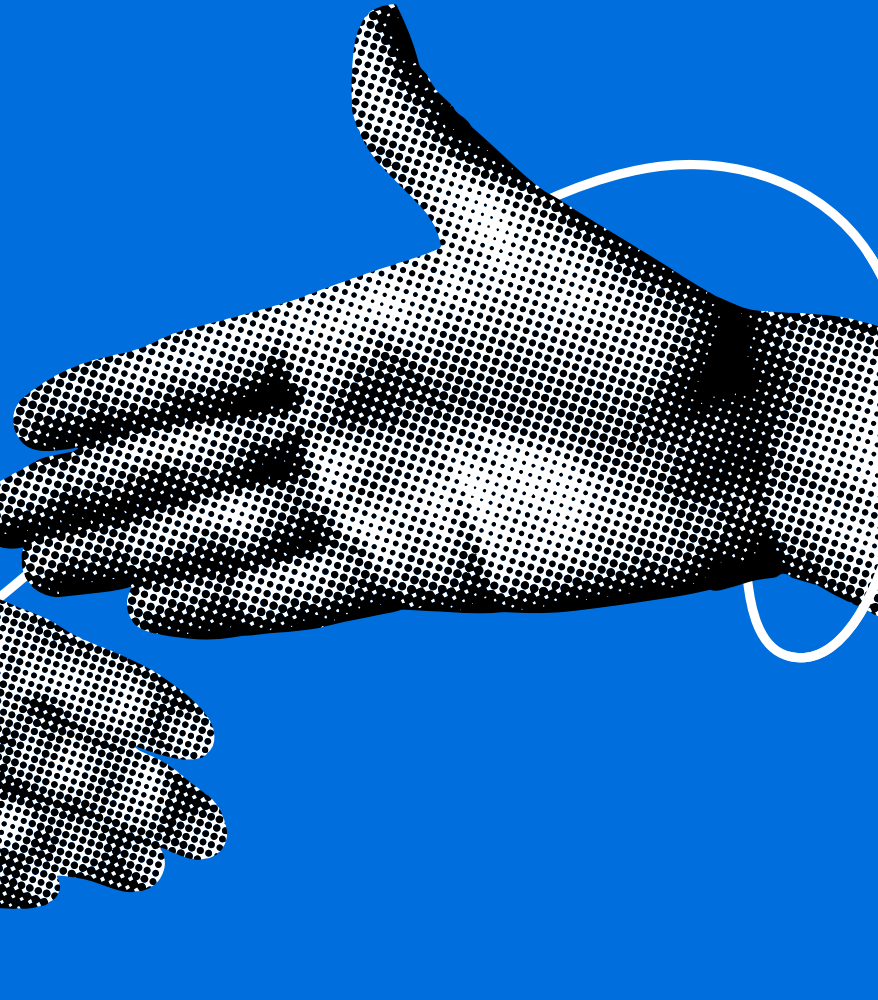
Client-side researchers (who, for purposes of this article, we refer to as “clients”) rely heavily on the research suppliers they utilize to conduct primary marketing research. Selecting the best supplier for each project and then working effectively with that supplier is critical to the success of any research project. However, in our experience, many clients receive little training on evaluating and effectively managing the research suppliers they rely on. In this article, we will use our experiences as client-side researchers and research consultants to propose best practices that clients may use to evaluate, select and manage research suppliers.

Both clients and suppliers have the same goal: high-quality research projects. Both want to conduct research that delivers on time and on budget and meets the study objectives – with no surprises. Suppliers want to make their clients “look good” by hitting these marks because it will help to ensure a long and profitable relationship with that client. Clients want the same because it will answer their internal clients’ business questions, leading to job satisfaction and (hopefully) advancement.

However, to the client, a research study is an input: an expense that delivers a product that they and their internal clients use to develop strategies and tactics. To the supplier, the research study is an output: the product of their work and a source of revenue. As a result, there is the usual tension between supplier and client. Because of this, client-side researchers must conduct adequate due diligence on potential suppliers because they know the product delivered by their suppliers reflects on them.

General considerations

Do you trust them? This may seem like a strange place to start but it’s the first question to ask when selecting a supplier. If you question your ability to trust a supplier, you can’t use them in good faith. Unfortunately, developing trust without first working with a supplier is nearly impossible. But what does



trust mean in this context? In our experience, a supplier that you have come to trust does what they say they will do (meet the study objectives and deliverables) when they say they will (meet deadlines) at the cost they promised.

So, what are some keys to determining if you can trust a new supplier? One indicator is the supplier's willingness to constructively challenge you versus taking everything you say at face value. This indicates that the supplier is honest about what they can do and how they can do it. When selling anything to a new customer, it takes some guts to not always say yes. Also, although it's sometimes not feasible, consult references. Often, researchers know their peers in competitive companies. It's ok (as long as your legal team oks it) to ask them about their experiences with a supplier.

Were their past projects of high quality? Although this seems obvious, if you like the quality of a supplier's projects, keep using them. As suppliers, we have always assumed that you are only as good as your last project – it is imperative that there be no “clinkers.” However, if you feel a supplier didn't hit it out of the park on a study, don't cast them off. First, look internally at the hand you dealt them. Were there issues with the study objectives, communication or any other aspect in which you or your team may have contributed to the study not being a winner? Also, in most cases, a study is unlikely to uncover a new “aha” but rather confirm in some way what you or your clients already believed. This is especially true when the research is conducted on in-line products or services the client knows well. Don't blame the supplier for not striking gold – there's not always gold there. However, asking the supplier to evaluate their processes is fair if a study doesn't meet your expectations. What if anything changed on their side that might have contributed to this?

Who will do the work? Before commissioning a project, client-side researchers should know who at their supplier will be playing which role in the study. Most suppliers have teams of researchers and support staff participating in each project, ranging from recent college grads to people with years of

experience. In our careers, we have been the fresh-faced junior researchers and are now the “old gray-haired guys.” When bidding on a research project, most suppliers are pricing the hours each person (or job title) will spend on the project. Each person has a differing hourly price, depending primarily on their experience. The final cost of a study is the rollup of these hourly costs plus any out-of-pocket costs.

Herein lies the conundrum. Ideally, the client would like only the most experienced people at their supplier to carry out their study. Conversely, the supplier would like to keep the study cost down, train new researchers and leverage the time of their experienced people while still successfully executing the project. What to do? In our experience, it is vital that a client-side researcher determines precisely who will be participating in what role in a study. If you want or need a highly experienced person playing a key role in a study – say, qualitative moderation or advanced analytics – demand them. Make sure that the old gray-haired guy or gal isn't just involved in pitching the proposal and delivering the final report, especially if the study has major implications for your internal clients.

However, new researchers don't gain experience without spending years participating in and then managing research projects and they often add fresh ideas. Suppliers (and ultimately the clients) can't afford to have their highly experienced people do all the work. Be open to a blend of more- and less-experienced people working on your project.

Also, not all experience is equal. Although we are proponents of Malcolm Gladwell's “10,000 hours” theory (“Outliers: The Story of Success”) and believe practice makes perfect, time alone is not everything. Check out their credentials (LinkedIn). Where and what did they study? Are they published, how often and where (Google Scholar)? This information alone does not mean they are good researchers but it does provide insight into their intellect and the seriousness with which they have approached their careers.

What are their competencies? Are they selling what you need? If it's clear that a study requires a qualitative approach and the supplier spends most of their pitch describing their quantitative skills (or vice versa), it's a sign that you should probably not use them for some types

of research. Nearly every supplier has things they do better than others and no one supplier is likely the best fit for all your projects. Ask them about their areas of specialty. Look to participation in conferences and published (preferably peer-reviewed) articles by their researchers to document this.

Professional assessment

The most common way to start assessing a new supplier is via a capability presentation. Ask them to include not just their standard pitch but also pertinent case studies (with sensitive information redacted as necessary) to help you judge how they approach a research project. We have often used this approach (via redacting key parts of past studies) to show how we address a research problem from the study's business purpose through research objectives, methods and findings.

How's their problem-solving? The best research suppliers are good critical thinkers and demonstrate they are effective and creative in problem-solving. They are intellectually curious, interested and excited about your work. They ask good questions and are proud of what they do and how they do it. You can ask suppliers questions about how they have or would solve a challenging research issue but, ultimately, the best way to learn about how a supplier thinks are to send them an RFP. Their proposal should answer a multitude of questions. Do they offer multiple ways to address your research issue? Do they suggest alternatives that perhaps you haven't thought of? Do they ask questions to refine their understanding of the RFP before submitting it? With today's technology, it's easy to make an RFP look pretty but it's what's inside that counts – the depth and quality of the thought.

Do they have industry experience? As the opening song of "The Music Man" goes, "You gotta know the territory." A key component of a supplier's competency is their knowledge of your industry, products/services and business. This knowledge is critical in every case, especially in B2B markets where the client's products or services become part of their customers' final products downstream. Knowing how B2B study respondents run their businesses, make decisions and the language they use is critical to providing context that makes study findings actionable. New suppliers can demonstrate

this, at least in part, by what they share in their capability presentations (including case studies). Have they worked in your market and how often? Do they demonstrate knowledge of the market's inner workings, your product/service category and the terminology used? There is perhaps nothing as uncomfortable in a report out to your internal clients as a supplier who does not know the nuances of what they are reporting on. You can prevent this by doing your due diligence.

