IMAS international

IMAS answers to

ESOMAR 28 QUESTIONS TO HELP BUYERS OF ONLINE SAMPLES

2015

INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of these 28 Questions is to increase transparency and raise awareness of the key issues for researchers to consider when deciding whether an online sampling approach is fit for their purpose. Put another way, the aim is to help researchers to ensure that what they receive meets their expectations. The questions are also designed to introduce consistent terminology for providers to state how they maintain quality, to enable buyers to compare the services of different sample suppliers. Notes on the context of the questions explain why the questions should be asked and which issues researchers should expect to be covered in the answer.

These new questions replace ESOMAR's "26 Questions to help Research Buyers of Online Samples". ESOMAR has updated the text to recognize the ongoing development of techniques. While some of the questions remain constant, new questions have been added to incorporate new techniques and new technology in this area. In particular, this revision recognises the broad trend within the industry to build online samples from multiple sources rather than relying on a single panel.

It should be noted that these 28 Questions focus on the questions that need to be asked by those buying online samples. If the sample provider is also hosting the data collection you will need to ask additional questions to ensure that your project is carried out in a way that satisfies your quality requirements.

The 28 Questions complement ESOMAR's Guideline to Online Research which was revised in 2011 to add updated legal and ethical guidance and new sections on privacy notices, cookies, downloadable technology and interactive mobile.

COMPANY PROFILE

1. What experience does your company have in providing online samples for market research?

Context: This answer might help you to form an opinion about the relevant experience of the sample provider. How long has the sample provider been providing this service and do they have for example a market research, direct marketing or more technological background? Are the samples solely provided for third party research, or does the company also conduct proprietary work using their panels?

IMAS International has created an online research panel, IMAS OnLine (www.imasonline.pl), in Poland in 2005. Since then we have been offering studies on Internet users samples. We provide services to Polish researchers as well as international research agencies who are looking for reliable respondent samples. Our panel consists of a general panel and several specialized subpanels, including IT professionals, physicians and farmers.

Between 2005 and 2014 we carried out nearly 300 thousand interviews with the participants of the research panel and 200 thousand online interviews with those recruited outside the panel.

SAMPLE SOURCES AND RECRUITMENT

2. Please describe and explain the type(s) of online sample sources from which you get respondents. Are these databases? Actively managed research panels? Direct marketing lists? Social networks? Web intercept (also known as river) samples?

Context: The description of the types of sources a provider uses for delivering an online sample will provide insight into the quality of the sample.

Our company uses a proprietary research panel, which is managed by IMAS Research Department through a dedicated web application. The panelists are recruited from many sources to ensure a possibly diverse representation of the Internet users in Poland. One of the most important ways of recruiting new panelists is mailing sent out by our partners to their users, but also graphic and text banners placed on popular websites, adverts on search engines pages and similar. We also take the opportunity and invite our face-to-face or CATI respondents to join in.

If the purpose of the survey requires so, we pursue research among visitors of specific websites or individuals registered in social networks. Our clients are provided with detailed information on the advantages and disadvantages of each type of source and we collectively make decisions on the selections of the sample.

3. If you provide samples from more than one source: How are the different sample sources blended together to ensure validity? How can this be replicated over time to provide reliability? How do you deal with the possibility of duplication of respondents across sources?

Context: The variation in data coming from different sources has been well documented. Overlap between different panel providers can be significant in some cases and de-duplication removes this source of error, and frustration for respondents.

In most cases we only use our own research panel and discourage our clients to combine samples from different sources. Our database is constantly checked against duplicates and any suspected multi-registration is immediately explained.

Our internal research shows that about 50% of the participants of IMAS OnLine is registered in other panels as well. There is a high possibility of repeating an interview with the same person if the sample is purchased in multiple panels. Therefore, we only complement our sample with external sources in exceptional cases, and only after consultation with our client. In such cases, we protect our sample against duplication by checking cookies and IP addresses.

4. Are your sample source(s) used solely for market research? If not, what other purposes are they used for?

Context: Combining respondents from sources set up primarily for different purposes (like direct marketing for example) may cause undesirable survey effects.

The panel is used solely for the purpose of conducting market research.

