

Is AI Replacing Researchers

Or is it making them more critical than ever?

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IRONWOOD
INSIGHTS
group, LLC



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Introduction

A full-spectrum insights partner built to improve the quality, reach, and impact of primary market research.

Field Services Division

Online Panel &
Sampling Services

Data Collection &
Recruiting Services

IRONWOOD
INSIGHTS
group, LLC

Research & Insights Division

Data & Analytics
Services

Full-Service Insights
Solutions

Lindy

Product Development

RealRespondent™



Quant

Dashboards

AI

Communities

Online & Digital Groups

Telephone

Qual

Strategy

Segmentation

Multivariate

Online Surveys

Customer Experience

IronBrand™

Branding / Coms



FastFocus



indico

TANJO.ai

VOXCO

Relative
INSIGHT



Enghouse
Interactive



ZYLA

AI is changing the mechanics & speed surrounding research *execution*.

But trust in the outcome still requires a human signature

HITL philosophy anchors the full research spectrum:

- 01 Data Collection**
Getting the right respondents
- 02 Data Quality**
Ensuring respondents are real
- 03 Analysis & Interpretation**
Ensuring findings are valid
- 04 Synthetic Respondents**
Moving to the next frontier... *responsibly*

Human in the Loop - "HITL"

Methodology...Designing to Reach the "Right" Respondents



Online/Mobile



Telephone/CATI



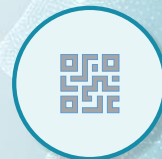
In-Person/F2F



Text/SMS



Mail



QR Code



Mixed Method

“Traditional” and mixed mode data collection methods can be cost-effective AND provide greater informational accuracy, depth and respondent engagement

A Guide to Integrating Alternative Methods

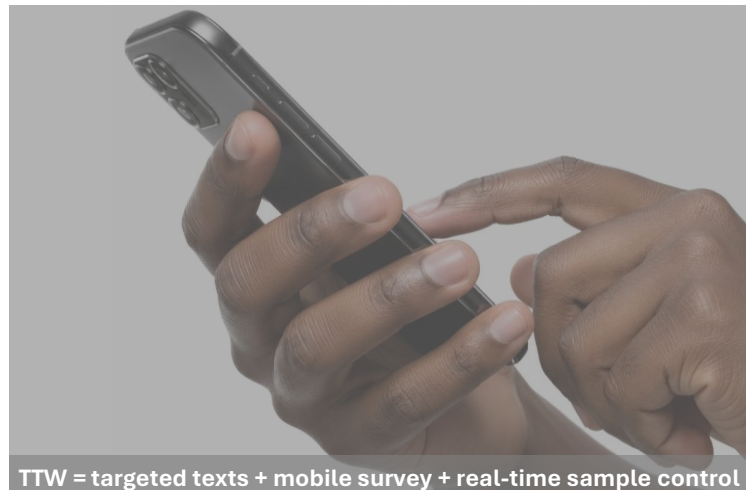
Dimension	 Online/Mobile	 Telephone/CATI	 In-Person/F2F	 Text/SMS	 Mixed Method
Efficiency/Speed to Insights	●	●	●	●	●
Geographic Reach	●	●	●	●	●
Representativeness of Sample	●	●	●	●	●
Response Rates	● — ●	●	●	●	●
Respondent Engagement	●	●	●	●	●
Depth of Information	●	●	●	●	●
Content Flexibility	●	●	●	●	●
Respondent Authenticity/Fraud	● — ●	●	●	●	●
Data Quality	● — ●	●	●	●	●
Cost	●	●	●	●	●
Value	●	●	●	●	●

Case Study: Unlocking the Power of Text-to-Web (TTW)

Overview

A statewide political poll of n=500 registered voters was needed. Study requirements included typically rigorous political polling standards for speed, cost-efficiency, sample quality, and projectability of results.

Our custom text-to-web survey incorporated tailored invitation/reminder messaging, and real-time demographic/geographic quota tracking to efficiently capture a balanced statewide sample.