Project execution considerations

Can they consistently meet your deadlines? The only way to find out is to give them a project. This is also a good question for your peers (even those who work for your competitors) who have worked with this supplier. Missing deadlines is one of the surest ways a supplier can get themselves in hot water – and for good reason. But there is an inherent conflict. Suppliers are trying to manage their manpower to get the most out of it without overloading the system. In a supplier's perfect world, their workload is level. However, things are rarely ideal and the workflow has ebbs and flows. It's not uncommon for suppliers to include aggressive deadlines in their proposals – win the bid first and then work out the schedule. This is mainly because most projects are at least somewhat delayed and most of those delays are caused by the client.

A typical supplier complaint is that clients propose arbitrary and unrealistic deadlines. If you have a firm internal deadline – a meeting or a decision that must be made by a specific date – communicate this to the supplier upfront. A good supplier will work like crazy to deliver by that date or tell you that they can't and work with you to find some middle ground, such as the delivery of the project in phases.

Do their deliverables meet your expectations? The key deliverable in almost every study is a final report, almost exclusively done in PowerPoint. The report should look professional, be free of typos (which we've found unconsciously cause internal client questions about the report's validity) and hopefully not exclusively use WordArt. Many suppliers now employ graphic artists to punch up the look of their reports or report templates. However, as with proposals, while it's relatively easy to make reports

look great, it's what's inside that counts. It's fair to ask new suppliers for a couple of reports (redacted as needed to preserve confidentiality) so that you can see how they approach the content and the look of their reports.

We have found it highly beneficial to talk with our clients about what they expect in each report before we begin drafting. Ask for a report outline. Doing this ensures the client gets what they want regarding content and appearance with the first draft. If your supplier does not initiate this, tell them about your expectations for the final report – length, style, order, inclusion of verbatims in qualitative reports and any other specifics you are looking for. Our reports have ranged from a very short executive summary of 10 or 20 pages for some projects to reports of over 100 slides, with a 10-slide summary. Do the groundwork in advance so you can provide whatever the client wants.

For some studies, deliverables like market simulators or the like are necessary. Again, it is key to work with the supplier to design these to meet your needs, mainly so that you and your internal clients can easily use them post-study. If your company often conducts this type of study, ask for examples as part of new supplier screening.

Finally, get clarity on what is expected for any mid-study check-ins – preferably in your RFPs. This allows the supplier to correctly budget for the added time and cost of these activities and account for them in the study timetable. Suppliers are likely to push back or seek to increase the project cost if the client wants to add these post-commissioning.

Do they use valid methods? In other words, are the methods they use well-founded in the marketing research literature? Marketing research firms often brand methods or study types as their proprietary version of "X." This is especially true for analytical methods. While we support the concept of branding, the client must be allowed to see inside the black box and require the supplier to describe what makes their version of X different and better than other versions. We have had better success justifying methods for which we can cite references or use methods considered the gold standard (i.e., Sawtooth Software for conjoint).

Also, some suppliers rely too often on certain methods they have become comfortable or proficient with. Every research method has its uses but no one method is always the best approach. If you find your supplier recommending one method often, ask questions.

Do they have access to the right sample? Access to the “right” sample – the respondents who can provide the best insights on your research objectives – has become increasingly difficult in many B2B markets, especially those that are highly concentrated. However, even in consumer markets with large numbers of potential respondents, be sure to ask questions about the source and quality of the sample. Your supplier must have access to sample that will allow you to address your objectives. Suppliers who work in tight verticals often maintain their own databases or even panels of qualified respondents. Don’t be shocked if the sample sizes are smaller than you’d like – response rates have declined in these markets over the past 10 years, even as respondents can increasingly be reached online.

What is their post-delivery follow-up? In most cases, good answers result in more questions. Additional questions are usually raised during the delivery of the final report. A supplier should be willing to provide some agreed-upon additional support post-delivery, usually with an additional analysis of the data captured in the study. However, these requests cannot be open-ended; it’s unfair to the supplier (and unbusinesslike) to keep asking for more. This additional support costs the supplier time and, thus, money. Unless the supplier has built this into the initial study cost, at some point, there is a point at which they will ask for more money, especially when the added support causes the original study scope to “creep.” However, a new supplier will often be willing to go above and beyond the original analysis to solidify their relationship with the client. Don’t assume that this will always be the case just because they provided extensive post-delivery support in a previous study. The RFP and proposal stage is the best time at which to address the additional follow-up the supplier needs to provide.

What does it cost? Most clients offer RFPs to multiple suppliers to allow them to compare costs and approaches as a part of the selection process. A standard way

of comparing cost is cost-per-complete (CPC). CPC can act as a starting point for comparison. Still, in our experience, each supplier will offer a somewhat different approach to your RFP – methods and/or deliverables – unless your RFP sets hard boundaries for each.

Our advice is to ensure you are comparing the costs on an apples-to-apples basis that takes these differences into consideration. A more rigorous methodology or deliverables may be more expensive but might be warranted to meet your study objectives. One of the benefits of getting multiple proposals is the opportunity to see different approaches to your research objectives. Finally, be careful to point out these differences in approach to your internal clients and not let them become fixated on the CPC.

All research suppliers want to know if you are less than happy with any aspect of a study – talk to them. They are your business partners and tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars in projects are at stake in the future – for both of you. They want to ensure you are satisfied with their product. If you are unhappy, tell them, and if you decide to drop a supplier, tell them why.

The client’s responsibilities

Remember that a supplier’s proposal is not their line in the sand. There are usually multiple ways to approach a study; their proposal is their best attempt but likely one of several they could suggest (sample size, methods, etc.). If you find a supplier you feel is a good match for a study from the standpoint of their background, competence and other factors listed in this article, but their proposal doesn’t meet your expectations, talk to them. Give them a chance to resubmit. If the goal is to get the best possible work done, take a little more time.

When you are preparing to conduct research, do your prework. Prepare an RFP – even if it’s a short one. At least list the business purpose and study objectives. It’s hard for suppliers to respond to verbal or back-of-napkin RFPs because doing so usually results in an off-the-mark proposal.

Try not to pigeonhole the suppliers as only “good for” a certain type of study. We have too often heard long-term clients exclaim, “We didn’t know you did that,” even when we had discussed those capabilities many times before. We realize

that it’s not the client’s job to remember what a supplier can or can’t do and it’s normal to make this type of judgment so that at least some tasks can be put in the “handled” pile. But there is almost nothing as deflating to a supplier as hearing after the fact about a study that was totally in our wheelhouse for which you used another supplier without soliciting an RFP from us.

In the RFP or during the kickoff meeting, adequately brief your suppliers. Give them as much background as possible on the situation that led to this research. Provide information on the products/services being studied and where these fit into the company’s overall business. If you cannot do this, involve your internal clients (actually, we have found this is desirable in any case to help ensure their buy-in). Provide relevant prior research. Describe the hypotheses you want the study to test and their expected outcomes. There is sometimes concern that providing this information may bias or direct the research findings. Still, in our experience, it leads to higher-quality research that better addresses the study objectives and client needs.

Hold up your end of the timetable and communication. Your suppliers will do everything possible to meet the timetable’s terms but they rely on you for critical reviews and approvals.

Set up for success

Effective collaboration between clients and research suppliers is the cornerstone of successful marketing research. By establishing trust, ensuring alignment on objectives and fostering open communication, clients can set their suppliers up for success, resulting in high-quality outcomes that benefit both parties. Ultimately, when clients and suppliers work as true partners, the research not only meets expectations but also drives impactful business decisions. 🗣️

David Soorholtz and Terry Grapentine are independent marketing research consultants. They can be reached at david@vetsense.biz and tgrapentine@gmail.com.

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When online sentiment leads to real-world boycotts

Tips from an intelligence professional on avoiding strategic surprises

| By Brent Pearson

abstract

To survive and thrive in today's complex and divisive media atmosphere, brand managers need to understand the information environments relevant to their brands and industries, especially when engaging in a strategy that involves potentially controversial cultural issues.

This is an article written for an insights industry publication by someone who is not in the insights industry. I am a career intelligence professional specializing in analysis of publicly available information aka open-source intelligence (OSINT). My intention is to share my thoughts on how uncontrolled dissemination of information online is causing real-world consequences for iconic and popular brands today and propose a way forward for you, the insights professional, to defend and maintain the health of your brand in today's digital media landscape.

Because I have worked in the U.S. intelligence community as a government employee or as a private defense contractor I need to begin with a disclaimer: This article is not written in an official capacity and therefore the views expressed in this article are my own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. government.

To get us started I want to dispel any sense of mystique you may have about the work of an intelligence professional by simply defining intelligence as: a process focused externally using all available sources of information to reduce uncertainty for decision makers and avoid strategic surprise.

With OSINT, we use the same definition and insert the word "publicly" between "all" and "available."

Using the above definition, I believe the work of an intelligence professional is not all that dissimilar from your insights work. As an insights professional you gather, process and present information from surveys, focus groups, car clinics, etc., to reduce your clients' uncertainty about how to design, present, price and promote a product or service.

