

# ESOMAR 28

## 28 QUESTIONS TO HELP ONLINE RESEARCH BUYERS



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.

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## 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?*

YouGov is an international, full-service online market research agency offering custom research, omnibus, field and tab services, qualitative research, syndicated products and market intelligence reports. Our mission is to supply a continuous, live stream of data and insight into what people are thinking and doing all over the world, so that companies, governments and institutions can better serve the people that sustain them.

Founded in the UK in 2000, YouGov is considered the pioneer of online market research. With our global panel of more than 3 million respondents, and offices in the United Kingdom, the United States, Europe and the Middle East, we offer our clients international results faster and more cost-effectively than traditional methods, with no compromise on quality.

## 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.*

YouGov maintains a highly engaged panel of respondents who have specifically opted in to participate in online research activities.

The value of our panel, as opposed to many other types of online sample sources, lies in having continuous access to a responsive audience ready-profiled on important demographic, attitudinal and lifestyle attributes. This enables us to execute a wide range of projects, from nationally representative samples to re-contact surveys with hard-to-find audiences.

### 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.*

Due to the size and strength of our own panel, YouGov does not often require additional sample. When we do include samples from external providers, it is only with the prior approval of our clients, and we will only use pre-identified partners who work to our approved standards. In such cases, our technology allows us to detect users taking the same survey with other providers, so we can remove them from the data as required.



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 YouGov panel is used solely for 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.*

YouGov actively recruits hard-to-reach respondents (such as younger people and those from ethnic minorities) via a network of partners with access to a wide range of online sources that cater to these groups. These sources have specific experience in recruiting these audiences for online activities.

These recruitment programmes include search engine optimization (SEO), affiliate networks, niche websites, and refer-a-friend programmes.

All recruitment sources, for hard-to-reach audiences or anyone else, are monitored to ensure that respondents are profiled, responsive, and engaged in the survey-taking experience.

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.*

As noted above, we rarely need to supplement our sample with that from other sources. On those occasions when external sample is required, we always notify the client so that they can take part in the decision about when and how to proceed with a different supplier.

External sample partners are chosen by their ability to target hard-to-reach audiences, and by the quality and timeliness of their work. Our technology allows us to detect users taking the same survey with other providers, and thus avoid duplicate responders.

## 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.*

Using YouGov's proprietary sampling technology, we begin by framing quotas based upon the census or profile of the required population. This frame is the basis on which our sampling software controls the flow of members into each survey.

Our sampling system will randomly select from our available panel, and allocate to surveys according to the quotas set.

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.*

YouGov's proprietary sampling software includes a router. This removes the potential for self-selection on surveys, and increases our ability to deliver lower incidence samples within a short time frame.



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.*

Panelists receive an invitation email containing a survey link. When they access the link the router will check against quotas on all live surveys and allocate them to a survey for which they qualify. We can manually control prioritisation (for example to ensure that a particularly urgent client survey can meet quotas in the necessary time frame), but allocation is predominantly determined by the quotas defined in the frame for each survey.

If, following more detailed screening, a respondent doesn't qualify for the survey to which they are allocated they will be returned to the router and allocated to another survey.

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.*

In any case where we consider there could be a potential for bias resulting from use of a router, we will revert to a manual invitation process. All surveys running on the router will have sampling controls on all variables likely to affect the results.

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?*

All parameters are set and controlled by the panel team within our Operations department. These are only changed following explicit consultation with all affected parties.

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?*

We collect over 500 data points on panelists through the initial opt-in process, in ongoing profiling efforts, and from survey responses. Basic profile information is stored for all panelists, with less frequently used attributes covered to varying degrees. Collection of this long tail of opinion and behavioural data is typically driven by client demand.

Beyond this, we have a proprietary system that automatically updates panelist demographics from survey data (typically every 3-6 months) depending on the relative frequency with which particular data points are likely to change.

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.*

In the majority of cases, respondents are emailed a generic survey invitation, whether invited directly to a study or via a router. Once they are allocated to a particular survey and have passed any additional screening, they are immediately informed of the topic, estimated length and their reward for taking part.

For qualitative studies respondents are given more information in the invitation itself on the topic and nature of the survey, and the amount of time they will have to make available to participate.



**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.*

Panelists are typically motivated by two things:

- Points for completing a survey (i.e., rewards)
- Understanding the impact of their contribution (i.e., "having their say")

YouGov's incentive programme is points-based. Point values are determined by survey length and are allocated upon survey completion. Respondents accumulate points for completing surveys and are able to redeem these either for entries into prize draws with a wide range of prizes or towards a cash payment.

In addition, we also share key survey results and actual data from selected surveys, and are constantly developing ways to enhance this feedback loop. Results are posted on the panelist areas of the website, and regular newsletters are used to highlight media coverage of YouGov survey results.

**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.*

The information we need stems from the client's requirements:

- Who do they wish to survey, in terms of demographics, behaviours and/or attributes? This will enable us to estimate incidence and develop quotas.
- What do they want to know? This will enable us to design the survey(s) to meet their needs and understand the length and nature of the survey(s) we will be running.
- When do they want to know it? Defining an end date will allow us to manage the client's survey(s) as part of the suite of fieldwork we are running, to ensure optimum response.