5. How do you source groups that may be hard to reach on the internet?

Context: Ensuring the inclusion of hard-to-reach groups on the internet (like ethnic minority groups, young people, seniors etc.) may increase population coverage and improve the quality of the sample provided.

While recruiting samples that are difficult to obtain, we look for them primarily within our panel. If we believe that this might not be effective, we suggest other methods of obtaining respondents, such as telephone recruitment from our CATI studio. We also use advertising campaigns on specialized websites (eg for the elderly, people suffering from certain diseases etc.).

6. If, on a particular project, you need to supplement your sample(s) with sample(s) from other providers, how do you select those partners? Is it your policy to notify a client in advance when using a third party provider?

Context: Many providers work with third parties. This means that the quality of the sample is also dependent on the quality of sample providers that the buyer did not select. Transparency is essential in this situation. Overlap between different providers can be significant in some cases and de-duplication removes this source of error, and frustration for respondents. Providers who observe process standards like the ISO standards are required to give you this information.

IMAS uses primarily its own respondents database and we only complement our sample with external sources in exceptional situations.

However, if it is necessary to combine samples with other panel, we cooperate exclusively with companies of proven reputation, that also meet ESOMAR and ISO standards or similar. In such cases our client is always informed about the source the sample comes from.

SAMPLING AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

7. What steps do you take to achieve a representative sample of the target population?

Context: The sampling processes (i.e. how individuals are selected or allocated from the sample sources) used are the main factor in sample provision. A systematic approach based on market research fundamentals may increase sample quality.

Every data base is being prepared based on a random selection from the panel members. The representative sample is built according to the demographic distribution of several important features in the target population. In this way, the assumed quotas are fulfilled evenly. Invitations are sent automatically in batches, until the requested number of interviews is achieved.

The database can be prepared considering the respondents' activity in previous surveys. Respondents can be added or removed from the database depending on how often they are sent invitations, how often they complete the surveys, what topics they answered recently, how many points they earned so far, etc.

8. Do you employ a survey router?

Context: A survey router is a software system that allocates willing respondents to surveys for which they are likely to qualify. Respondents will have been directed to the router for different reasons, perhaps after not qualifying for another survey in which they had been directly invited to participate, or maybe as a result of a general invitation from the router itself. There is no consensus at present about whether and how the use of a router affects the responses that individuals give to survey questions.

No. Our respondents are invited each time via email to take part in one specifically described survey.

9. If you use a router: Please describe the allocation process within your router. How do you decide which surveys might be considered for a respondent? On what priority basis are respondents allocated to surveys?

Context: Biases of varying severity may arise from the prioritisation in choices of surveys to present to respondents and the method of allocation.

We do not employ a survey router.

10. If you use a router: What measures do you take to guard against, or mitigate, any bias arising from employing a router? How do you measure and report any bias?

Context: If Person A is allocated to Survey X on the basis of some characteristic then they may not be allowed to also do Survey Y. The sample for Survey Y is potentially biased by the absence of people like Person A.

We do not employ a survey router.

11. If you use a router: Who in your company sets the parameters of the router? Is it a dedicated team or individual project managers?

Context: It may be necessary to try to replicate your project in the future with as many of the parameters as possible set to the same values. How difficult or easy will this be?

We do not employ a survey router.

12. What profiling data is held on respondents? How is it done? How does this differ across sample sources? How is it kept up-to-date? If no relevant profiling data is held, how are low incidence projects dealt with?

Context: The usefulness to your project of pre-profiled information will depend on the precise question asked and may also depend on when it was asked. If real time profiling is used, what control do you have over what question is actually asked?

During the registration, we only get the minimum information about our panelists: e-mail address, birth date, gender, place of residence and region. Additional data are then gathered during a detailed registration survey asking for information like respondent's professional status, used products, use of media, buying behavior, etc. The data are updated and verified during regular research.

13. Please describe your survey invitation process. What is the proposition that people are offered to take part in individual surveys? What information about the project itself is given in the process? Apart from direct invitations to specific surveys (or to a router), what other means of invitation to surveys are respondents exposed to? You should note that not all invitations to participate take the form of emails.

Context: The type of proposition (and associated rewards) could influence the type of people who agree to take part in specific projects and can therefore influence sample quality. The level of detail given about the project may also influence response.