Brands seek to bring their products or services to market in a way that distinguishes them from similar offerings in the eyes of the public and they expect their insights professionals to help them obtain, maintain



and grow customer loyalty. Your role in maintaining your client's brand is exactly like that of the intelligence professional's in avoiding strategic surprises.

In recent years, several multibillion-dollar brands have experienced strategic surprises in the form of online activity that resulted in real-world boycotts. In this article we will review four case studies: Bud Light, Planet Fitness, McDonald's and Starbucks. I argue that the reason for these brands experiencing these strategic surprises was a lack of knowledge of what the intelligence community and Department of Defense (DOD) often refer to as the information environment.

The DOD defines the term "information environment" as "an aggregate of individuals, organizations and systems that collect, process, disseminate or act on information."

I would add that any individual, organization or system can only be a participant in an information environment. They cannot own or control an information environment, nor can they choose the information environments in which they are participants.

It is also important to note that when we use the term information, we do not mean only factual or verifiably true information but also information that is deliberately or unintentionally false. In this context the term information includes the categories of misinformation, disinformation and mal-information.

- **Misinformation:** Unintentional mistakes such as inaccurate photo captions, dates, statistics, translations or when satire is taken seriously.
- **Disinformation:** Fabricated or deliberately manipulated audio/visual content; intentionally created conspiracy theories or rumors.

- **Mal-information:** Largely accurate information that is based on reality but may be presented out of context to inflict harm on a person, organization or country.

In 2017 the United States military fully acknowledged the need to understand information environments and how influence in those environments can affect the real world by adding information as the seventh joint function of the military. This means that information is as much a priority for the military as the functions of command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection and sustainment.

The objective of the joint function of information is: to influence relevant actor perceptions, behavior, action or inaction and human and automated decision-making.

By using information, online organizers of boycott calls against Bud Light, Planet Fitness, McDonald's and Starbucks influenced perceptions of those brands and the purchasing decisions of online participants in information environments relevant to those brands. Now let us go through in detail the events that caused the boycotts against the above-mentioned brands and understand how a better grasp of information environments of those events could have prevented or at least softened the effects of the boycotts they experienced.

BUD LIGHT

In 2023, popular American beer brand Bud Light partnered with Dylan Mulvaney, a transgender social media influencer documenting her transition in a series of videos called "Days of Girlhood." Bud Light partnered with Mulvaney by sending her customized cans of their beverage featuring her image. Mulvaney made videos prominently displaying the cans and promoted a contest put on by Bud Light for March Madness, the annual American collegiate men's basketball tournament. At the same time Bud Light also released a series of "Pride-themed" cans listing various pronouns. Online activists immediately took to social media to call for boycotts of the brand for supposedly alienating its main

customer base in favor of promoting an LGBTQ agenda.

The backlash was exacerbated by misinformation when a satirical website posted claims that the entire Bud Light marketing team had been fired over the success of the boycott. Those participating in the boycott shared the claim online believing it to be true, further encouraging continuation of the boycott.

Bud Light's sales in the United States suffered throughout 2023. Its parent company Anheuser-Busch InBev reported a 9.5% decline for the whole year and 17.3% decline in the fourth quarter, "primarily due to the volume decline of Bud Light."

By partnering with Mulvaney, Bud Light appeared to be responding to recent activity in the information environments of popular entertainment, politics and parts of academia calling for greater inclusivity of what some consider to be historically marginalized communities. Bud Light did nothing wrong wanting to gain appeal among potential customers who value inclusivity. What Bud Light missed was an awareness of the polarizing online

information environments whose participants viewed the partnership with Mulvaney as a deliberate departure from the brand's identity and disregard of its main customer base.

In-depth knowledge of the information environments relevant to the partnership initiative would have enabled Bud Light to better assess the potential pitfalls of partnering with certain social media influencers. An influencer may have a large online following but if their content does not align with the brand's identity among its core audience, there are risks of negative bottom-line impacts.

Bud Light could have achieved a more effective and sustainable brand expansion by exploring gradual, adjacent opportunities that naturally resonate with its audience. For example, by introducing campaigns or product innovations that celebrate inclusivity within the context of shared values like camaraderie, lighthearted fun or communal experiences, Bud Light could have broadened its appeal while maintaining its connection to its loyal customers.

PLANET FITNESS

Planet Fitness operates over 2,000 health centers throughout the United States and had a policy that allowed members to use the locker rooms associated with their individual gender identity. That policy brought controversy in March 2024 when a female member of a Planet Fitness in Alaska took photos of a biological male shaving in the women's locker room. Upon complaining to staff claiming that women and girls were uncomfortable with the presence of a male in the women's locker room, Planet Fitness reiterated its position on inclusivity and revoked the woman's membership over its policy of prohibiting taking photos in locker rooms.

Popular conservative social media influencers spread mal-information about the controversy depicting it as Planet Fitness revoking the membership of the woman who stood against the company allowing men into women's locker rooms and "creating unsafe spaces for women." This took attention away from the fact she herself violated a Planet Fitness policy against taking photos in locker rooms. The controversy

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sy went viral and online influencers called for boycotts.

In less than one week Planet Fitness lost \$400 million in valuation. In the following weeks dozens of Planet Fitness locations reported receiving bomb threats, sometimes causing their facilities and the businesses next to them to evacuate members and staff until law enforcement could investigate and give the all-clear.

The online backlash about a single incident at one Planet Fitness caused real-world consequences for the brand. Awareness of the relevant information environments would have provided Planet Fitness insights about the online depictions of the controversy and enabled it to implement mitigation strategies before the losses became significant.

An insights professional with an understanding of the information environment would approach the Planet Fitness controversy by uncovering how the issue unfolded and gained traction. This would involve mapping out the narratives, key influencers and platforms driving the backlash to guide the brand's response and reframe the conversation. For example, they might recommend a messaging campaign with an empathetic tone to clarify misinformation while announcing a review of company policies and a commitment to improvement.

Rather than elevating the controversy by addressing it too directly, a measured approach informed by deep insights could have defused tensions and positioned the brand as responsive and forward-thinking.

MCDONALD'S

On October 7, 2023, Israel experienced a terrorist attack, losing over 1,000 of its citizens. In the immediate aftermath, Alonyal Limited, a company operating McDonald's fast-food franchises in Israel, posted on social media that it was donating meals "to all those who are involved in the defense of the state, hospitals and surrounding areas." Alonyal Limited was probably thinking that posting on social media about its gesture to support the country's first responders after a disaster would paint the brand in a positive light in the eyes of the Israeli public in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy. What ended up

happening was online activists used the gesture as a way to spread disinformation by depicting McDonald's entire global brand as having deliberately politicized itself by choosing a side in the long-running Israel-Palestine conflict. Since October 2023, McDonald's franchises in the Middle East, Asia and Europe have encountered boycotts, protests and even vandalism over the perception of their having chosen a side.

The immediate backlash was so severe that in early November 2023 the McDonald's corporation issued a statement attempting to explain how the donated meals were actions of the local franchise operator and "made independently without McDonald's [Corporation] consent or approval." In January 2024, McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski acknowledged the continued effects of the boycotts on the company's performance in the Middle East, blaming "war and associated misinformation." Kempczinski also tried to convey how McDonald's franchises in the Muslim countries are locally owned and employ thousands of people and that claims of the corporation supporting Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip were "disheartening and ill-founded."

In April 2024, the McDonald's Corporation announced a buyback of all 225 franchises owned by Alonyal Limited in hopes of rebuilding the brand's reputation in the Middle East. However, the McDonald's corporate outlook is not 100% positive, according to its CFO Ian Borden: "We do not expect to see meaningful improvement until there is a resolution in the Middle East."

McDonald's restaurants are independently operated by individual franchise owners. The initiatives of one owner resulted in online actors using information to target the entire brand for boycott on a global scale. Brands with a global presence (or those striving for such a presence) are vulnerable to their reputation being negatively affected, rightly or wrongly, by perceptions of associations with political issues of international significance. Mitigation strategies will likely be different for each country and/or region where a brand has presence. Characterizing the information environments relevant to where brands operate

enables effective monitoring of online activity and development of mitigation strategies unique to the circumstances in a given locale.

STARBUCKS

From October 2023 to January 2024 Starbucks lost around \$11 billion in market value after being subjected to boycotts over disinformation that claimed the coffee giant had taken the side of Israel against the Palestinians in the current conflict. The reality is that neither Starbucks Coffee Company nor its then-CEO Laxman Narasimhan ever made any official statements about the conflict and the company has not operated in Israel since 2003.

On October 9, 2023, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union, representing Starbucks Workers United, posted on social media, "Solidarity with Palestine." Starbucks claims to have received over 1,000 complaints about the union's social media post, including threatening phone calls and vandalism of some of its stores. In response, Starbucks filed a lawsuit against the union demanding removal of the social media post in question and cessation of use of the Starbucks logo.

The lawsuit was an attempt by the Starbucks Corporation to distance its brand from any political position about the Israel-Palestine conflict but online supporters of Starbucks Workers United were able to spread disinformation on social media that Starbucks was taking the side of Israel against the Palestinians and therefore deserved a boycott.