**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.*

YouGov asks for satisfaction scores from every panelist at the end of a survey experience, both explicit (using five specific questions) and implicit (using response metadata). These data are used internally to evaluate and improve the YouGov experience for panelists.

YouGov also carries out its own research on research, exploring in more detail what makes for a good respondent experience, identifying drivers of – and developing solutions for – respondent fatigue.

**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.*

Upon request, we will happily provide clients with disposition reports that contain email metrics (such as start and completion rates, and so on), invitation examples, and any other details relating to the project fielding.



## 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 have several techniques available to us to ensure that clients receive the highest quality data on which to base analysis. Specifically, we have mechanisms to identify and remove:

- Speeders
- Those that fail trap questions
- Habitual non-responders

The suite of quality checks will be defined with the client at the start of a project to ensure they align with any existing quality standards. In addition to removing fraudulent responses from the survey data, those panellists that fail these tests are marked in the database and ultimately removed from the panel should they turn out to be consistent offenders.

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.*

On average, panellists complete a survey no more than once per week, a threshold that ensures continued engagement without over-burdening panellists with too many surveys.

We monitor and control the number and frequency of invitations and completions both at an overall level and within subject areas.

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.*

Controls are set on a study-by-study basis. We can control to whom invitations are sent based on previous studies they have completed, and within whatever time frame is specified.

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.*

Though not generally relevant to clients, we do store additional data on the effectiveness of our recruiting partners. We can evaluate the quality of a source by understanding the longevity, response frequency, and participation history at an individual and source level.



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.*

YouGov applies a number of checks to ensure the quality of survey data, including, for example, trap questions that test panellist responses against pre-collected demographic data.

The suite of quality checks available allow us to detect fraudulent responses as well as duplicate respondents, and where panellists fail quality checks they are marked in the database as suspect and are removed from the panel if they turn out to be consistent offenders.

## 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).*

YouGov uses a double opt-in procedure across all panels. At the point of the first opt-in panellists are asked to confirm they are happy to accept the Terms and Conditions of membership. Only once they've agreed to these will they be sent a confirmation email and a link to double opt-in and activate their panellist account.

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.*

YouGov takes data protection and panellist privacy very seriously. Our Privacy Policy can be found at <http://www.yougov.co.uk/privacy-policy> and covers key topics including:

- Use of personally identifiable information
- Disclosure of information
- Data security



**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.*

All panellist data, personally identifiable or otherwise, is stored on UK-based servers that are maintained behind secure firewalls, IDS and Threat Management appliances and located in a site that is certified to the latest ISO standard (ISO/IEC 27001:2005). Personally identifiable information is stored separately from all profile data as a means of further securing panellist data.

Access to the data is limited to only those with direct responsibility for panel management and maintenance. In addition, all employees are required to abide by our Privacy Policy and are subject to disciplinary action if it is violated.

**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.*

Though there are no flawless methods of protecting in-survey content, YouGov can offer both general and specific protection to web-based client material. First, all YouGov panellists are subject to clear restrictions on the re-use of material by virtue of their agreement to our Terms and Conditions (see <http://yougov.co.uk/panel/terms-and-conditions/>). Second, to augment this general protection, YouGov can limit the lifetime of any link to audio, video and other content, such that it expires after a certain period of time, and cannot thereafter be accessed.

**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.*

YouGov's third party data centre provider is certified to the following standards, providing industry-approved protection to all YouGov data:

- ISO 9001:2008
- ISO/IEC 27001:2005
- Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard v2.0
- Member of the British Polling Council

**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.*

Panel registration is limited to those over 16 years of age, in line with MRS guidelines.

In cases where our research seeks to understand the views of those under the age of 16, YouGov seeks permission from the parent or guardian when screening our own panellists, and ensure all contact is via the parent or guardian and that they are fully aware of the nature of the research at all times.



## GUIDANCE ON PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Maintaining consumer trust is integral to effective market, social and opinion research. ESOMAR through its codes and guidelines promotes the highest ethical and professional standards for researchers around the world.

The ICC/ESOMAR Code on Market and Social Research, which was developed jointly with the International Chamber of Commerce, sets out global fundamentals for self-regulation for researchers. It has been undersigned by all ESOMAR members and adopted or endorsed by more than 60 national market research associations worldwide.

The ESOMAR Guideline on Guideline on Online Research is of particular relevance to researchers using online panels and should be read in conjunction with these questions for more explanation of the legal and professional responsibilities of researchers who are collecting and analysing online research data.

In addition, ESOMAR has issued the following guidelines to provide more detailed advice on how to address the legal, ethical, and practical considerations of conducting specific areas of research:

- Guideline on Social media research
- Guideline for Conducting mobile research
- Guideline on Online research
- Guideline on Distinguishing market research from other data collection activities
- Guideline on Passive data collection, observation and recording
- Guideline on Interviewing children and young people
- Guideline on Customer satisfaction studies
- Guideline on Mystery shopping
- Guideline on How to commission research
- ESOMAR/WAPOR Guide to opinion polls

There are also two ISO standards which relate to market research:

ISO Standard 26362 – Access panels in market, opinion and social research - Vocabulary and service requirements

ISO 20252 - Market, opinion and social research - Vocabulary and service requirements

These documents contain useful definitions and explain process quality standards for access panels and research projects. They explain good practice and the information that should be provided to clients. They can be purchased from the International Standards Organisation <http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html>

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