

About Market and Social Research

Questions & Answers

What is market and social research?

Market and social research provides accurate and timely information on the needs, attitudes and motivations of a population. This information can be collected over the telephone, face-to-face or via the internet.

It plays a vital social role, assisting governments and businesses to develop services, policies, and products that are responsive to an identified need.

It contributes to Australia's economic wellbeing, by ensuring that organisational responses to these needs are relevant and properly targeted.

Research projects educate the response of decision makers to a range of important issues, including planning for major transport and infrastructure projects, responses to climate change, taxation policy and many other areas.

Is market and social research the same as telemarketing?

No. Market and social research is not the same as telemarketing and cannot be used to 'push' a product or service. Under the Trade Practices Act it is illegal to pretend to undertake market or social research if the real purpose of the phone call is to sell something.

Who uses market and social research?

Consumers of market and social research include State and Federal government agencies, companies and non-government organisations – in fact, any organisation that needs to better understand customers, community attitudes and opinions, or trends of any kind.

How big is the Australian market and social research industry?

Demand for research continues to increase as organisations recognise the need to ensure policies programs or strategies are based on rigorous research and facts, not guesswork or assumption. The industry turns over around \$750 million annually. It employs more than 4,100 full time professionals and many more part-time.

How big is the market research industry worldwide?

According to ESOMAR's latest Global Market Research 2008, the total market for market research worldwide is US\$28.2 billion, representing a growth of 6.5 per cent on the previous year.

What role does AMSRO/ AMSRS play in the market research industry?

The Australian Market and Social Research Organisation (AMSRO) is the peak body for Australia's market and social research companies. AMSRO represents more than 100 Australian member companies that enjoy a reputation as leaders in many areas of research. Australian researchers are in demand internationally and have developed techniques and approaches that are used worldwide.

The Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) is the industry's not-for-profit professional membership body – representing over 2,100 professionals who are dedicated to increasing the standard and understanding of market and social research in Australia.

Together, AMSRO and AMSRS promote:

- High quality research methodology.
- Stringent ethical standards.
- Professional development and training for market research practitioners.

How does the profession police itself?

The market and social research industry operates under strict, government-approved codes of conduct that ensure ethical behaviour and professional standards are upheld. Complaints can be investigated and sanctions applied by AMSRO and AMSRS.

The standards by which the Australian market and social research industry is governed include:

- The Code of Professional Behaviour.
- The Australian Standard for market, opinion and social research (ISO 20252) market, opinion and social research.
- The Quality Standard for Online Access Panels (QSOAP).
- The Quality Control Scheme (IQCA).
- The Qualified Practicing Market Researcher scheme (QPMR).

Membership of the industry's professional bodies is contingent on individuals and companies adhering to these standards.

The Australian market and social research industry is also closely involved in setting international market and social research standards. It is represented on the market and social research committee of the International Organization for Standardization ISO that sets global industry standards.

What are the differences between quantitative and qualitative research?

Quantitative research is the term used for any research that seeks to make numerical measurements. In most cases, this involves the statistical analysis of the answers given to a structured set of questions (as in a survey questionnaire). The main strength of quantitative research is that it enables measurable comparisons between sets of data (between groups of people and between points in time).

Qualitative research is used to describe the approach taken when opinions are sought from a relatively small number of respondents by means of individual interviews or group discussions. This form of investigation makes use of relatively flexible 'discussion guides' rather than pre-structured questionnaires.

How is an opinion poll conducted?

Reputable political polling is conducted by several major polling organisations that use a number of different techniques for sampling and fieldwork. No single technique is equally appropriate in every situation, hence the variation. The most commonly-used techniques are face-to-face interviewing in respondents' houses and telephone interviewing.

Face-to-face polling is conducted within a number of 'primary sampling points' (usually constituencies). These are often selected proportional to the number of electors after all possible sampling points have been arranged in a particular way (i.e. by social class, political preference).

Telephone polling offers the possibility of a more efficient sample and hence potentially lower error estimates for a given size of sample. The reason for this is that telephone samples need not be clustered in smaller areas in the way that face-to-face samples are.

Internet-based polling is becoming more widely used as – like many forms of online research – it enables faster data collection and allows the presentation of a richer range of stimuli to respondents, such as visual and audio clips. However, there are limitations with the technique because 33 per cent of Australian households do not have home Internet access (Source: ABS) and those that do are skewed demographically, which requires weighting and other techniques to be applied to ensure representative results.

What is the background of researchers?

Market and social researchers are often graduates from a variety of disciplines. The majority of research graduates are drawn from degree disciplines that require strong communication or analytical skills, such as languages, English literature, maths, psychology, geography, history, politics, science and IT.