Although there is no way to prove definitively that the company's reported loss of market value was a direct result of boycotts, online activists certainly believed it was and continued to spread disinformation. Activists posted and shared further disinformation online that Starbucks announced "...they are ready to donate money to Palestine," and its CEO was "begging for forgiveness," after having made public statements against the Palestinians and stating, "Starbucks is forever a pro-Israeli company." The truth is that no such statements from the company or its CEO exist and Starbucks has made multiple public statements expressing sympathy for innocent

victims on both sides of the conflict. However, the calls for boycotts continued into the spring of 2024, resulting in Starbucks's Middle East franchise operator laying off 2,000 employees throughout the region.

Similar to McDonald's, Starbucks became embroiled in information environments related to the heated politics of an ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Starbucks from the very beginning publicly tried to distance itself from being associated with any side of the conflict but its detractors were able to create a perception of partisanship within the information environment that caused real-world consequences for the brand.

Be an active participant


As stated earlier, you cannot choose your information environment, nor can you control it. The best-case scenario for any brand is to be an active and influential participant in its relevant information environments and be ready for a quick response when your brand finds itself threatened by controversy due to damaging information.

However, mitigating controversy is not the only benefit of knowing your information environment; it's also a rich source of insights waiting to be uncovered. Knowing your customers' motivations and their adjacent brand affinities requires understanding their information sources and influences. Knowing those sources and influences, and monitoring how they change over time, is how you can make your information environment a constant source of insights about the customer experience and loyalty to your brand.

The case studies of Bud Light, Planet Fitness, McDonald's and Starbucks illustrate the tangible impact of online sentiment on real-world brand performance. Going forward, brands will be at risk of more than just the deliberate spread of misinformation on social media. As AI technologies continue to advance, AI-generated video, images and audio files at a glance will appear authentic and permeate information environments. These deepfakes could associate your brand to emotionally charged social and political issues and lead to boycotts, loss of investor

confidence and ruined individual and corporate reputations.

Even with the proliferation of AI, the most effective way for you as an insights professional to detect damaging information, AI generated deepfakes, etc., is to immerse yourself in the information environments relevant to your brand. Through continuous monitoring of those environments, you will develop a deeper understanding of your customers and a sixth sense of when new information is disingenuous or out of place.

Understanding information environments provides opportunities for insights professionals to anticipate risks, protect brand reputations and better inform decision-making for all elements of brand management and strategy. 

Brent Pearson is an OSINT subject matter expert. He can be reached at brentdpearson@gmail.com. The author wishes to acknowledge Derek Pearson, senior research consultant with MarketResponse International, for his generous help in preparing this article.

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Jon Ward, VP of Sales at EMEA

While online tools are impactful in achieving many Qualitative research objectives, there is just nothing like having the face-to face interaction with our consumers and clients – something that online just cannot replicate. The interaction between Moderator and Respondent becomes more immersive and natural – body language is key when tapping into the System 1 which is integral in a lot of the work we do. Finally, the back room and client engagement is just as important – bringing key stakeholders together to workshop live during research is unmatched and super effective.

Paul Markovic, Director of Behaviorally

I have enjoyed helping clients return to in-person research. You can see the excitement as they leave, re-energized with a very enthusiastic "We'll be back!" I think this is something we are all experiencing in our lives as we also return to more social gatherings, making more interpersonal connections face to face. I have been very grateful for technology through the pandemic, but what once seemed like a suitable substitute now pales in comparison to the real thing.

Megan Pollard, President of Fieldwork Network

The rich and robust nature of in person research is the best avenue for much of the qualitative work to be conducted. We are fortunate to see this back to its full potential with questions answered, ideas generated and collaboration amongst so many. As the conversations flow, we are gaining the much needed information to move ideas, products and plans forward.

Debby Schlesinger

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Research mirrors society: something gets lost when our only form of communication is on a computer screen or telephone. Of course there are the three senses...taste, touch and smell...that cannot be replicated online. But there's also the fact that humans are social creatures, and make decisions based upon social influences. People behave differently when you meet them in-person versus how they respond on a FaceBook neighborhood group post, do they not? Research is no different.

Smart companies know new products and ideas cannot be tested solely online: they need to be exposed "in the real world", with people interacting together. Much can be learned from what people do and react, versus solely about what they say...just like the real world, researchers are remembering the value of in-person research, and the incredible learning.

Brett Watkins, CEO of L&E Research

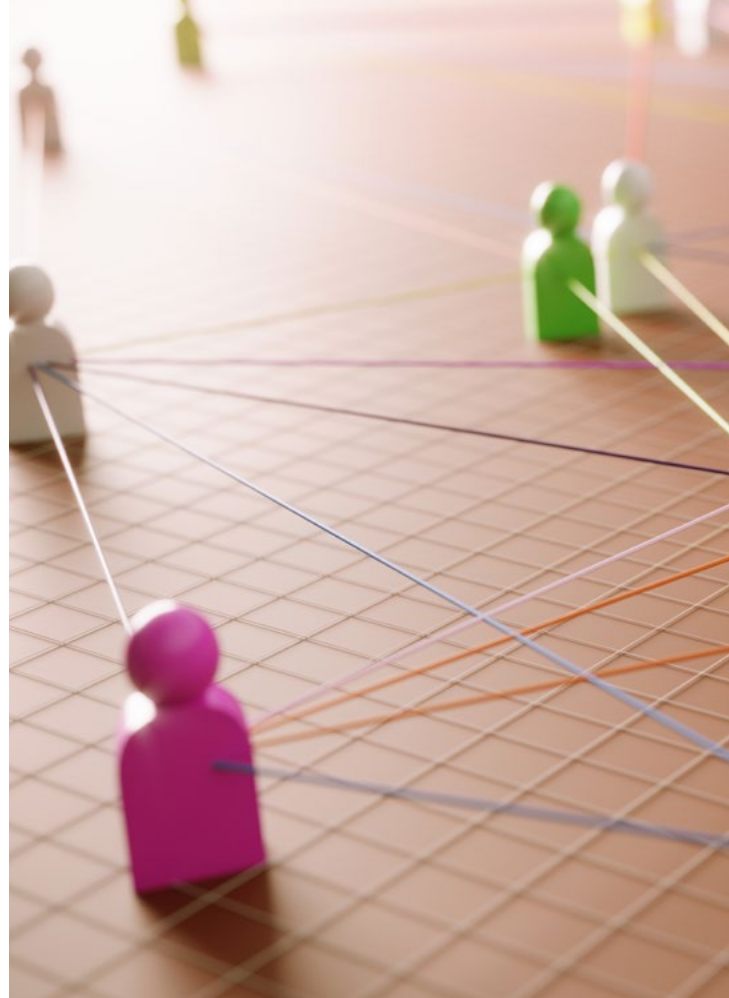


●●● health care research

From awareness to advancement

The role of education, internships and mentorship for Black women in clinical research

| By Danielle Mitchell, Portia Gordon, Tatiana Barakshina and Tom Donnelly



abstract

Black women face unique challenges entering and advancing in clinical research, despite the field's rapid growth and need for talent. An industry study uncovered how mentorship and networking are critical tools for overcoming barriers and driving inclusion.

In 2023, over 130,000 clinical trials were registered in the U.S. and the market size was \$27.8 billion, with a projected growth rate from 2021-2028 of 5-7%.¹ Some of the factors driving this trend include: increased research and developmental spending in the pharmaceutical industry; the need for more agents; increasing prevalence of disease; and a focus on rare disease and multiple orphan drugs in the pipeline.

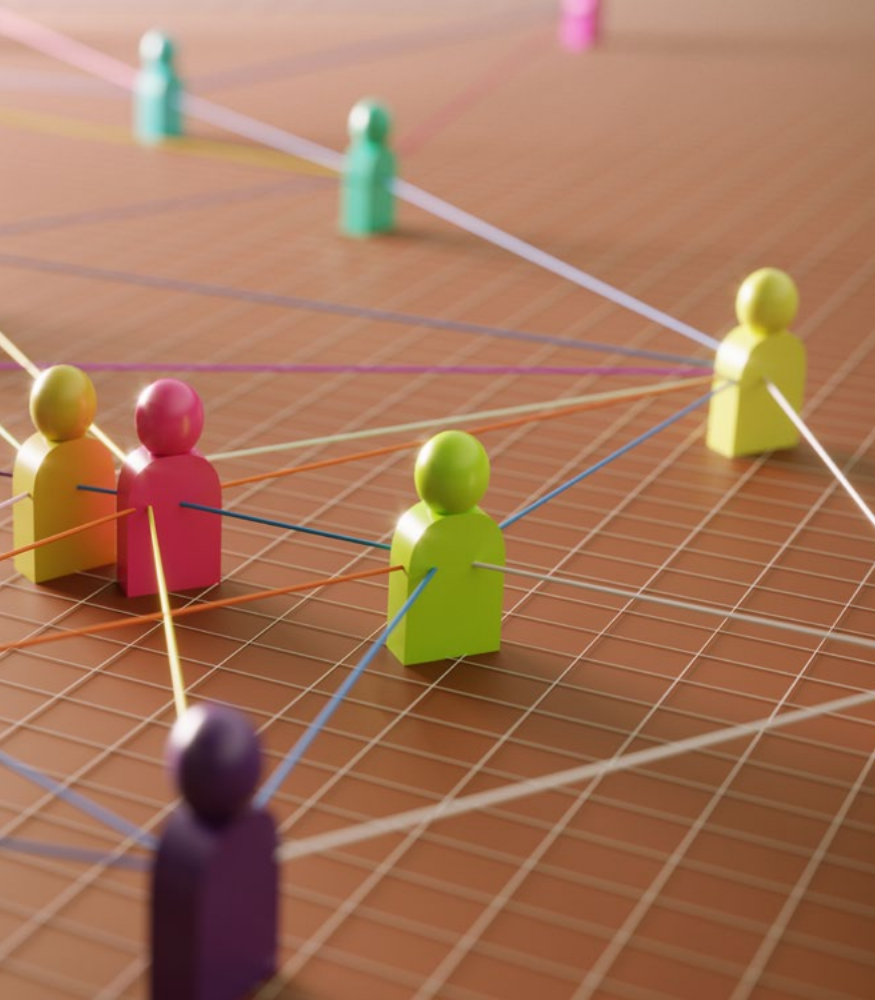
While there is growing demand for work and professionals in clinical research (over 127,000 professionals were employed in clinical research in 2023), there is also a vast underrepresentation of minorities, with single-digit percentages of African American (6-8%) and Hispanic (7-9%)² workers in the field, numbers that do not parallel their representation in the population (13.4% and 18.9%, respectively).³

