THE DATA REVOLUTION

How big data will change the way we live and work

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RW RESEARCH WORLD

Encouraging, advancing and elevating market research, worldwide.

SIMON CHADWICK

Learn and disseminate

Mario Callegaro of Google UK on why
we need to share knowledge.

Simon Chadwick: You've written a number of articles, and you have two books in the works right now. What interests you the most about market research and survey research?

Mario Callegaro: I'm really passionate about the data-collection side of market research and survey research. There are new ways of collecting data and new ways to administer surveys. That's my interest and the reason why I like to run survey experiments, write papers, attend conferences and also disseminate information.

We need to share knowledge–that's the only way we can increase the quality of our surveys in general. If everybody is doing their own experiments and they keep them internal, then we don't learn from each other. We should not keep a lot of research in difficult-to-find PowerPoint presentations on a conference website.

I know that it might be discouraging to write something that can look old in a couple of years, but this is not an excuse to not do it. We can always learn from it. I'm editing a book on online panels which is coming out next year with Wiley. I was talking to some colleagues at an ESOMAR conference, and they asked me, "Why are you even writing this book? Market research is changing so quickly!" And I said, "It's been more than 15 years that we have online panels. There is no book on online panels, and everybody is using them. If you hire a young person, how do they learn about online panels?"

With every data-collection method, we need to recognise its strengths and weaknesses. As an example, in the US there is a new project done by the Advertising Research Foundation called the Foundations of Quality 2, whose results are coming out as we speak. It's the second comparison they did across online panels. They run the same survey across a number of panels, and they see what kind of data emerges. For example, what are the differences in estimates among panels? Are data coming from online panels close to official benchmarks? Those are key questions that the research industry should be working on, and sharing that information is on us.

Simon: What do you think are the most exciting developments in market research in the near future–and its biggest challenges?

Mario: The new, exciting part is that, on the survey front, we have our respondents who carry a 24/7 device with them, a data-collection device–that is, their smartphone. That's really a game changer. Potentially, we have a device that can be used to collect all kinds of data, including passive behaviours. Of course, we need to be very careful with the privacy of the data we're collecting and make sure everything is communicated exactly to the respondent.

Two–and this is our challenge, call it big data–all the data that are generated online. From Google trends data to social media data to Twitter feeds to any kind of data that is now increasingly available. As an industry, we still don't know how to deal with it. Some believe that this unsolicited data might even be a substitute for traditional surveys. We need to understand how it could work and, again, understand their limits and weaknesses. It's not easy. There is the processing side–for example, how do you make sense of pictures? How do you analyse these endless gigabytes of text in social media? Then you have the representativeness problem. Are these data representative? Of what population? For example, Twitter is used by a very young demographic which is also very active online.

The other big challenge is privacy. I'm afraid that a vendor who is not very careful, not following ESOMAR's and other industry guidelines, may create a situation where there is some disrespect for a respondent's privacy–which could lead to restrictions on the kind of research we can do. We need to communicate what people are signing up for, for example in the case of survey apps. In theory, they can collect a lot of information, but is the respondent aware that you're collecting them? And how do you anonymise the data to make sure that nobody can track down a respondent? It's a challenge and something we need to work on together.

The other area important to recognise is that market and survey research needs to work with more players. In the past, we tended to do everything ourselves. Now, we need to be more open and to work with computer scientists, machine learning researchers, data scientists and, of course, statisticians. We need to build on different strengths, different team members that come from completely different backgrounds, because the data sets are getting more and more complex.

Another big challenge is that many surveys have already been done by official statistics or other agencies. The data is available, but we do not fully use it. This data is generally of very high quality. We need to find it, leverage it and do secondary data analysis. Many data sets are publicly available or available for a small fee. This also means that we don't need to ask respondents the same questions over and over. **RW**

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