#NewMR

Presenting & Reporting Report 2021

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Executive Summary

There is no such thing as a report that is the 'right' report for every audience and every project.

This report is based on two waves of survey research (with more than 1000 responses) plus the insights gleaned from 40+ years of work in the research industry.

The key points are:
- 82% of participants described reports as Good (or Very Good or Excellent)
  - But only 64% of the people receiving reports described them as Good (or Very Good or Excellent).
  - 92% of people writing reports described them as Good (or Very Good or Excellent) – highlighting a gap between creators and receivers.
- Reporting appears to be improving
  - But receivers of reports do not think it is improving as much as creators think
- Since most reports are seen as good, if your report is not good, it is going to stand out – and not in a good way
- Almost all receivers of reports (92%) said that Insightful was a key criterion for a good report.
  - But people varied on what the other criteria were (50% of receivers wanted Concise and 48% prioritised Practical).
- There are variations by factors such as region and years in the industry, but the overall pattern is the same, for example Insightful remains the key driver of a good report
  - The key differences depend on the specific audience and the specific project.
- The key things that make a good report are providing Insights, being Actionable, and being Clear
  - However, different clients/receivers had differing priorities on other topics, for example, many people like concise, but some prefer detailed.
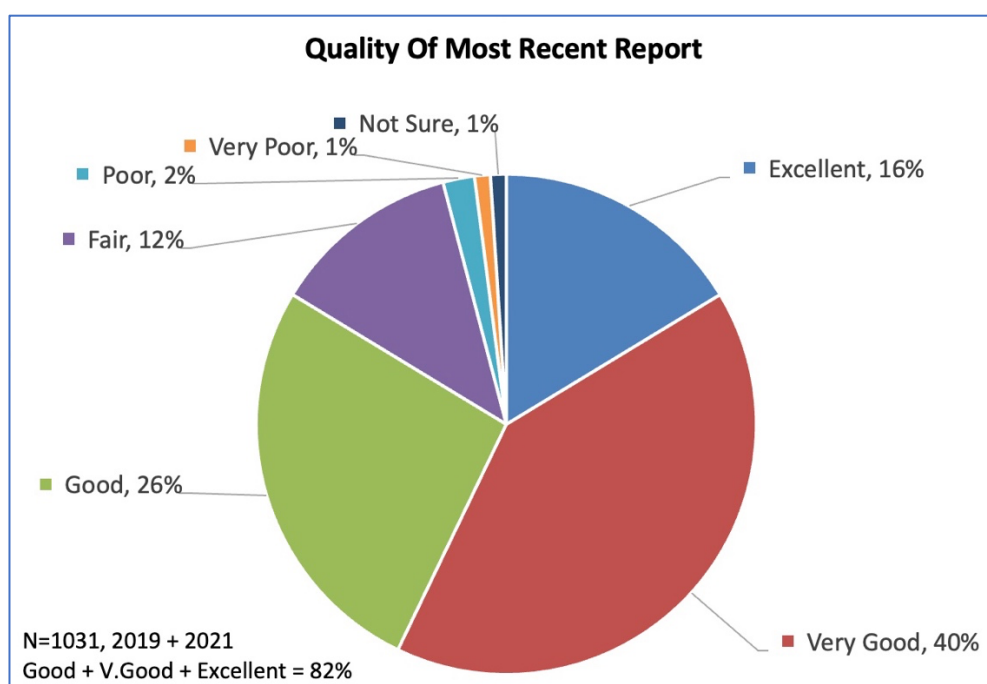
Accessing the data

Our friends at Infotools have created an online system for accessing the data from the 2019 and 2021 waves. To find out how you can access the data to investigate it yourself send an email directly to Infotools (geoff@infotools.com) and they'll arrange the most appropriate access for your needs.

Narrative

This NewMR study presents the results of two waves of research into the state of market research reports and reporting. The first wave was conducted in 2019 and the most recent wave 2021 (8 July to 20 August).