Given this disparity, special considerations are needed to help minorities get into and advance in the field. One industry group working on making a difference is Black Women in Clinical Research (BWICR), started in 2019 by Danielle Mitchell. Its mission is to educate, empower and support Black women in the clinical research industry.

BWICR asked Intellus Worldwide, a nonprofit organization that provides a community for health care insights and analytic professionals,⁴ to conduct a research study to understand the experiences of Black women throughout their clinical research journey, including unmet needs.

The research objectives were to:

- understand how Black women in clinical research learn of the field and their rationales for selecting the profession;
- understand challenges and barriers encountered during training, hiring/employment and other notable milestones/experiences throughout their clinical research journey; and



- identify unmet needs and provide solutions to help address these needs, including suggestions to help them grow in the field.

Intellus partnered with Seton Hall University’s Market Research Center⁵ to help execute the research in 2023. A two-phase research project was conducted with members of BWICR in the U.S., all women of color working in the clinical research field. First, 15 tele-depth interviews were done to inform a quantitative study. Next, a 20-minute online survey was conducted with 42 BWICR members, with professional experience ranging from beginner to 25 years in the field. The interviews covered a range of topics including awareness of clinical research opportunities, conferences attended, mentors, career satisfaction and assessment of BWICR services.

Results

The findings are organized into two streams. First, we review how Black women get into the field of clinical research. Second, we cover aspects of advancing in the field.

GETTING INTO THE FIELD

Awareness is the first step in a funnel that leads to a career in clinical research. We asked professionals in the field when they first learned about career opportunities in clinical research and found that 50% of respondents learned while already in the workforce. The remaining 50% had some exposure, having awareness in college

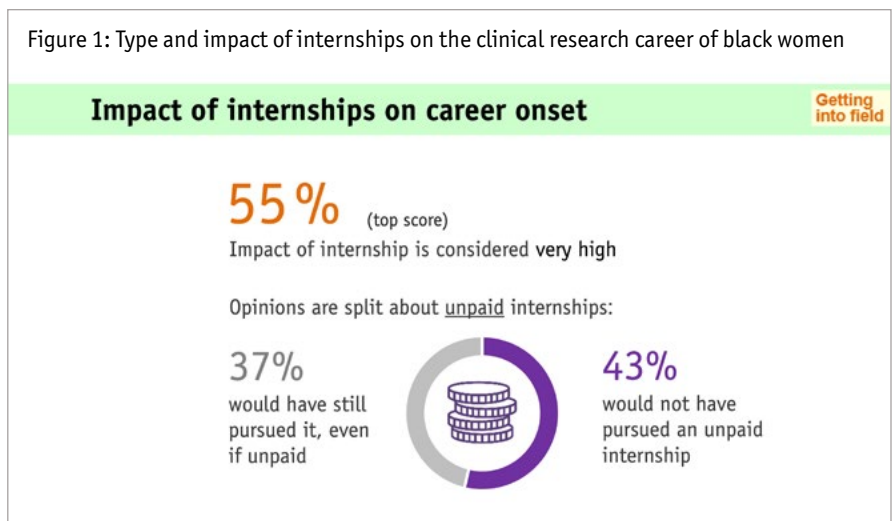
(28%) or in graduate school (19%). Two-thirds of respondents had past working experience before they joined clinical research in areas/roles such as: public health, psychology, nursing, pharmacy technical, lab manager or technician. Exposure to clinical research as a career came when looking for information on career websites (28%); some heard about clinical research from friends and family (23%) or from college resources (21%). Thus, there is an opportunity to raise awareness through formal education and career websites, helping people learn about this career earlier as they plan their futures and gain necessary skills. When considering the influence of money in entering the field, 64% of respondents reported that they received a pay increase as they were switching from another field to clinical research field, while 24% mentioned taking a pay cut in order to get into the field.

Internships are critical to help get into the field by gaining early experience, as well as an overall understanding of it. Just over half of respondents felt that internships had a high impact on getting into their clinical research career. As with many industries, it is difficult to enter the field if you do not have relevant experience. Just over a third of respondents would have taken an unpaid internship, while 43% would only have done a paid internship in order to progress into the field (Figure 1).

ADVANCING IN THE FIELD

Mentorship creates a space to share ideas, learn from others, avoid mistakes and clarify next steps, while also helping to solidify goals. A men-

Figure 1: Type and impact of internships on the clinical research career of black women



tor can help accelerate career growth by offering expert guidance and field navigation tips. When Black women are mentors for other Black women in the field, it expands the pool of future leaders and mentors, compounding expansion in the industry.

In this research, 43% of respondents had a mentor in the industry (Figure 2). Mentors were from a wide array of clinical research areas, including researchers, senior leadership, project management, specialized roles, operational management and educational leaders. This shows that a mentor does not need to be from a narrow area within your field. Mentorship length varies, as shown with respondents reporting their experience lasted an average of five years, ranging from one to 12. In our sample, 70% said having a mentor was extremely beneficial to their career.

Networking provides a support system that helps with finding new positions, pay negotiations and getting a holistic perspective of the field. LinkedIn was the most-used platform (78%) by the BWICR community (Figure 3); the free BWICR Facebook community was second (55%); and the paid BWICR app was third (30%).

The app was highly rated (average of 2.72 out of 3) and was used by 50% of the sample. The main benefits users reported are networking (50%) and identifying with their peers (29%). The

ability to identify with someone like you – similar experience, values and aspirations – was viewed as a career accelerator. Such a match can help the mentee and mentor to be more honest and open about issues. Also, it provides a space for unique challenges related to being an underrepresented minority.

Driving more widespread awareness

Clinical research is not widely recognized as a career option in high school and college education. Increasing awareness in these settings would help in attracting Black women to the field as well as driving more widespread awareness in general. Internships are important because many entrants into the field are coming from other medical professions and lack specific experience in clinical research. Thus, increased availability of internships would be a strong boost for expanding the number of Black women in this field. Mentorship connections are highly valued by Black women in clinical research and networking was ranked as the most valuable benefit to help them grow in the field. Providing a community that supports these, such as BWICR, will help Black women advance in clinical research careers.

Statistics are important, but personal stories are powerful. Two of the authors will briefly share theirs. When Portia graduated from Smith College, she

wanted to go into biomedical research. She did not want to go into medicine but wanted to have a very strong medical background. She was accepted into the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and entered its Sue Golding graduate division. Portia was the first woman of color to attain a doctorate in molecular pharmacology and biochemistry. She spent a lot of hours working at Albert Einstein but did not have a mentor who looked like her. She looked forward to going to conferences, such as the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, which is a scientific society that advances health and wellbeing by promoting research and education in the biological and biomedical sciences. There, Portia collaborated and interacted with other students of color. They discussed papers they worked on together and it was a very rewarding experience.

While she did not have a mentor, someone senior to her in the field, Portia was able to participate with colleagues on her level. Given that experience, once she had her own lab, she would invite graduate students and high school students of color to work with her during the summer. She felt this was an invaluable experience for the student because it gave them an opportunity to see if they wanted to pursue a career in clinical research. In addition, Portia gave presentations to elementary, high school and college students about her ex-

Figure 2: Percentage of Black women clinical researchers who had mentors and from what areas



perience in working in clinical research, thereby increasing awareness of the field to those who are underrepresented in the field.

Danielle began in clinical research starting as a coordinator at Karmanos Cancer Institute. She had a mentor as an undergraduate attending Clark Atlanta University who helped her navigate research, building confidence and overcoming challenges. This mentorship experience showed her the value in shaping careers and empowering others to reach their full potential. Danielle realized it was important to have a mentor who believes in you and can advocate for you, because often individuals are unaware of their capability. A mentor is a cheerleader in your corner, telling you that you can do it. She recalls attending an investigator meeting in a room of hundreds of people where there was only one other Black woman. She wondered if the lack of diversity was just in that room or if it was an industrywide issue. With this experience, Danielle wanted to provide a forum for other Black women to have the same empowerment through mentoring and networking.