TTW = targeted texts + mobile survey + real-time sample control

Key Outcomes

~76K text invite/reminders
Seamless flow of outreach delivered at scale

n=510 completed in **4 days**
Fully balanced sample exceeded the 500-voter goal—no weighting!

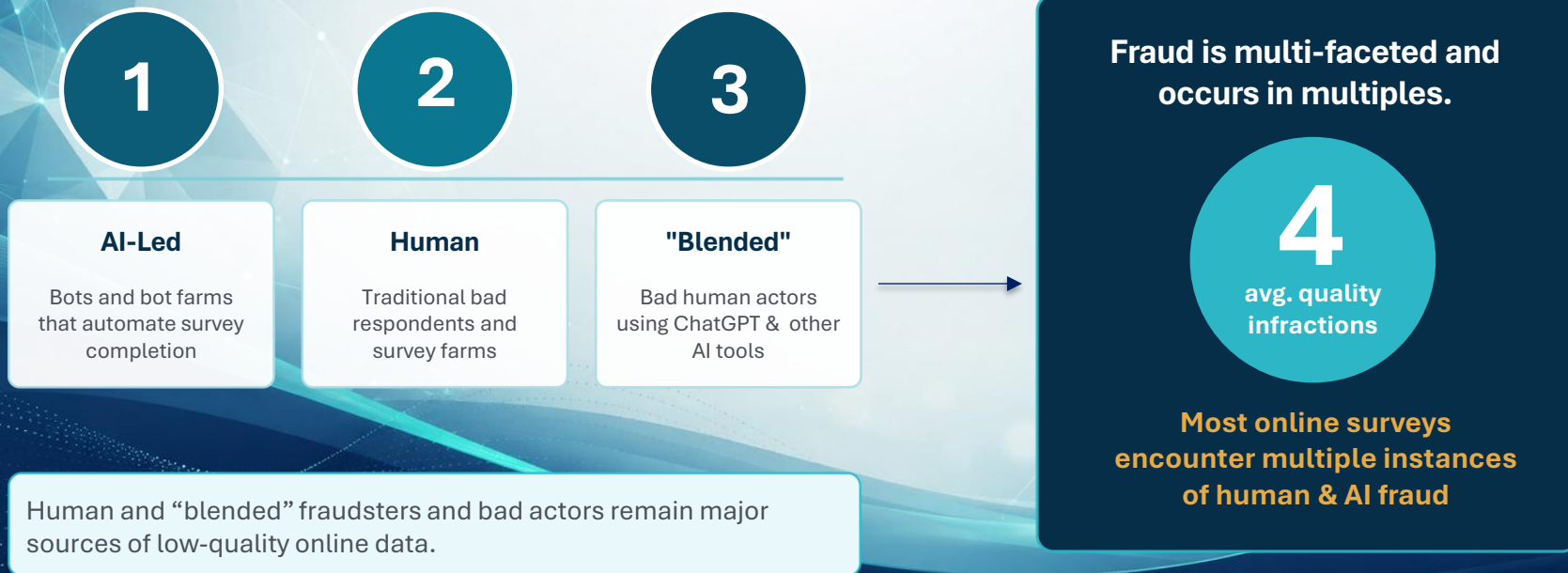
4-way sample control
Age, gender, party affiliation, and county population targets

~0.7% overall response rate
Over 1% before quota limits were reached—**above standard**

Implication: TTW can stand alone when the design is short, mobile-optimized, actively monitored, and quota-managed in real time.

Primary Sources of Survey Fraud & Low-Quality OL Data

AI is a major accelerant — but it is still only one piece of the fraud puzzle.