If a person has been chosen for the study, s/he is being sent an e-mail invitation to take part. The invitation message describes briefly the purpose of the study, expected timing, the date when the survey is due and other important information (i.e. why they have been sent the invitation, how to withdraw, how to proceed in case of problems).

14. Please describe the incentives that respondents are offered for taking part in your surveys. How does this differ by sample source, by interview length, by respondent characteristics?

Context: The reward or incentive system may impact on the reasons why people participate in a specific project and these effects can cause bias to the sample.

IMAS panelists collect points for completing the surveys. Number of points to be rewarded depends on the length of the survey, its level of complexity and the target sample. In some projects, participants are offered a few points even for completing the screener if it's considerably longer than usual.

15. What information about a project do you need in order to give an accurate estimate of feasibility using your own resources?

Context: The "size" of any panel or source may not necessarily be an accurate indicator that your specific project can be completed or completed within your desired time frame.

In order to determine our ability to provide an adequate sample, we need the following information:

- a general description of the sample,
- quota conditions (demography),
- conditions of qualification for participants,
- the estimated length of the interview,
- the required number of completes,
- desired fieldwork time.

16. Do you measure respondent satisfaction? Is this information made available to clients?

Context: Respondent satisfaction may be an indicator of willingness to take future surveys. Respondent reactions to your survey from self-reported feedback or from an analysis of suspend points might be very valuable to help understand survey results.

IMAS asks all respondents to rate their satisfaction at the end of each survey carried out on our online system. Furthermore, we check the satisfaction of all our panelists on a regular basis (quarterly).

Satisfaction survey results are available to our clients upon request.

17. What information do you provide to debrief your client after the project has finished?

Context: One should expect a full sample provider debrief report, including gross sample, start rate, participation rate, drop-out rate, the invitation/contact text, a description of the field work process, and so on. Sample providers should be able to list the standard reports and metrics that they make available.

At the end of the survey, the client is provided with a fieldwork report containing detailed information according to the client's individual needs. Generally, the report includes the exact start and end date, description of the sample and sample designing, response rate, number of invitations sent and number of completed surveys.

DATA QUALITY AND VALIDATION

18. Who is responsible for data quality checks? If it is you, do you have in place procedures to reduce or eliminate undesired within survey behaviours, such as (a) random responding, (b) Illogical or inconsistent responding, (c) overuse of item non-response (e.g. "Don't Know") or (d) speeding (too rapid survey completion)? Please describe these procedures.

Context: The use of such procedures may increase the reliability and validity of the survey data.

We use a number of techniques to detect fraudulent respondents. We check the demographic data obtained in other surveys for consistency and accuracy. We check the time of completion and frequency of choosing the response options "Don't know" or "No Answer". If surveys are completed far too quickly or DK/NA are used too often, we closely watch the respondents and monitor their following activity. Any suspected fraudulent respondents are removed from the panel.

19. How often can the same individual be contacted to take part in a survey within a specified period whether they respond to the contact or not? How does this vary across your sample sources?

Context: Over solicitation may have an impact on respondent engagement or on self-selection and non-response bias.

We keep a record of participation history for each panel member. We do not set limits on how often our respondents receive invitations to our surveys. All active participants of our panel may receive the invite. The exceptions are cases in which the respondent has taken part in a survey on specific topic – for explanation read point 20.

20. How often can the same individual take part in a survey within a specified period? How does this vary across your sample sources? How do you manage this within categories and/or time periods?

Context: Frequency of survey participation may increase the risk of undesirable conditioning effects or other potential biases.

Our panelists are invited to participate in a survey no earlier than a week from the last completed questionnaire. We set limits on survey topics and do not invite the same respondents to similar projects within a minimum 3-month period. Moreover, on client's request, we do not engage panelists who participated in any of the client's projects before.

21. Do you maintain individual level data such as recent participation history, date of entry, source, etc., on your survey respondents? Are you able to supply your client with a project analysis of such individual level data?

Context: This type of data per respondent including how the total population is defined and how the sample was selected and drawn, may increase the possibilities for analysis of data quality.

Yes, we do record the individual-level data on our respondents, such as participation history, date of joining the panel, etc., but we do not deliver this information to our clients because of confidentiality and protection of such data.

