

Research

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News



Segmentation

Photos, videos and the privacy implications

Do you take video-recordings of group discussions or in depth interviews? Do clients or others watch your groups, either in person, remotely or via recordings? Do you ask respondents to upload or send in photos or videos of themselves as part of your research project or research community?

If you answer 'yes' to any of these activities, you have obligations under the Privacy Act and the AMSRS Code of Professional Behaviour.

Photos and videos are defined as personal or identified information by the Privacy Act and must be treated accordingly. You must also ensure that the way you store and use them does not contravene Rule 4 of the Code, which states that 'respondents' anonymity must be strictly observed'.

Two recent questions highlight this obligation.

The first was: 'What should a client do if they recognise a person taking part in the discussion?'

If anyone watching a group recognises someone in the group, that person's anonymity is violated and the client should immediately

stop watching the group, leave the viewing area or stopping the streaming or recording. Rule 5 of the Code may also apply here: 'The researcher must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that respondents are in no way directly harmed or adversely affected as a result of their participation in a market research project'. A participant may be adversely affected if a viewer recognises them and later refers to or acts on their comments.

It is the researcher's responsibility to inform viewers of this requirement so that respondent anonymity is assured. A reasonable approach is to inform viewers about anonymity, privacy and the code and to ask them to abide by the rules at the start of the project and give a reminder before each discussion.

The second query related to the use of 'vox pops' or identifying photos in a presentation.

These are identifying information and the researcher must obtain the informed consent of the respondent before featuring them and ensure they are not recognised by anyone attending the presentation. If the presentation is given to the client for their use later, the client must not use the identifying segment for any non-research purpose.

It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the anonymity of participants in market and social research and ensure that any identified data is used in accordance with the code and the Privacy Act. If handing over any identified information to a third party, the researcher must ensure that the third party will also take on this responsibility.

Jane Gregory, AMSRS professional standards officer