Most reports are good, but not as good as their creators believe

We asked the participants to evaluate the most recent report they were involved with (as creator, receiver or 'other'). The overall picture is shown in the chart below. 82% of reports were rated as Good, Very Good or Excellent.

Quality Of Most Recent Report

Not Sure, 1%
Very Poor, 1%
Poor, 2%
Fair, 12%
Excellent, 16%
Good, 26%
Very Good, 40%

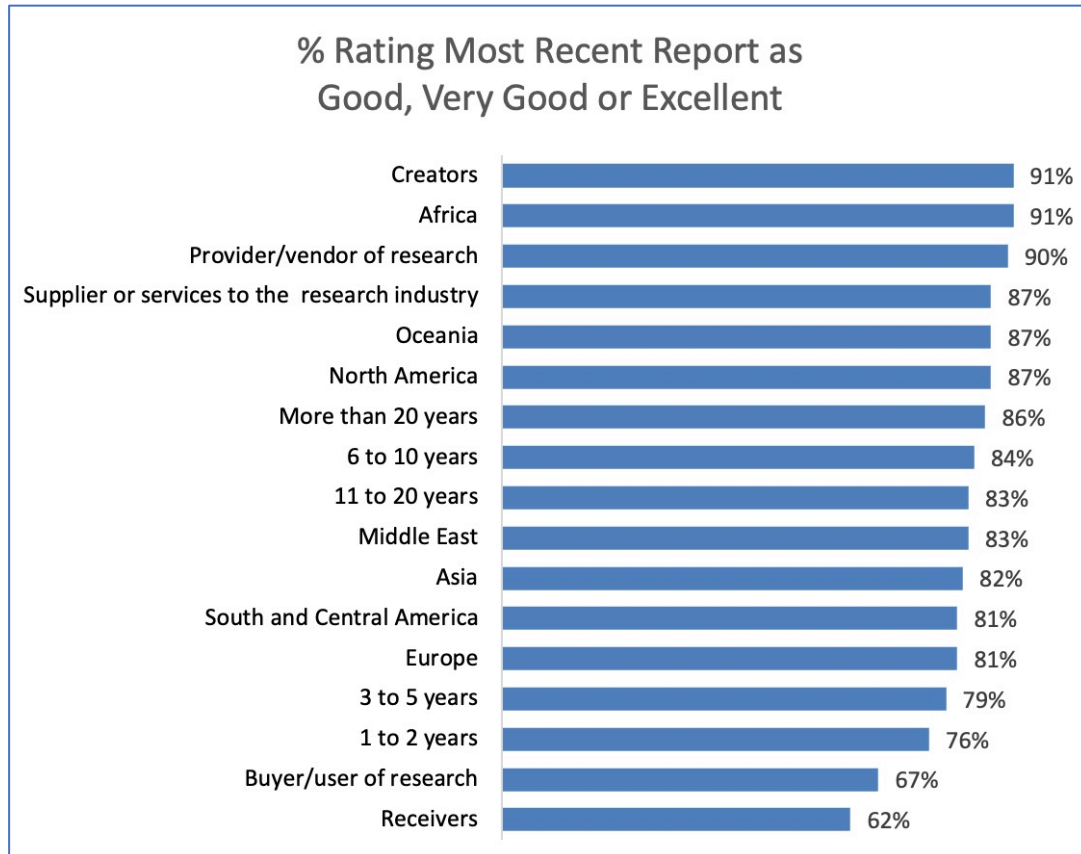N=1031, 2019 + 2021
Good + V.Good + Excellent = 82%

The data for 2019 and 2021 are remarkably consistent, in terms of the proportion rating the most recent report as Good, Very Good or Excellent. In 2019, 81% said the report was Good, Very Good or Excellent, in 2021 it was 82%. Indeed, there are very few differences between the 2019 and 2020 values.

