Guideline on Publishing the Results of Market and Social Research

This English version of this Guideline is a translation of the original German version; in the event of variances, the German version shall take precedence over the English translation.

This guideline is issued by the industry associations for market and social research in Germany:

- ADM Arbeitskreis Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforschungsinstitute e. V.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Institute e. V. (ASI)
- BVM Berufsverband Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforscher e. V.
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Online-Forschung – DGOF e. V.

These guidelines are always to be applied in conjunction with the “ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics” prefaced by the “Declaration for the Territory of the Federal Republic of Germany”, as well as the various guidelines issued by the industry associations for market and social research in Germany.

The guideline applies to the whole of market and social research and therefore also includes research projects identified as opinion or political research. It also applies to end clients when they commission research agencies to carry out studies.

1 Purpose and public interest

Many results of market and social research are published in the media. It is therefore important and necessary that both end clients and the public receive the information that they need in order to understand and interpret the results. Studies on political and other socially relevant topics require particular care, as they shape public opinion and are also used as a basis for political decisions.
Information is also important in the case of studies that use artificial intelligence (AI) for data collection and in areas that are relevant to data quality.

This guideline focuses on the publication of quantitative market and social research results that are claimed to be generalisable to the population or to specific target groups. However, the rules apply analogously to all published market and social research results, e.g. those based on qualitative studies (including in-depth interviews and group discussions) or on social media analyses or statistical (secondary) analyses.

Such cases require information and notes on interpretation that have been appropriately adapted (see also DIN Spec 91368: Samples for scientific surveys in market, opinion and social research – Quality criteria and documentation requirements).

2 Responsibilities

The guideline sets out the responsibility of all the parties involved to always provide results and interpretations with sufficient transparency. This includes:

- the end client,
- the agency carrying out the research (definition: the research agency responsible for the overall execution. This also includes online panels, field service providers and other providers of market and social research services, if they are commissioned directly by an end client),
- the institutions publishing the results.

When publishing the results of market and social research, a clear distinction must be made between the **research results** as such and **interpretations and conclusions** that are based on them. The recognised scientific and methodological criteria must be observed. Any statements that do not follow from the data collected must be identified as such.

3 Flow of information between the end client and the agency carrying out the research

A distinction must be made between publication and information that is given to the end client by the agency carrying out the research. In the case of publication, a distinction must be made between publication by the agency carrying out the research (see Chapter 5), publication by the end client of the study (see Chapter 6) and publication by some other organisation (e.g. media, see Chapter 6). In the case of publications, a distinction must also be made in terms of the audience, in particular the general public/population or the professional public (in science, politics, business). The necessary information, as described in Chapter 4, must be adapted accordingly.

4 Basic information about the study

The following basic information is the minimum that is necessary in order to assess the scientific quality of a study and its results. This information must be documented for the end client of the study by the agency carrying out the research and should be reported as fully as possible in any publication (see the notes below marked with an asterisk (*) for publication to the general public).

- Name of the agency/agencies carrying out the research *
- End client and any sponsors of the study *
- Overall population and target group of the study *
- Number of entities surveyed/number of AI-generated cases (sample size), as well as sources used in social media analyses and AI deployment *
- Survey period *
- Survey method used (e.g. oral, written, telephone, online interviews or mixed-mode designs), methods used for qualitative studies, social media analyses, use of AI for statistical (secondary) analyses *
- Sampling method used (e.g. random sample, quota sample, census)
- Generalisability of the study/representation of the overall population *
- Sample basis (e.g. ADM master sample, residents' registration office, website visitors), adapted for social media analyses
- For synthetic data: Description of the data source incl. scope and up-to-dateness of the training data *
- Statistical margin of error, if possible and methodologically justified *
- Exact wording of the questions asked *
- Information on the weighting of the data ("whether") and type of weighting ("how", which characteristics/variables)
- Number or proportion of respondents who answered "don't know" or "no response", if this appears necessary in order to be able to interpret the actual distribution of the responses appropriately, e.g. political questions

(* = to be provided as a minimum requirement when publishing for the general public, including video and audio reports)/(see Appendix for examples)

If the information listed above is too extensive to be published in the media, for example, it can also be made available via an easily accessible link or a corresponding reference.

In addition to presenting the results, publications of market and social research findings often also include an interpretation of the results and possible conclusions based on them. These are part of applied empirical research, but they must be identified as such in contrast to the pure presentation of the results.

Conversely, interpretations and recommendations that are not supported by results are not part of empirical research. They must be clearly labelled as such when they are published.

5 Publication by the agency carrying out the research

The agency carrying out the research must publish the basic information, as described in Chapter 4, together with the research results.