Parallels with health care research

There are parallels in the career paths for clinical researchers and health care marketing researchers. For example, people are generally unaware of both industry segments. And, as with clinical research, typically there are no formal academic paths for young professionals who are interested health care market-

ing research. Instead, people often fall into it, as they do with clinical research.

With a \$31.7 billion market size and a projected growth of 4-6%,⁶ the marketing research industry employs over 140,000 professionals. As with clinical research, there is also a severe underrepresentation of Blacks (6-7%) and Hispanics (8-10%) in the industry.⁷

Getting into health care marketing research typically requires some experience. While time spent in consumer marketing research may be a stepping stone, without some health care background it is not enough to land that first job. Thus, internships in health care marketing research are crucial in providing an avenue to help newcomers get quickly up to speed, gain some experience and provide context about the field. And, as with the clinical research field, getting ahead in health care marketing research can be accelerated by engagement in a network, as well as having a mentor.

To that end, Intellus Worldwide has a resource center that includes member contact information, new job postings, recordings of past presentations, committees working on specific areas in the field (e.g., health literacy) and a mentorship program. In the past two years, Intellus has matched 17 mentors/mentees and has kicked off the next wave of matching for 2025. Intellus invites undergraduate and graduate students to attend the conferences with grants, which provides a path to the health care insights community.

As with clinical research, there are additional challenges for minorities in health care marketing research. Junior researchers rarely see themselves mirrored in senior positions. Finding a mentor that closely resembles your background can be crucial for navigating unique hurdles.

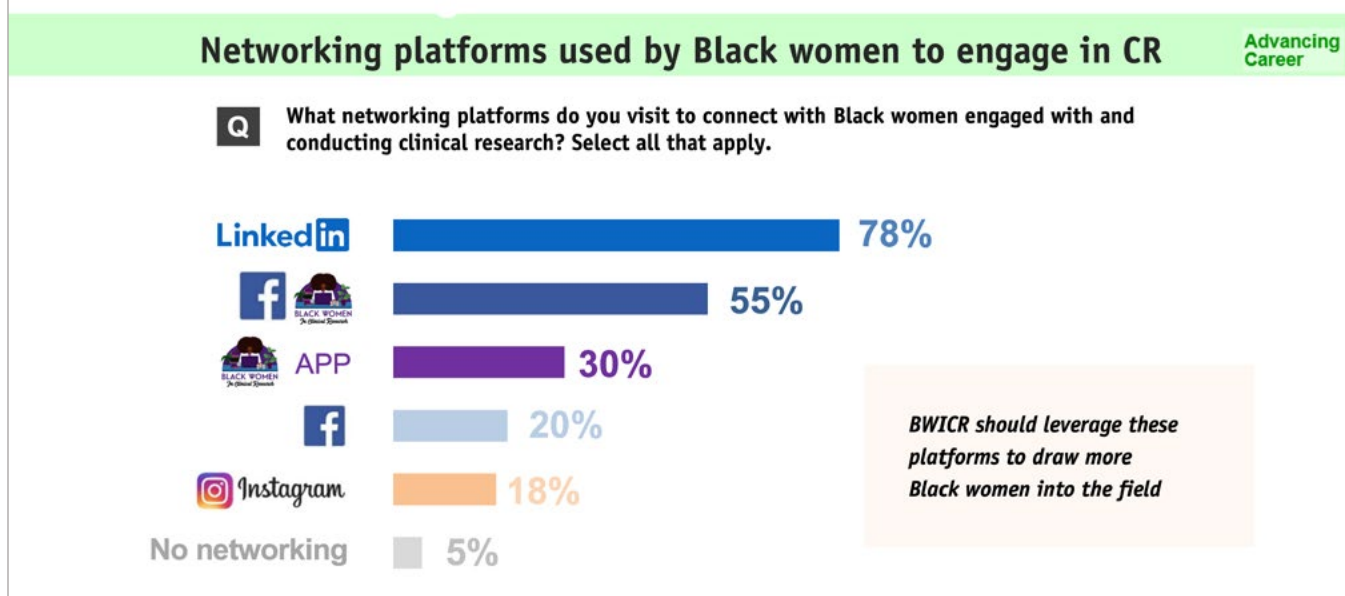
The clinical research and health care marketing research communities should find ways to provide more internship opportunities, more networking channels and more mentorship programs – all with consideration for underrepresented minorities. ¹

Danielle Mitchell is CEO and founder of Black Women in Clinical Research. She can be reached at dcoe@bwicr.com. Portia Gordon is associate director at Branding Science. She can be reached at portia.gordon@branding-science.com. Tatiana Barakshina is managing partner at Bazis Americas. She can be reached at tvb@bazisgroup.com. Tom Donnelly is vice president MedTech at the Research Partnership. He can be reached at tom.donnelly@researchpartnership.com.

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Figure 3: Percentage of Black women clinical researchers using networking platforms



••• naming research

Winning the naming game when you're not first

Smart strategies for second-place brands

| By John Hoepfner



abstract

When you're entering a market after the first mover, your brand name becomes your most critical differentiator. Learn which advanced research methods can help latecomer brands develop names that communicate unique value propositions and capture consumer imagination.

Being first in a new category has its advantages. The first brand to market often becomes synonymous with the category itself – think Kleenex for tissues or Google for search engines. But what happens when you're not first? Naming the second product in a category presents unique challenges, requiring marketers to be far more strategic in their approach. It's not enough to simply follow the leader; second-place brands need to outsmart their competition with a well-researched, creatively positioned brand name that can carve out its own space.

Having worked in brand naming, research and strategy for 35 years, I've witnessed how the success of a second-place brand often comes down to how smartly it positions itself. Winning in this scenario means choosing the right name and employing advanced research techniques such as category norms analysis, preference regression and perceptual mapping. These tools help identify the brand's differentiators, enabling it to stand apart in a crowded marketplace. Here's how you can succeed when you're the second to enter a new category.

Leverage a unique position

When you're the second (or third) to enter a new category, the name of the first product usually dominates consumer associations. For example, if you're developing a ride-sharing service, you're already up against Uber and Lyft, which have become ingrained in the public consciousness. The task, then, is to create a brand name that doesn't just mimic the leader but finds a way to leverage a unique position.

In these cases, the goal is to create a name that communicates your differentiation – what makes you distinct in the eyes of consumers. Your name should immediately signal how your product offers something new, better or different compared to the incumbent leader.



While the first brand might focus on ubiquity or convenience, your second-place brand name might emphasize trust, affordability or specialized features. The trick is to understand the category norms and use your name to exploit any gaps that exist in the market.

Category norms analysis is essential for any second-place product. It involves examining the patterns and trends in your category – what names are being used, what associations are being made and how consumers perceive those names. When developing a name for a second-place brand, it's important to understand these norms but also know how to break away from them.

For instance, if all the first movers in a category use descriptive names (like Booking.com in travel), a second-place entrant might choose a more evocative or metaphorical name that helps build emotional resonance. By analyzing the common naming conventions within a category, you can identify opportunities for disruption and differentiation.

The challenge of coming in second is that the category leader has already established the norm. The advantage, however, is that second-place brands have the opportunity to define what's next. The key is identifying these opportunities and ensuring the brand name isn't just another player in the category but a leader in its own right.

To outmaneuver the competition in brand naming, it's not enough to understand the category norms. You also need to know what really matters to your target audience. This is where **preference regression analysis** comes into play. By statistically evaluating what features or attributes are most important to consumers, you can position your brand name around what they care about most.

For example, if you're launching a new athletic shoe in a category dominated by a major player like Nike, you can't rely solely on broad