The chart below looks at the proportion of different sub-groups in terms of those who rated their most recent report as Good, Very Good or Excellent. The biggest difference is between those creating and receiving reports. Amongst creators, 91% rated the report as Good, Very Good, or Excellent. Amongst those receiving reports, 62% rated the report as Good, Very Good, or Excellent. There is a similar gap between "Provider/vendor of Research" (90%) and "Buyer/user of research" (67%). This is not surprising since most providers of research were creators of reports (with just a few being receivers) and most clients were receivers of reports (with just a few being creators).

The gap between creators and receivers is a cause for concern. The key message is that creators can't necessarily judge the quality of their reports. One third of the reports that creators thought were good, were not seen as good by the receivers. One possible reason for this mismatch is variance displayed by receivers in what they want and in what they consider constitutes a good report. Another reason for the mismatch is could simply be that some creators simply don't understand what receivers want.
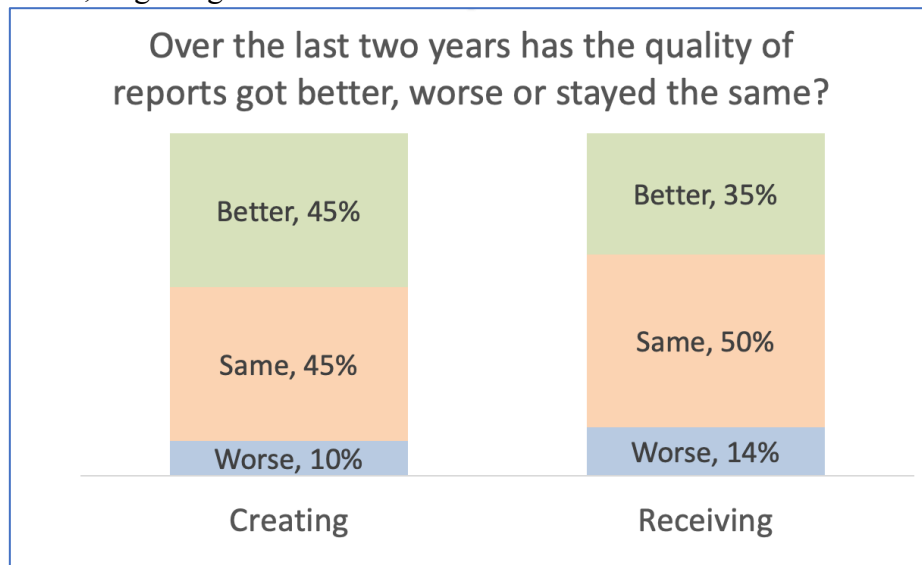
There were no strong differences between the sub-groups, once sample size was accounted for. Africa has a higher percentage saying good, and people with less than 5 years' experience had a lower percentage saying good, but these were all smaller cells, implying the likely sampling error would have been larger. Note the detailed responses and the sample sizes are available in the Data section of this report.

% Rating Most Recent Report as Good, Very Good or Excellent

Sub-group	%
Creators	91%
Africa	91%
Provider/vendor of research	90%
Supplier or services to the research industry	87%
Oceania	87%
North America	87%
More than 20 years	86%
6 to 10 years	84%
11 to 20 years	83%
Middle East	83%
Asia	82%
South and Central America	81%
Europe	81%
3 to 5 years	79%
1 to 2 years	76%
Buyer/user of research	67%
Receivers	62%

Looking at analyses by sub-group, across all of the questions in the study, it is clear that the key differences are between individuals not between groups (other than the differences between creators and receivers of reports). For example, the differences between two clients in North America are likely to be as big or bigger as the differences between the average client in North America and the average client in say Oceania or Europe.

Reports are tending to improve

We asked participants whether, over the last two years, reports had been getting better, staying the same, or getting worse. The results are illustrated in the chart below.

Over the last two years has the quality of reports got better, worse or stayed the same?

