



Research Conference

Report

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The Insights You Missed at Recent MR Conferences

ESOMAR

Online Research 2010

Berlin, Germany

October 17-19, 2010



Next Data Quality Focus: Sample Frames

Main Point: It is time for those who use online panels to shift their concern from sample to the sample frame, and the solution needs to be global in its application. Behavioral profiling of respondents can augment old sampling frames and create new, representative sampling frames.

This presentation won the first ever “Best Presentation Award at the ESOMAR Online Research Conference.

RCR impressions of content: **Freshness:** A-
Relevance: A
Practicality: A-

“With our eroded probabilistic sampling frames, many of us in market research are in a state of dissonance, unresolved and uncomfortable, stated **Mktg, Inc.** (East Islip, NY) President **Steve Gittelman** and EVP **Elaine Trimarchi**. “We used to rely on a theoretical underpinning to give our work a solid standard; now, we float in an unstructured, anxious space where we can’t gain our footing. We can leverage what we know about structured, representative, market sampling, or pit ourselves against the random noise of the crowd.”

Citing the dissonance of the clarinet that opens Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue, the presenters noted, “Gershwin blended the old formal structures of music with the new world. We in MR have to follow Gershwin’s model: ‘take from the old and blend with the new.’

“There will certainly be detractors to this idea in the MR world, but we must move fast; the Internet will not wait. Can we accept unstructured data emanating from a social network, or is there a need to understand what that data represent?

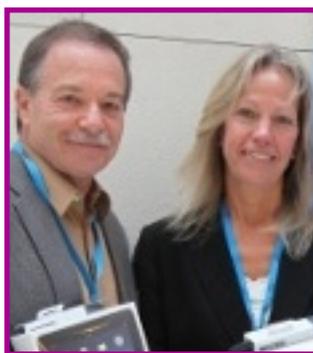
“There is no more fundamental question in MR! It is the fork in the road. Either market researchers will be able to describe the representative nature of the data they collect, or they will lose a tremendous repertoire of interpretive tools that tell us what data mean. Making decisions from data will be impaired and the value of the profession could be

diminished. Those who pursue the interpretation of unstructured data that cannot be referenced to a standard will have to tolerate greater risks in their decisions,” they declared.

The duo said online research is not “the root cause of the erosion of our probabilistic framework,” and endorsed “a combination of modes [Census, online and telephone] to approach our goal.”

The pair took issue with complete reliance on demography to create sampling frames. “Should we pursue a behavioral standard?” they asked. “Understanding behavioral differences and variables that influence differences are at our core. We have to balance based on behavior because there are differences that are not captured by anything other than behavior. We must create a viable standard where demography alone no longer serves as our only metric.”

The speakers sighed that current young MR practitioners have not been



Steve Gittelman and Elaine Trimarchi

“We in MR have to follow Gershwin’s model in ‘Rhapsody in Blue’: take from the old and blend with the new.”

exposed to decades of probabilistic sampling “that helped us achieve our goals with a theoretic, intuitive and executable underpinning. Our professional standing is threatened by failing to create a best-in-class sampling frame that withstands many current challenges. For the most part, today’s market researchers do not understand the issues at hand, or, worse, fail to value them; many fail to acknowledge

RCR Ratings Explanation: “Freshness” – Based on whether content has previously been covered by any RFL newsletter; “Relevance” – The current importance of this content to the research industry; “Practicality” – The ease of implementing specific suggestions expressed in this presentation

Mktg Inc.'s Creation of its "Grand Mean"

- A 16-minute questionnaire was translated into languages enabling its use in 35 countries. With the cooperation of 200 panels around the world, it generates 10 segmentations that are sensitive measures of sample source change. Three hundred thousand respondents have been screened.
- Telephone and online sources are employed. Online sample is divided into three segments: river, social network and opt-in panel. The four sources are behaviorally different and are combined into a "Grand Mean" in proportions balanced by minimizing difference from a battery of reference points.
- Its battery of 10 segmentations includes three general segmentations: buying behavior (37 variables), sociographics (31 variables) and media (31 variable), plus seven market segmentations: automotive, appliance, consumer electronics, clothing, grocery, entertainment and insurance/banking. For social network and river sampling methods, a real-time abbreviated segmentation scheme can be employed.
- Differences between sample sources can be assessed by comparing distribution of their segments. Drivers of variability can be measured by changes in the segments they create.
- Blending of sources "is a critical epiphany for the industry. A haphazard mixing of sources is not a sample frame—it is just noise. Blending requires a detailed, transparent score that is replicable, transparent and brings together the constituent elements in harmony."
- It would be quite useful for a Grand Mean to account for mail and in-person data where these can be collected.

the non-probabilistic nature of online samples while some have had that epiphany only in the past few years."

Gittelman and Trimarchi took issue with the MR industry's "crude substitution of demographic quota control as a means of achieving a Census simulation. Price and timing pressures have trumped theory," they stated. "Science lives in a real world, where non-probabilistic, hypothesis-based models rule—which represent a rich treasure trove for us to explore."

The speakers spotlighted "the onslaught of respondents coming from well-meaning sources: social networks, opt-in panel river, phone, mail and in-person. They think these need to be transformed from disparate groups and to talk to one another via a common language. "Without mastering the language, we can expect to be commoditized and we will surrender business' historic reliance on us," they said.

"Which is why we must achieve an understanding of our sampling frame—specifically, common denominators between sample sources that transcend their differences," they continued. "We must make a science of understanding how it affects our data. How and whom the panels provide us within our sampling frame should become our passion. To do our jobs correctly, we must know and understand our respondents

and, of equal importance, know how to combine them."

The presenters publicly proposed what they had pushed since late 2009. They asserted respondents be "behaviorally profiled and classified by a battery of segmentations to be distributed according to a demographic/behavioral standard."

To make their point, Gittelman and Trimarchi shared an April 2010 Utility Study involving Microsoft. "Each respondent was pre-profiled using a standard profiling questionnaire for which questions were selected to allow a consistent standard and independent assessment of respondents in a sampling frame or completed study set," they explained. Two databases were created: one from the Grand Mean Project (see sidebar explanation on page 3) and a pool of behaviorally-profiled respondents from various online panels (segmented by 37 input variables through the questionnaire). Over 2,800 respondents were invited to take the study and compared with 2,000 from the Grand Mean Project. Quotas for age, income, gender and race were employed to demographically balance the final population of the completed interviews.

"Pre-profiling balanced behaviors in real time; the study group was de-duplicated, outside-verified and tested for engagement and the accuracy of their responses. It would be considered a 'preferred' online population. Differences between responders and non-responders were considered response bias. Demographic quotas provided scant control over variability in the array of behaviors measured through a set of multivariate segmentations. Pre-profiling all respondents afforded the ability to balance behavioral differences even with demographics in balance," they noted.

"This success changes how we might practice online research; those who respond to our questionnaires are different from those who fail to attempt the screener. Screening also eliminated individuals with different and valued sets of opinions," they added. "We should routinely measure non-response bias; it is the difference between an unknown sample frame and one we can understand and adjust." ©

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