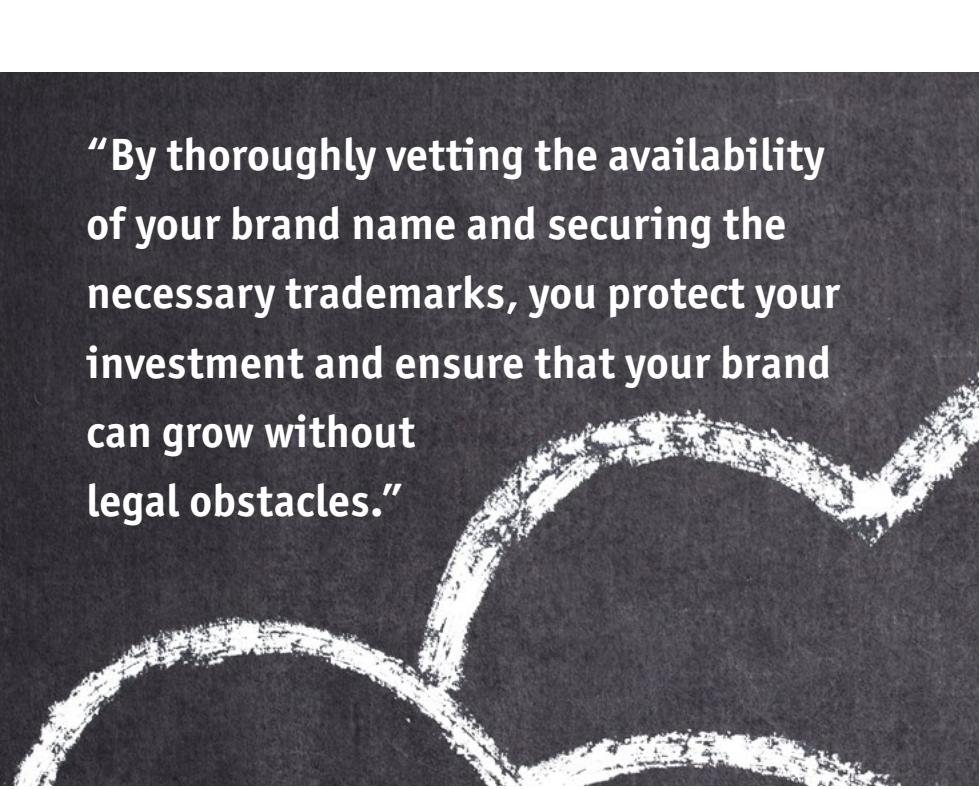
brand appeal. Instead, you might discover through preference regression that a significant portion of your target market values sustainability or innovative materials over celebrity endorsements. By focusing on what your consumers want most, your brand name can reflect those preferences and carve out a unique space.

In one of my past projects, we used preference regression to identify key motivators for consumers in the skincare industry. While the first mover in the category emphasized luxury, our second-place brand name highlighted the scientifically proven benefits consumers were actively seeking. The result was a name that resonated more deeply with a data-driven, results-oriented audience, helping the brand secure market share despite being second to market.

Perceptual mapping is another powerful tool for second-place brand naming. By visualizing how consumers perceive various brands within a category, you can find the white space – the unclaimed areas of the competitive landscape where your brand can stand out.

In my experience, perceptual maps help brands see beyond their initial assumptions. You might think your brand is seen as more innovative or affordable, but a perceptual map could reveal that these attributes are already claimed by the category leader. In such a case, the map might show an opening in areas like trustworthiness, reliability or sustainability – and this is where your brand can plant its flag.

For example, in the crowded fitness wearables space, where Fitbit and Apple Watch dominate, we worked with a client to identify that the market perceived most products as either high-tech or lifestyle-oriented. The perceptual map, however, showed an opportunity for a new player to emphasize health and wellness benefits in a more tangible, accessible way. The result was a name that directly addressed this white space, helping the second-place brand successfully differentiate itself from the tech-heavy incumbents.



“By thoroughly vetting the availability of your brand name and securing the necessary trademarks, you protect your investment and ensure that your brand can grow without legal obstacles.”

Key strategies

Once you've identified the areas of differentiation, it's time to choose a name that communicates these insights in a memorable and engaging way. Here are some key strategies for naming second-place brands:

Highlight your unique strengths: Your name should emphasize the key attributes or benefits that set you apart from the category leader. If the first player is all about convenience, you might focus on trust or service.

Go against the grain: If the first mover has established a certain tone or convention in naming – such as serious, professional names – consider going the opposite route with a more playful or aspirational name. This helps to break the consumer's association with the category leader and positions you as a new and exciting option.

Be clear, not clever: While creativity is important, clarity is critical for second-place brands. If you're not first to market, your name needs to clearly communicate what you offer and why it's different from the leader. A vague or overly clever name can lead to confusion and limit brand recognition.

Aim for emotional resonance: Even in competitive categories, consumers make decisions based on emotion as much as logic. A name that

taps into feelings of aspiration, trust or excitement can help consumers form a deeper connection with your brand, even if you're not the first to market.

Securing your brand's future

The final and perhaps most crucial step in the naming process is ensuring that your chosen name is legally available and can be protected. As simple as this may sound, securing a trademark for your brand name is often where things can get tricky – especially if you're entering an established or competitive category.

A thorough trademark search is critical for two reasons. First, to avoid costly legal disputes, and second to ensure that your name can be legally owned and protected, preventing competitors from copying or diluting your brand.

During this stage, I work closely with trademark attorneys to conduct comprehensive searches across multiple jurisdictions, including the United States Patent and Trademark Office and international databases. The goal is to identify any potential conflicts with existing trademarks, ensuring that your brand can launch without legal complications.

Once the search is clear, the next step is trademark registration. Securing a trademark for your brand name gives you exclusive rights to use it in

your market, providing legal protection against infringement. This is especially important for second-place brands, as a strong trademark can protect your market position and intellectual property as you continue to grow.


In addition to traditional trademarks, it's essential to consider domain names and social media handles to ensure a cohesive online presence. A mismatch between your brand name and digital assets can create confusion, so securing a uniform presence across all platforms is critical.

By thoroughly vetting the availability of your brand name and securing the necessary trademarks, you protect your investment and ensure that your brand can grow without legal obstacles.

Succeed by being smarter

Naming the second product in a category requires far more strategic effort than naming the first. But with the right approach, second-place brands can succeed by being smarter about how they position themselves. By leveraging advanced research methods like category norms analysis, preference regression and perceptual mapping, you can find unique opportunities to differentiate your brand name from the leader.

In my decades in the naming business, I've seen countless examples of second-place brands overtaking the leader by crafting a name that resonates more deeply with consumers. The goal isn't to mimic the category's first mover, it's to outsmart them. A strategic approach helps brands ensure their names stand out and succeed, even when they're not first to market.

In the world of brand naming, it's not about who gets there first – it's about who names it best. And with the right strategies and research, second place can still be the winner. 

John Hoepfner is president of Brand Name Quest LLC. He can be reached at john@brandnamequest.com.



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High stakes: Protecting and satisfying online gamblers with credit cards

Socratic Technologies and Discover



U.S. gambling laws, and online gambling laws in particular, are becoming more readily accepted by local, state and federal lawmakers – and

the general public. Fueled by the ability for individual states to approve sports betting, elected officials are becoming more receptive not only to online sports betting sites but also to other types of gambling, including real-money games at regulated online casinos, digital slots and internet poker.

Attend this session at Quirk's Event – Los Angeles to learn how Socratic Technologies and Discover answered key questions about the use of credit cards in online gambling. Learn how the two used AI-based technologies for better insights, thought about tackling this business opportunity and learn some of the insights they gained from this study.

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Thomas M. Rich and Associates

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Gaining and retaining a seat at the C-suite table" presented by

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Future-proofing the next generation of researchers: Versatile skills and strategic adaptability

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Help brands create internal research champions – From a brand's perspective

THOR Industries

The THOR Industries Inc. marketing team understands and champions the value of market research through their organization. It is a core part of our DNA but our broader organization has not always viewed it that way. This session will highlight ways in which market research companies/agencies/startups can effectively communicate the value of their services, support brand research teams and build a long-term relationship with companies. For large companies where research has not historically been a strategy pillar, it takes patience but can grow exponentially over time.



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Going short to go long: The symbiotic relationship between shortform + longform content

Warner Bros Discovery



While Gen Z and Millennial audiences are spending increasing amounts of time on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, our research shows a symbiotic, rather than antagonistic, relationship between shortform content and longform content.

Through a multipronged approach, we illuminate the motivations and drivers of their favorite longform content, in which shortform content serves a critical role.

NETWORKING & FUN



Opening Night Party

During the Los Angeles Quirk's Event, stop by the Opening Night Party and have a night cap or two under the stars!

The party will take place on Wednesday, February 26, 2025 from 8:30-10:30 p.m.

More information to come.



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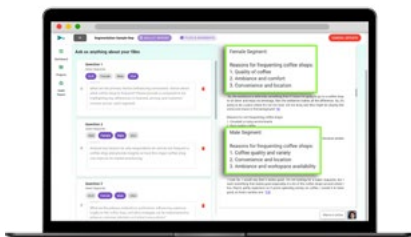
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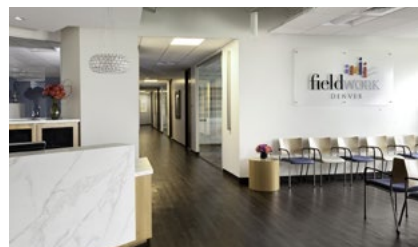
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QUIRK'S TIME CAPSULE

Facts and findings from nearly 40 years of Quirk's

Predictions from 1997!

The Quirk's June/July 1997 magazine focused on the internet and its potential advantages and challenges. Throughout the issue, various articles mentioned an uneasiness about privacy over the internet, a concern that is still present today. Sharon Weissbach's article "Internet research: Still a few hurdles to clear," predicted that due to the commercialization of the internet, encryption methodologies would be at the forefront of internet developments. Weissbach also suggested that the internet should be used as a platform for marketing researchers to conduct questionnaires but questioned the trust respondents would feel without a human involved in the process, writing "Once people become comfortable in using credit cards for internet purchases and transmitting other forms of digital cash, they will also share their ideas without fear of misappropriation."