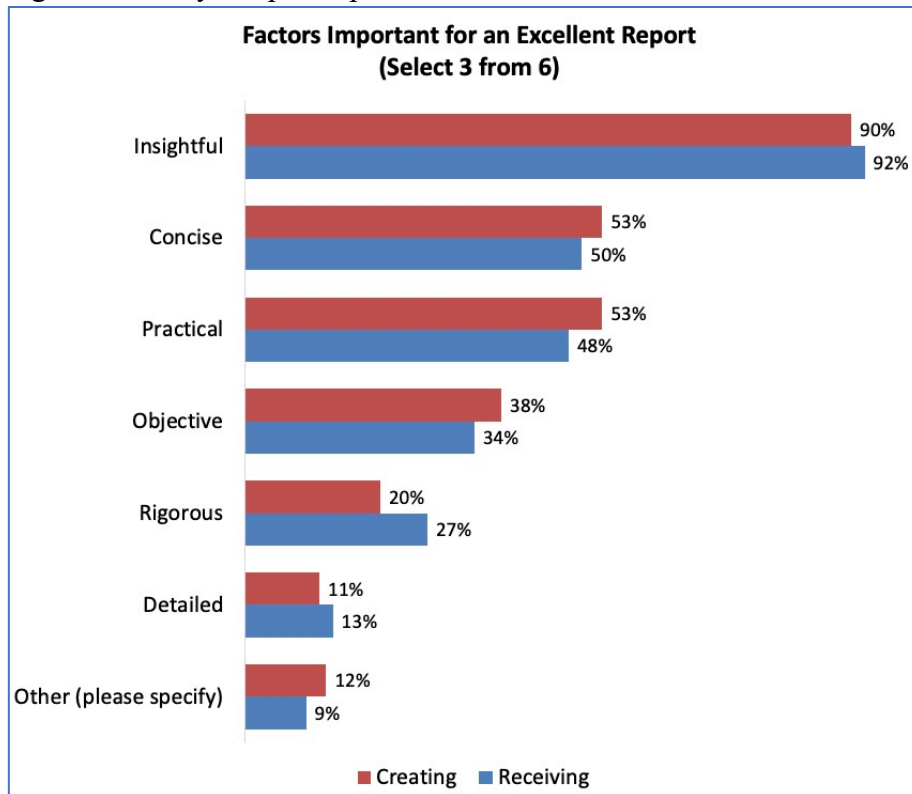| Creating	Receiving
Better, 45%	Better, 35%
Same, 45%	Same, 50%
Worse, 10%	Worse, 14%

While there are a few people who see reporting as getting worse, there are large numbers who see reporting as improving and the balance are those who see it remaining the same.

The consequences for a bad report could be high

Since the majority of reports are seen as good, any report that falls below this standard is going to stand out from the crowd, and stand out in a bad way. This means that suppliers need to ensure they are rated highly by their readers/receivers. As we saw earlier, one third of reports rated good by creators are not rated good by receivers – so creators should not trust their own opinions or standards.

What makes a good report?

As part of the research, we presented six possible characteristics of an excellent report to the participants and asked them to select up to three – in order to ascertain their key priorities. The percentage selected by the participants are shown in the chart below.

Factors Important for an Excellent Report
(Select 3 from 6)

Factor	Creating	Receiving
Insightful	90%	92%
Concise	53%	50%
Practical	53%	48%
Objective	38%	34%
Rigorous	20%	27%
Detailed	11%	13%
Other (please specify)	12%	9%

There is a large degree of agreement between creators and receivers in terms of the key priorities, which is reassuring.

The key result from this exercise is that almost everybody selected Insightful as one of their prioritised three characteristics.

The next two highest priorities are Concise and Practical, with about 50% picking each of these. This indicates that in the absence of further information, the top three priorities are Insightful, Concise and Practical. However, the data also shows that it is better to find out what each specific client/receiver prioritises. For example, 34% of receivers prioritise Objective in their top three, and 27% prioritise Rigorous.