Solution: Gated, HITL System of Fraud Countermeasures

AI + Technology-enabled... designed & maintained through human governance & HITL principles

ENTRY

Fraud & Data Quality Countermeasures Deployed Across the Response Journey

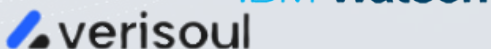
VALIDATED
DATA

01

SECURITY GATE Pre-Survey Measures

Prevent bad actors before they enter

- Screener design principles
- Fake account detection
- IP duplication block
- Human verification
- Visual traps

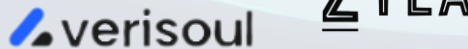


02

SECURITY GATE In-Survey Measures

Detect suspicious behavior in real time

- Survey design principles
- Attention & red herring tests
- Speed traps / timers



03

SECURITY GATE Post-Survey Measures

Validate data before decisions are made

- Back-end data/open-end review
- Cumulative quality scoring
- Subgroup comparison
- Pattern checking



Case Study: Live Fraud Capture Using Gated QC System

Key Outcomes

Overview

National sample of n=4,000 consumers captured for a 25-minute segmentation survey. Samples balanced to represent the U.S. census proportions for gender, age, ethnicity, census region.

The study was designed to define the total addressable market and segment that market on based on key demographics, psychographics, and health behaviors & aspirations.

GATE 1 Pre-Survey

1,840

of fraudsters screened out by AI tools before entering survey

Stopped a massive amount of AI led fraud from entering the survey—resulting in significant time- and cost-efficiencies

GATE 2 In-Survey

~14%

% of fraudsters/bad actors flagged using "blended" set of countermeasures

Countermeasures prescriptively implemented by researchers, kicked out automatically, reconciled by researchers in-field

GATE 3 Post-Survey

~6%

% of low-quality respondents/bad cases flagged through back-end analysis

Researchers analyze data patterns, open ends to mitigate significant negative impact to **research outcomes**

The Last Step...Ensuring the Integrity of Research Outcomes

Trustworthy insights require vigilance across three pillars of research process quality:



Design Quality

Study design, survey logic + programming integrity



Field Quality

Sample quality + respondent authenticity, engagement



Interpretive Quality

Data/patterns hold up to analytical scrutiny, relevance?

Why insights validity still breaks down:

- Validity can break down anywhere across these three pillars of the project life cycle
- AI and other tech tools can analyze, compile data and identify patterns very quickly—both from a QC perspective as well as an analytical perspective
- Research expertise applies the judgement, context and skepticism that transform data into trustworthy insights

The final arbiter of insights quality isn't AI. It's the researcher's "scientific skepticism!"

Process Disruptions can Occur Where You Least Expect Them!

Common Assumptions

Internal systems—customer sample, DIY platforms—are trusted, self-sustaining sources

- Known sampling sources
- Engaged audience, high-quality responses
- Democratized access to research systems
- Less need for scrutiny, oversight



Research Realities

Source credibility does not guarantee data integrity or insights credibility

- Customer files can still contain inattentive, careless, unmotivated or low-quality respondents **AND bots**
- DIY systems lack governance and oversight... Poor...survey design, programming/logic routing, fielding/data collection and QC practices can introduce error even when the source looks trustworthy.
- Continuous quality validation remains essential

As research becomes more automated & democratized, research expertise becomes more essential

Case Study: “Scientific Skepticism” + HITL QC Ensure Quality Outcomes

Key Outcomes

AI + HITL

63% ➤ 51%

HITL QC process salvaged a clean data set of over 6,000 cases.

AI-driven anomaly detection process **flagged ~two-thirds of the data set as suspect—in minutes!**

Human review confirmed most “suspects” as bad—**resulted in removal of over 50% of all cases**



Typing Tool Accuracy

Before QC

55%

Accuracy with the full customer dataset is essentially **a coin flip after a major segmentation investment.**



After QC

97%

After cleaning the data and focusing on a balanced sample of quality cases—**correct classification skyrocketed**

Overview

Study designed to type & classify a closed-source, customer sample with a newly-developed segmentation framework. The process would drive future research intended to develop product and messaging strategies targeted to key segments.