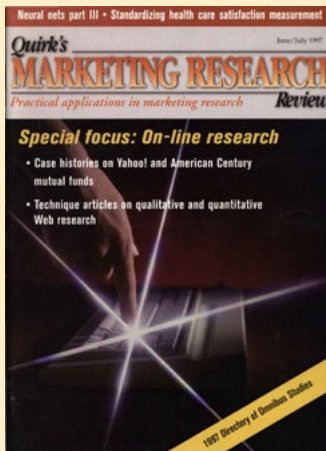
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A tool, not a replacement

While it was still in its early stages, Paul Jacobson considered the ways the internet affected online focus groups. In the article "On-line focus groups: Four approaches that work" (obviously published before we settled on "online" vs. "on-line" as our preferred style!), he stated an opinion similar to one we've been hearing nonstop regarding ChatGPT: "On-line focus groups are not a substitute for the face-to-face thing and were never meant to be. This is simply an additional tool in the box, meant to productively coexist with 'the real thing.'"

Jacobson argues that online focus groups are not always the best way to go, stating "There are circumstances when the on-line approach is inappropriate... We admittedly haven't yet figured out a way to dump 50 images on a cyber table and have people sort through and pin the right ones on the virtual wall." While part of that rings true – for example, it's still a good idea to have a researcher in the room with the respondent when dealing with sensitive topics – technology has greatly advanced and is more than capable of showing and allowing respondents to categorize a large number of images and data.



Pay by phone or by fax? The early days of online shopping

Many of us today expect to see images showing every angle of a product we consider buying online, and even read numerous reviews before clicking the buy button. However, in an article in the same 1997 issue titled "Women offer tips to make internet commerce more appealing," women warned about offering too much information on the page, saying sites should "begin with basic information and leave it to the shopper to determine the amount of information she needs."

Researchers e-mailed surveys to women to gauge their online shopping habits and found that 52% spent 10 or more hours a week online. Women who had not purchased anything online were interested in doing so in the future. "They see the enormous potential. They want it to be fun, they want it to be easy and they seek the variety that online has the potential to give them." Seventy-four percent of women purchasers paid with credit cards, 19% called or faxed [Kids, Google "fax machine" if you're not familiar with the term! - Ed.] their credit card number and 19% mailed in a check, but 57% of non-buying women feared credit

card fraud and cited it as their primary barrier to online shopping.

Women favored brands they were already familiar with but still considered newer companies, including one we are familiar with today. "Of course, unknown online vendors who make it easy to shop and buy can gain a significant edge, as demonstrated by Amazon.com."

1997

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MRS will host **Semiotics and Cultural Insights 2025** on **February 13**. Visit www.mrs.org.uk/event/conferences/semiotics-and-cultural-insights-2025.

succeet will host **succeet 2024/2025** on **February 12-13**. Visit www.succeet.de/en.

GenerativeAI Expo will host the **Generative AI Expo** on **February 11-13**. Visit www.generativeaexpo.com/east.

Corinium Global Intelligence will host **CDAO UK** on **February 12-13**. Visit <https://cdao-uk.coriniumintelligence.com>.

Global Insight Conferences will host the **Shopper Insights & Behaviors Conference** on **February 13** in **London**. Visit <https://shopperinsightconference.com>.

QRCA will host the **QRCA Annual Conference** on **February 11-14** in **Philadelphia**. Visit www.qrca.org/general/custom.asp?page=annual-conference.

AMA will host the **AMA Winter Academic Conference** on **February 14-16**. Visit www.ama.org/events/academic/2025-ama-winter-academic-conference.

Category Management Association will host **CMA|SIMA Conference** on **February 17-19**. Visit www.catman.global/annual-conference.

Merlien Institute will host **UX360 Virtual** on **February 19-20**. Visit www.virtual.ux360summit.com.

Global Insight Conferences will host **Shopper Insights & Behaviours** on **February 25** in **London**. Visit <https://shopperinsightconference.com>.

WBR will host **eTail Australia** on **February 24-26** in **Sydney**. Visit <https://etailaustralia.wbresearch.com>.

WBR will host **eTail Connect Spring** on **February 25-26** in **London**. Visit <https://etailconnecteu.wbresearch.com>.

Connect Media will host **CX Leaders Forum** on **February 25-26** in **Sydney**. Visit <https://cxleadersforum.com.au>.

IQPC will host the **CX USA Exchange** on **February 25-26**. Visit www.cxnetwork.com/events-customer-experience-exchange-usa.

IQPC will host **GenAI DACH** on **February 24-26** in **Berlin**. Visit www.aidataanalytics.network/events-generative-ai-dach.

Quirk's Media will host **The Quirk's Event – Los Angeles** on **February 26-27**. Visit <https://thequirkseven.com>.

WBR will host **eTail Palm Springs** on **February 24-27** in **Palm Springs**. Visit <https://etailwest.wbresearch.com>.

Australian Retailers Association will host the **Australian Retailers Association Leaders Forum** on **February 26-27**. Visit www.retail.org.au/leaders-forum-2025.

Market Research Society will host the **Gen A-Z Conference** on **February 27**. Visit www.mrs.org.uk/event/conferences/gen-az-conference-2025.

Australian Retailers Association will host the **ARA Leaders Forum** on **February 26-27** in **Sydney**. Visit www.retail.org.au/leaders-forum-2025.

Corinium Global Intelligence will host **CDAO Financial Services** on **February 26-27**. Visit <https://cdaofs.coriniumintelligence.com>.

IQPC will host **Customer Contact Week UK Exchange** on **March 4-5**. Visit <https://europe.customercontactweekdigital.com/events-ccwexchange-uk>.

Gartner will host **Gartner Data & Analytics Summit** on **March 3-5**. Visit www.gartner.com/en/conferences/na/data-analytics-us.

IQPC will host the **CX BFSI Exchange UK** on **March 4-5**. Visit www.cxnetwork.com/events-cx-bfsi-exchange.

IQPC will host **Customer Contact Week Australia and New Zealand** on **March 4-6**. Visit www.customercontactweekdigital.com/events-customercontactweek-au.

we.CONECT Global Leaders GmbH will host **Big Data Minds Europe** on **March 9-11**. Visit www.big-data-minds.eu.

MRS will host its annual conference on **March 11**. Visit www.mrs.org.uk/event/conferences/mrs-annual-conference-2025.

Quirk's Media will host **Quirk's Virtual – Consumer Reset** on **March 12**. Visit <https://www.quirks.com/events/quirks-virtual-consumer-reset-2025>.

Mertien Institute will host **Qual 360 North America** on **March 12-13**. Visit <https://na.qual360.com/>.

Quirk's Media will host **The Quirk's Event – Chicago** on **April 2-3**. Visit <https://thequirkseven.com>.

Quirk's Media will host **The Quirk's Event – London** on **May 7-8**. Visit <https://thequirkseven.com>.

Quirk's Media will host **The Quirk's Event – New York** on **July 23-24**. Visit <https://thequirkseven.com>.

Event details as of December 12, 2024. Please see websites for more details.

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How has your experience as a food scientist and lab specialist shaped and informed your approach to consumer research today?

Having started my career as a food scientist and lab specialist, I've gained a deep understanding of how to conduct rigorous research and interpret complex data. This experience has been invaluable in my past and current role, where I apply these skills to understand consumer behavior and preferences.

Do you have any tips for researchers struggling to communicate research findings across a team or organization?

To communicate findings effectively across a team or organization, start with curiosity – it's the key to unlocking the why behind the data, inspiring you to delve deeper into your research and discover new insights that can drive change. Curiosity is not just a trait; it's a powerful tool that can fuel your passion for research and inspire you to explore new avenues.

Embrace storytelling as a skill to practice and master. A compelling story can make data come alive, engaging your audience and making your insights more memorable. Storytelling is not just a technique, it's a way to make your research findings more relatable and impactful, sparking interest and understanding in your audience.

Tailor your message for each stakeholder, aligning your insights with their unique priorities and goals. For instance, when presenting to the marketing team, focus on how the research can help them target the right audience by highlighting specific demographics or consumer behaviors. When presenting to the product development team, emphasize how the findings can shape future product features, perhaps by suggesting new features based on consumer preferences.

Ensure your work ties directly to business needs and strategic objectives – alignment is the bridge that connects your research to actionable outcomes, keeping you focused on the end goal. Aligning your research with business needs is not just a strategy, it's a mind-set that keeps you on track and ensures your work has a real-world impact.

Finally, prioritize building strong relationships with your internal and external partners; trust and collaboration make communication smoother and more impactful. Strong relationships are the foundation of successful research communication, fostering trust and understanding that can enhance the impact of your findings.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

The most rewarding part of my job is the opportunity to bridge the gap between data and impact – translating insights into meaningful action that drives change and growth in the business I am supporting. But equally fulfilling is mentoring and guiding the next generation, just as others have generously done for me. There's something profoundly special about watching someone you've supported grow and succeed, knowing you've played a small role in shaping their journey. It is the ultimate full-circle moment, reminding me why I love my work and reinforcing the importance of mentorship in professional growth. Mentorship benefits not only the mentee but also the mentor, as it provides an opportunity to reflect on one's own experiences and learn from the fresh perspectives of the mentee. I encourage everyone to seek or provide mentorship in their careers, as it can be a powerful tool for personal and professional development.



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