As an example of the variations between people, among the 535 people who chose Concise as one of their top three priorities, 121 also said Detailed and 72 said Rigorous.

Overall, 12% of participants selected 'Other (please specify)' – so it is interesting to see what they specified in addition to the six items offered in the question.

The open-ended responses to the 'please specify other' question, from the people who receive reports, focused on business focus, e.g. "Clearly answers the questions the stakeholders want answers to" & "With clear actions". A few of the receivers also mentioned fast and visual was mentioned a couple of times.

Among the people who create reports, business focus was a common response, but so was visual, engaging and storytelling, for example "Good looking", "We need to understand how to engage our clients" & "It tells a clear story". The receivers are perhaps more focused on their clients (e.g. internal stakeholders) and creators are focused on their clients (e.g. insight teams). But overall, the pattern was constant, Insights are always the most important,

In terms of these 6 characteristics, there were few differences between sub-groups, even though there are differences between individuals. For example, Africa prioritises Objective more (61%) than other regions, and North America prioritises it less (31%). People with more years in research prioritise Concise (e.g. 20+ years, 55%) and new entrants prioritise it less (e.g. 1 to 2 years, 36%). Overall, the key patterns appear consistently, i.e. Insight is the most important, followed by Concise and Practical, with just a few minor variations.

The asymmetry of strengths and weaknesses

To dig deeper into what characterises a good or bad report, we asked participants to describe in their own words what (if anything) was wrong with their most recent report, and what (if anything) was good about it. Analysis of these open-ended comments show an asymmetry in terms of what people described as poor and good.

When there was something that could be improved, it often related to the basics. For example:
- Errors (e.g. "Mistakes with numbers")
- Lack of insights (e.g. "It was fact based without highlighting insights")
- Not engaging - narrative (e.g. "No narrative and no story telling.")
- Not engaging – visuals (e.g. "Could have had more visuals")
- Too long/detailed (e.g. "Too many slides")
- Too shallow (e.g. "It was a bit too simplistic")
- Not actionable (e.g. "I think the team needs to understand that if they have shared a data point - they need to answer the SO WHAT")

Things that tended to reduce the evaluation of the report tend to be failings, rather than the absence of something special.

The two key themes that emerged from the open-ended comments about what made a good report good were Actionable and Clear.

Looking more broadly, including reports that were less good, themes that were highlighted as good, in addition to Actionable and Clear were:
- Analysis (e.g. "Analysis that tied together the results with current events/trends.")
- Comprehensive (e.g. "Comprehensive and rigorous")
- Concise (e.g. "Concise, well-written, attractively presented, easy to absorb.")
- Met the brief (e.g. "Answered all the major questions well.")

How to create an Excellent report?

The data in this study suggest that there is a three-step process to create an Excellent report.
1. Get the hygiene factors right, for example, no errors, on time, with a balance of text, length, visuals etc that match the specific client's needs/preferences.
2. Meet the brief, this often means finding the right sort of analysis and extracting the insights.

3. Produce something that is clear and actionable – this third step, going beyond meeting the brief, is what delivers and excellent result.

What is a report?

Several of the participants in the study queried what exactly is meant by the term report? It is clear that some people included a PowerPoint presentation (especially if the slides were left behind) whilst others reserved the word for a more formal document, perhaps one produced in Word. In the future, it might make more sense to clarify the aim of the research further, perhaps focusing on the debrief, the deliverable, or both but separately?

Data

8 July to 20 August 2021. 526 interviews.

Q2

When was the last time you were involved in creating or receiving a report relating to a major market research project?