6 Publication by the end client or another organisation

If the agency carrying out the research has no influence on the publication of the research results, it is recommended that the contract include a clause giving the end client sole responsibility for such publications. Should the agency carrying out the research become aware that a publication of the results by the end client is misleading and/or incorrect, the agency should inform the end client of this and thereby support the correction of incorrect or misleading representations and interpretations of the research results.

The end client should provide the basic information, as described in Chapter 4, when publishing market and social research results.

If the end client is planning to publish the results of a market and social research project, they should consult the agency carrying out the research about the form and content of the publication. The appropriate type of communication should be weighed up for each publication on a case-by-case basis.

It is recommended that contracts concluded with the end client of a market and social research study should take this guideline into account. The contract can, for example, stipulate that the agency carrying out the research has the right to review and approve a copy of any publication based on its research work.

7 Specific considerations when publishing the results of political and electoral research

A special feature of political and electoral research is that its findings usually attract a great deal of public interest and are the subject of intense public debate. This results in a special obligation to ensure the transparency and completeness of the basic information provided, as described in Chapter 4.

It should also be pointed out that projections based on the "voting intention question" are not election forecasts. When publishing the results of voter surveys conducted on election day as voters leave the polling station ("exit polls"), the following must be taken into account in addition to the basic information, as described in Chapter 4: how many polling stations were surveyed, how they were selected, their regional distribution, the times at which they were surveyed, and whether and how people who voted before election day (e.g. postal voters) were taken into account in the forecast.

8 Final provisions and disclaimer

This guideline forms part of the professional rules that govern German market and social research, resulting as they do from the law and the methodological standards, but also from common practice. It always applies when market and social research studies are carried out in Germany or from within Germany and whenever their results are published. It therefore also applies to studies carried out from abroad in order to conduct research in Germany.

The principles and procedures described in this guideline are, inter alia, the result of the right to conduct research, together with the resulting methodological requirements, as well as the right to obtain information.

However, the issuers of this guideline cannot guarantee indemnity. It cannot be ruled out that, upon reassessment at a later date or by other authorities, different—possibly stricter—criteria for the permissibility of the behaviours described may be established.

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Appendix: Examples of an appropriate form of providing basic information in (media) publications

Version listing information
End client: xyz
Carried out by: Example Research Agency
Survey method: Mixture of methods: telephone survey (mix of landline and mobile) and online panel (70% telephone (50% landline and 50% mobile)/30% online panel)
Number of interviews: 2056 persons aged 18 or above who are eligible to vote in the Federal Republic of Germany
Survey period: 5 – 7 March 2023
Additional information: The survey was weighted according to gender, age group, level of education, federal state and town size category, in order to reflect the overall population in terms of these characteristics.
Wording of question: If federal elections were held next Sunday, which of the following parties would you vote for?
(Detailed information about the survey is available at ... insert link)

Version with continuous text
This survey was conducted by Example Research Agency on behalf of XYZ. From 1 April until 12 April 2023, 1032 people were interviewed in a telephone survey according to the specified quotas ... (list quota characteristics). The sample is representative of the German-speaking resident population of the Federal Republic of Germany aged 14 and above with regard to these quota characteristics.
Wording of question: Which of the following manufacturers of xyz do you know, even if only by name?
(Detailed information about the survey is available at ... insert link)

Version for qualitative methods (continuous text)
This non-representative study was conducted by Example Research Agency on behalf of XYZ. From 1 April until 12 April 2023, six two-hour online group discussions about the use of daily newspapers were conducted with 32 regular readers of daily newspapers, recruited nationwide by Example Research Agency.
(Detailed information about the study is available at ... insert link)

Version for a social media analysis (continuous text)
This study was carried out by Example Research Agency on behalf of XYZ. From 1 April to 12 April 2023, all freely accessible posts and comments on Facebook on the subject of electric cars were analysed using xyz software as part of a social media analysis. The study only represents the group of people who posted content/comments on the subject of electric cars on Facebook.
(Detailed information about the study is available at ... insert link)

Version listing information – Use of synthetic data
End client: xyz
Carried out by: Example Research Agency
Survey method: Mixture of methods: synthetic data/respondents and online panel (20 % synthetically generated data sets / 80 % from online panel)
Number of cases: 2,056 in total, including 1,656 people eligible to vote in the Federal Republic of Germany and 400 data sets generated by artificial intelligence (synthetic data).
Survey period: 5 – 7 March 2025, synthetic data created on 7 March 2025
Source of synthetic data: five studies on voting behaviour including “voting intention question”, representative of eligible voters aged 18 and above; a total of 10,153 cases, survey period 4 January 2025 – 26 February 2025
Additional information: The survey was weighted according to gender, age group, level of education, federal state and town size category, in order to reflect the overall population in terms of these characteristics.
Wording of question: If federal elections were held next Sunday, which of the following parties would you vote for?
(Detailed information about the survey is available at ... insert link)