

Editorial

You may be reading the proceedings of the last “Panel Research” conference!

At the time of this fourth edition of the panel conference the panel section of the market research industry has reached maturity quickly – if not too quickly. In his 2005 editorial Kees de Jong wrote “*panels are hot*”. Anno 2008 I believe classic access panels are overheated.

The market has attracted many panel suppliers, market research agencies have built proprietary panels, prices are under pressure, response rates have dropped, e-mail is no longer a dominant electronic medium to invite respondents, people are harder to convince to join panels ... but (online) surveys need to be completed in an ever increasing tempo. While concerns for quality have been raised, numerous bad surveys still circulate and panel members are solicited too frequently. Despite Esomar’s valuable 26 questions to guide buyers of online samples, nothing much seems to happen in practice. Most current panel providers must admit they are actually impotent to do anything about the market tension without it being detrimental for their business. As many end users do not realize or care about the consequences (yet), panel providers can still get away with not suiting actions to words and say what they want when it comes to good quality panel practices. Still, this is a finite business model as all these providers are drawn towards the ‘commodity magnet’¹. Panel providers who wish to avoid the commodity magnet have to raise their costs and efforts and/or be selective in their business and search for new opportunities.

Opportunities lie in the evolution towards a combination of high quality, dedicated (e.g. branded, in-house) panels, and sourcing platforms that rely and embed the web’s newest semantic developments (e.g. social media). The future of the market research industry needs to embrace collaboration and connection between end-users, agencies and participants. Truly these trends go beyond the panel industry alone but for the panel business it implies we need to move from a ‘provider centric’ approach to a ‘people or participant centric’ view of managing panels and participants.

The papers in this conference edition are a blend of more traditional topics as well as subjects which are in line with the views suggest before. I believe in future editions of this conference we will see more papers centered around communities; mobile research; engaging participants; the convergence of research, social media and conversations; dedicated in-house panels Therefore we may consider repositioning and renaming this conference as we need to move on to the next generation of sourcing and panels (and stop calling it this way). I leave the renaming up to specialists but we may tap from the following pool of vocabulary: collaborative, participative, empowered, networked, socially connected, user-content generated ... research.

In any case, let the following set of papers sharpen your knowledge or be thought provoking and stimulate us towards better consumer insights and marketing management decisions.

Enjoy!

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ⁱ Rangan, K. and G. Bowman (1994), Beating the Commodity Magnet, Harvard Business Review.