Q2 Last Involved in Creating or Receiving MR Report		Year		
		Total	2019	2021
Total	Base	1031	505	526
This month	%	62%	66%	59%
Last month	%	14%	13%	15%
2 to 4 months ago	%	8%	8%	8%
5 to 6 months ago	%	3%	3%	4%
7 to 12 months ago	%	4%	4%	5%
Longer	%	6%	5%	7%
Never	%	2%	2%	3%

Q3

Were you involved in creating that report or receiving it?

Q3 Creating or Receiving		Year		
		Total (analysis)	2019	2021
Total (analysis)	Base	1008	497	511
Creating	%	74%	77%	71%
Receiving	%	23%	20%	25%
Other (please specify)	%	4%	3%	4%

There were 20 open-ended comments in 2021. The main other roles described in the open-ended comments were: supervising, reviewing, and people who contributed to the report as well as receiving it.

How would you describe the quality of that report?

Q4 Quality of Report		Creating			Receiving		
		Total	2019	2021	Total	2019	2021
	AVG	4.73	4.65	4.81	3.82	3.68	3.93
Total	Base	743	382	361	228	98	130
Very Poor	%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Poor	%	1%	2%	0%	7%	9%	6%
Fair	%	7%	7%	6%	27%	29%	26%
Good	%	24%	26%	23%	32%	38%	28%
Very Good	%	47%	48%	46%	23%	17%	28%
Excellent	%	20%	16%	23%	7%	4%	8%
Not Sure	%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%
VG + E	%	67%	64%	69%	30%	21%	36%
G+VG+E	%	91%	90%	92%	62%	59%	64%

In what ways (if any) was the report poor?
When there was something that could be improved, it often related to the basics. For example:
- Errors (e.g. "Mistakes with numbers")
- Lack of insights (e.g. "It was fact based without highlighting insights")
- Not engaging - narrative (e.g. "No narrative and no story telling.")
- Not engaging – visuals (e.g. "Could have had more visuals")
- Too long/detailed (e.g. "Too many slides")
- Too shallow (e.g. "It was a bit too simplistic")
- Not actionable (e.g. "I think the team needs to understand that if they have shared a data point - they need to answer the SO WHAT")

Things that tended to reduce the evaluation of the report tend to be failings, rather than the absence of something special.

In what ways (if any) was the report good/excellent?
The two key themes that emerged from the open-ended comments about what made a good report good were Actionable and Clear.

Looking more broadly, including reports that were less good, themes that were highlighted as good, in addition to Actionable and Clear were:
- Analysis (e.g. "Analysis that tied together the results with current events/trends.")
- Comprehensive (e.g. "Comprehensive and rigorous")
- Concise (e.g. "Concise, well-written, attractively presented, easy to absorb.")
- Met the brief (e.g. "Answered all the major questions well.")

Q9
Which of the following do you think are most important for an 'Excellent' report - please pick up to three.

Q9 Most Important For an 'Excellent' Report		Creating			Receiving		
		Total	2019	2021	Total	2019	2021
Total	123	743	382	361	228	98	130
Insightful	%	90%	91%	89%	92%	93%	91%
Concise	%	53%	55%	52%	50%	52%	48%
Practical	%	53%	52%	53%	48%	50%	47%
Objective	%	38%	37%	38%	34%	37%	32%
Rigorous	%	20%	20%	20%	27%	24%	29%
Detailed	%	11%	11%	12%	13%	13%	13%
Other (please specify)	%	12%	11%	13%	9%	6%	11%

The open-ended responses from the people who receive reports focused on business focus, e.g. "Clearly answers the questions the stakeholders want answers to" & "With clear actions". A few of the receivers mentioned fast, visual was mentioned a couple of times.

Among the people who create reports, business focus was a common response, but so was visual, engaging and storytelling, for example "Good looking", "We need to understand how to engage our clients" & "It tells a clear story".

Q7
Compared with two years ago, do you think that generally the quality of market research reports now is ...

