

Anonymity in Market, Social and Opinion Research

Barry Ryan
Standards & Policy Manager



A bit of history



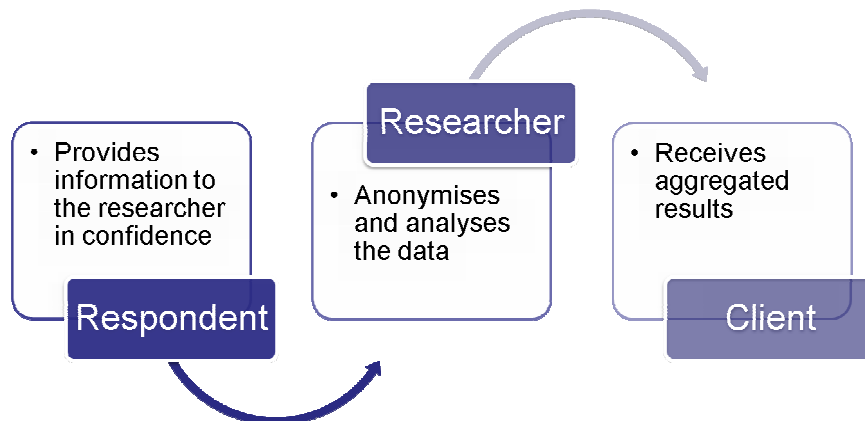
- Mass Observation of the 1930s
- Survey Research of the 1940s
 - Influenced by George Gallup
 - Development of the social sciences, including application of the Nuremberg principles

Classic research



- First Codes of Conduct
 - European Society of Opinion and Market Research (ESOMAR) 1948
 - The Market Research Society (MRS) 1954
- Confidential survey research
 - Voluntary participation of respondent
 - Information collected confidentially
 - Results reported anonymously

Classic Research



Research today



- Research has changed
 - Non-anonymous participation is possible in most countries
 - but heightens issues around informed consent

Research today



- Not just survey research
 - Qualitative groups, audio and video recorded,
 - Market Research Online Communities (MROCs)
 - Ethnographic and Deliberative techniques
- Subject to more detailed analysis
 - multivariate analysis in quantitative
 - semiotics or semantic in qualitative
- 15 million interviews in the UK each year (est.)

Research today



- Clients demand more
 - not just findings
 - insight and plans for action.
- Clients also have vast pools of personal data from which they would like to gain insight
 - transaction histories in financial institutions,
 - loyalty card information from retailers.

Life in small universe



- The more information that a client already holds the less individual level detail they can receive.
 - Traditionally a concern expressed where there is a “small universe”

The new challenge



- More information
- More detailed
- More action
- But still with the promise of anonymity?

Consumer research



- Client databases are the primary source of research sample
- Respondents have right to know the identity of the client in this case
 - Traditionally seen as a risk of bias but less of an issue in a era of customer engagement.

Consumer research



- Client provides sample to researcher
 - Typically name and sufficient contact details
- Researcher contacts sample
 - Provides information on source of sample
- Researcher processes interview data and aggregates it.
 - They may also provide anonymous respondent level information to illustrate points

Anonymous?



- Verbatim quotes
 - Respondent specific information
 - Verbal Tics
- Mapping and Geo-location data
 - Postcodes
 - IP Addresses
- Transaction history
 - Unique signature?

Opinion v. Behaviour



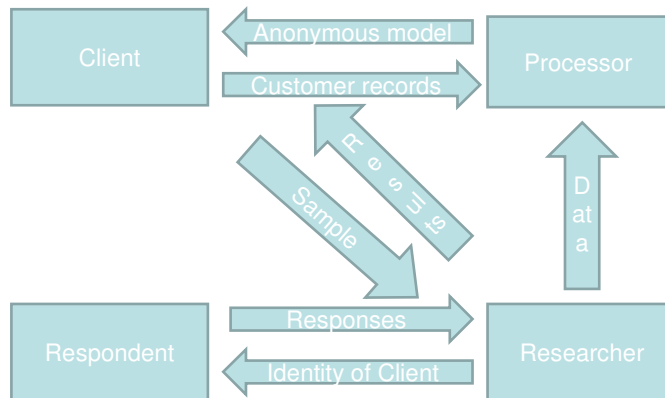
- Respondents are often unreliable witnesses to their own lives
- Client data sets provide the opportunity to compare reported experience with actual events.

Creating the model



- Clients may not however be able to pass their full data set to the researcher
 - Restrictions in Banking Code for example
- Researchers may not wish to receive or hold this information
 - Cost of security measures may exceed value of the project

Creating the model



Questions?

barry.ryan@mrs.org.uk

020 7566 1882