22. Do you have a confirmation of respondent identity procedure? Do you have procedures to detect fraudulent respondents? Please describe these procedures as they are implemented at sample source registration and/or at the point of entry to a survey or router. If you offer B2B samples what are the procedures there, if any?

Context: Confirmation of identity can increase quality by decreasing multiple entries, fraudulent panellists etc.

Data for all panel members are checked in a two-step registration process (double-opt in). During this process, the new member's e-mail address is verified. We also verify the panelist's postal address and their bank account at the time of incentive redemption.

We regularly check the consistency of the data provided by our panelists. In the event of incoherence, the respondent shall be informed and asked for clarification. If this type of behavior repeats, the respondent is removed from the panel members database.

POLICIES AND COMPLIANCE

23. Please describe the 'opt-in for market research' processes for all your online sample sources.

Context: The opt-in process indicates the respondents' relationship with the sample source provider. The market generally makes a distinction between single and double opt-in. Double opt-in refers to the process by which a check is made to confirm that the person joining a panel or database wishes to be a member and understands what to expect (in advance of participating in an actual survey for a paying client).

Joining the online panel is a two-step process. Candidates register on www.imasonline.pl by filling out a short form stating, among others, their name and e-mail address. This address is being used for sending the request for confirmation of identity as well as the first survey asking for demographic data, like education level, working status, possessions, use of services and other profile questions.

24. Please provide a link to your Privacy Policy. How is your Privacy Policy provided to your respondents?

Context: Not complying with local and international privacy laws might mean the sample provider is operating illegally. An example privacy policy is given in the ESOMAR Guideline for Online Research.

The privacy policy we use is available on the website www.imasonline.pl. We proceed in accordance with the International Code of Conduct of ICC / ESOMAR (www.esomar.org) and the applicable international and local law. The IMAS OnLine panel member's personal

data are processed in accordance with the Data Protection Law dated 29 August 1997 (unified text: Dz.U. of 2002 No. 101, item 926).

25. Please describe the measures you take to ensure data protection and data security.

Context: The sample provider usually stores sensitive and confidential information on panellists and clients in databases. These data need to be properly secured and backed-up, as does any confidential information provided by the client. The sample provider should be able to provide you with the latest date at which their security has been evaluated by a credible third-party

We use up-to-date, stable and secure server units able to store and process huge amount of data from thousands of respondents. They are securely protected from unauthorized access by means of specialized IT software and hardware. All equipment is located in a highly modern data center in Poland, with 24/7 monitoring and control. Access to the online application is secured with SSL protocol.

The database is separated from a direct Internet traffic in three levels. Every access to the data management application requires authorization. Only a few employees within the company have access to respondent database and every login attempt is recorded.

26. What practices do you follow to decide whether online research should be used to present commercially sensitive client data or materials to survey respondents?

Context: There are no foolproof methods for protecting audio, video, still images or concept descriptions in online surveys. In today's social media world, clients should be aware that the combination of technology solutions and respondent confidentiality agreements are "speed bumps" that mitigate but cannot guarantee that a client's stimuli will not be shared or described in social media.

All our clients are informed about the risks associated with the research on new concepts and products in the early stages of design. We believe that it is not possible to fully secure content from being copied and published. Usually in such cases we suggest other methods of research, eg CAPI.

27. Are you certified to any specific quality system? If so, which one(s)?

Context: Being certified may require the supplier to perform tasks in a pre-determined manner and document procedures that should be followed.

IMAS holds a Polish PKJPA certificate of quality in CAWI research awarded by the Organization of Opinion and Market Research Business OFBOR, which in some areas is close to the ISO26362 certification. IMAS also has implemented internal quality management procedures. We adhere to the ESOMAR guidelines for online studies.

28. Do you conduct online surveys with children and young people? If so, do you adhere to the standards that ESOMAR provides? What other rules or standards, for example COPPA in the United States, do you comply with?

Context: The ICC/ESOMAR International Code requires special permissions for interviewing children. These are described in the ESOMAR Online Research Guideline. In the USA researchers must adhere to the requirements of the Children's Online Privacy Act (COPPA). Further information on legislation and codes of practice can be found in Section 6 of ESOMAR's Guideline for Online Research.

IMAS does not conduct online surveys with children or young people below 13.