Quality of MR Reports Now vs Two Years Ago		Creating			Receiving		
		Total	2019	2021	Total	2019	2021
Total	Base	743	382	361	228	98	130
Much worse	%	1%	2%	1%	3%	1%	4%
Worse	%	9%	9%	9%	11%	8%	14%
About the same	%	45%	45%	45%	50%	52%	48%
Better	%	37%	37%	37%	30%	37%	25%
Much better	%	8%	8%	8%	5%	2%	7%
Net Better	%	45%	45%	45%	35%	39%	32%
Net Worse	%	10%	11%	10%	14%	9%	18%
Better-Worse	%	35%	34%	35%	21%	30%	14%

Great, many thanks, now we'd like to ask a few, quick descriptive answers to help us interpret the information. Which region best describes where you are normally based?

Quality Of Report		Africa	Asia	Europe	Middle East	North America	Oceania	South and Central America
	AVG	4.82	4.44	4.39	4.51	4.57	4.66	4.41
Total (analysis)	123	55	193	304	65	222	108	58
Very Poor	%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%
Poor	%	2%	4%	3%	0%	1%	3%	3%
Fair	%	7%	12%	14%	15%	9%	9%	14%
Good	%	20%	27%	29%	28%	26%	26%	22%
Very Good	%	49%	40%	38%	38%	44%	38%	50%
Excellent	%	22%	15%	14%	17%	17%	23%	9%
Not Sure	%	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%

Most Important For An 'excellent' Report		Africa	Asia	Europe	Middle East	North America	Oceania	South and Central America
Total (analysis)	123	56	198	312	66	224	109	59
Concise	%	45%	57%	54%	42%	53%	52%	37%
Detailed	%	27%	13%	8%	17%	12%	9%	12%
Insightful	%	91%	89%	89%	92%	91%	88%	88%
Objective	%	61%	37%	38%	42%	31%	33%	47%
Practical	%	43%	56%	52%	55%	50%	59%	39%
Rigorous	%	20%	14%	24%	18%	21%	23%	39%
Other (please specify)	%	2%	6%	12%	5%	19%	15%	10%

Better or Worse Now vs Two Years Ago		Africa	Asia	Europe	Middle East	North America	Oceania	South and Central America
Total (analysis)	123	56	200	307	66	222	109	59
Worse	%	12%	18%	6%	8%	11%	12%	19%
About the same	%	14%	38%	53%	42%	50%	59%	46%
Better	%	73%	44%	42%	50%	38%	29%	36%

Q11

Which of the following best describes you or your organisation?

Quality Of Report		Buyer/user of research	Provider/vendor of research	Supplier or services to the research industry
	AVG	4.01	4.74	4.47
Total (analysis)		258	545	156
Very Poor	%	2%	0%	1%
Poor	%	7%	1%	2%
Fair	%	24%	8%	8%
Good	%	31%	23%	28%
Very Good	%	26%	48%	44%
Excellent	%	10%	19%	15%
Not Sure	%	1%	1%	3%

Most Important For An 'excellent' Report				
		Buyer/user of research	Provider/vendor of research	Supplier or services to the research industry
Total (analysis)		260	551	164
Concise	%	50%	56%	43%
Detailed	%	13%	8%	20%
Insightful	%	89%	91%	88%
Objective	%	36%	38%	40%
Practical	%	53%	53%	51%
Rigorous	%	25%	21%	18%
Other (please specify)	%	12%	11%	11%

Better or Worse Now vs Two Years Ago				
		Buyer/user of research	Provider/vendor of research	Supplier or services to the research industry
Total (analysis)		257	550	163
Worse	%	16%	10%	9%
About the same	%	51%	45%	40%
Better	%	33%	45%	52%

Which best describes your role?
(Base = those who are clients)