The study was fielded using a DIY platform to deliver a short form typing tool that was added, “omnibus style,” to an existing online customer tracking instrument. Initial analysis of the datafile revealed a strikingly poor fit between the segmentation model and the customer base.

The Synthetic Respondent “Landscape”

Common & Segment-based SR's

Shared Traits



Lower cost / faster turnaround

Accelerates exploration vs. human-only panels



Reduced sample fraud

No bots, duplicates, or inattentive respondents



Less respondent fatigue

Avoids multi-concept contamination and survey wear-out



Demographic matching

Profiles can align to key audience traits

Segment-based SR's (SBSR's)

Differentiators



Behavioral + psychographic depth

Models generational, category, custom segment traits



Category-specific behavior modeling

Reflects how segments think, shop, react, decide using category-specific context



Continuously updated context

Incorporates evolving attitudes, category dynamics, competitive activity, events



Deeper actionability

Outputs are targeted—segment-relevant strategies, concepts, messages

Why SBSR's Matter

More realistic audience emulation

More current, less static output

Produce better early-stage insights

More useful marketing direction

SBSR Advantage: psychographic + category depth, continually refreshed.

Integrating Synthetic Respondents: Augment, Don't Replace

Optimizing synthetic use starts with role clarity



Better early-stage decisions

- **Research Flow:** Use synthetics to accelerate the research process and when the objective is upstream or directional exploration... not validation.
- **HITL:** Keep researchers in the loop to determine appropriate uses, frame objectives & questions, interpret the output, decide when human validation is required.

Best-fit use cases

Hypothesis generation

Scenario testing

Idea screening

Concept exploration

Early-stage innovation

SBSR Use Cases: From Monitoring to Concept Testing

Continuous stream of market intelligence drives segment-relevant ideation, concept testing & optimization

1

SBSR Updates

Continuous refresh keeps attitudes/behaviors up-to-date with current environmental, social, economic change



2

Monitoring Reports

Consolidate segment-relevant news, brands, campaigns, category events, competitive activity, social/political shifts.



3

Ideate/Develop Concepts

Learnings from reports/SBSR feedback used to develop hypotheses, ideas, concepts.



4

Evaluate & Optimize

Test, optimize segment-relevant ideas, messaging, marketing mix elements.

Market Monitoring Outcomes

Monitor specific brands

Monitor category events

Product launches / recalls

Track digital campaigns

Monitor impact (e.g., tariffs)

Track top topics of interest

Evaluative Outcomes

Innovation

Product /
Portfolio Mgt

Brand &
Coms Dev

What are Others Saying?

“Strong research design needs to be in place before AI enters the picture...AI routinely misses context. It can’t determine which theme is significant for your business as opposed to simply frequent in your data.”

Eric Karofsky, VectorHX
Quirk’s May-June 2026 Edition

“AI is making it faster and easier to produce (research) outputs... AI can improve productivity; it does not replace expertise.”

John Hoepfner, Brand Name Quest
Quirk’s July-August 2026 Edition

“AI routinely misses context. It can’t determine which theme is significant to your business as opposed to just frequent in your data.”

Eric Karofsky, VectorHX
Quirk’s May-June 2026 Edition

“The most effective approach is not to view AI and expertise as competing forces. . . but as complementary ones.”

John Hoepfner, Brand Name Quest
Quirk’s July-August 2026 Edition

“...collaboration between research & commercial technologies...is essential to maximizing the benefits of AI moderation while mitigating the harm and risk that can emerge from unexamined usage.”

Joint ADM Insights & Strategy Team
Quirk’s July-August 2026 Edition

In Closing...

Research is not AI vs. Humans... It's AI + Humans

AI improves the speed, scale & cost of the research process...

Data Collection

Data Processing

Data Analyzing

Human research expertise—interwoven with AI using HITL processes—ensures trust in the outcomes

Real Respondents

Accurate Data

Valid Conclusions

Thank You!



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OR stop by booth # **413****