Quality Of Report		Total	End user of research	Manage research within organization
	AVG	4.01	3.87	4.06
Total (analysis)	123	246	67	179
Very Poor	%	2%	0%	2%
Poor	%	7%	10%	6%
Fair	%	23%	27%	22%
Good	%	33%	34%	32%
Very Good	%	26%	22%	28%
Excellent	%	9%	6%	10%
Not Sure	%	0%	0%	1%
Most Important For An 'excellent' Report				
	AVG	Total	End user of research	Manage research within organization
Total (analysis)	123	249	68	181
Concise	%	50%	44%	52%
Detailed	%	13%	21%	10%
Insightful	%	89%	87%	90%
Objective	%	36%	40%	35%
Practical	%	54%	49%	56%
Rigorous	%	25%	25%	25%
Other (please specify)	%	11%	7%	12%
Better or Worse Now vs Two Years Ago				
	AVG	Total	End user of research	Manage research within organization
Total (analysis)	123	245	67	178
Worse	%	17%	21%	15%
About the same	%	51%	46%	52%
Better	%	33%	33%	33%

Q13

Years of research experience?

Quality Of Report		1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20 years
	AVG	4.40	4.32	4.35	4.44	4.62
Total (analysis)	123	25	62	162	330	422
Very Poor	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Poor	%	4%	3%	2%	4%	2%
Fair	%	20%	15%	13%	12%	11%
Good	%	20%	24%	35%	28%	23%
Very Good	%	44%	44%	41%	40%	42%
Excellent	%	12%	11%	8%	15%	21%
Not Sure	%	0%	3%	1%	1%	1%
Most Important For An 'excellent' Report						
	AVG	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20 years
Total (analysis)	123	25	63	166	338	426
Concise	%	36%	49%	51%	51%	55%
Detailed	%	32%	22%	16%	9%	8%
Insightful	%	84%	89%	89%	90%	91%
Objective	%	40%	43%	36%	38%	38%
Practical	%	64%	43%	59%	54%	48%
Rigorous	%	8%	22%	20%	22%	23%
Other (please specify)	%	12%	2%	7%	10%	16%
Better or Worse Now vs Two Years Ago						
	AVG	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20 years
Total (analysis)	123	25	64	165	336	423
Worse	%	8%	8%	7%	12%	13%
About the same	%	40%	42%	45%	45%	50%
Better	%	52%	50%	48%	43%	36%

All NewMR questionnaires finish with an open-ended question asking whether there is anything else people would like to say about this topic and/or about the questionnaire. Key themes that emerged from the 190 comments were:

- The need to match a report to a situation, including matching it to the audience. Recognition that one size will not fit everybody.
- The ambiguity about what we mean by 'report'. What are the alternatives to reports?
- Some call for more use of dashboards (or other interactive approaches), but others highlight that dashboards/interactive systems shift the work to clients, some of whom lack the skills to extract answers from systems.
- There are some calls (from clients and suppliers) for clients and suppliers to co-produce reports.
- There are about equal numbers who praise storytelling and those who say it is getting in the way, similarly for infographics and other visuals – plenty in favour, but also plenty against relying on it.
- The demand for speed/automation and maybe AI is potentially in conflict with giving each client what they specifically need from each project.
- Our survey was praised by some, criticised by others.

Questionnaire

This short survey looks into the QUALITY OF MARKET RESEARCH REPORTS and will be reported by Mike Sherman and Da Stanley in an upcoming NewMR webinar (16 September) and report. The study does not collect any personally identifiable data ar being implemented by Ray Poynter, NewMR and The Future Place. The data is being collected using the QuestionPro platform, th your data will be stored internationally, do not continue if you do not consent to this. If you have any queries about this study pleas contact ray.poynter@thefutureplace.com. Visit NewMR.org to find out more about The Future Place, NewMR and our privacy policy. Please press NEXT to start the survey.

Q2

When was the last time you were involved in creating or receiving a report relating to a major market research project?
1. 1. This month
2. 2. Last month
3. 3. 2 to 4 months ago
4. 4. 5 to 6 months ago
5. 5. 7 to 12 months ago
6. 6. Longer
7. 7. Never

Q3

Were you involved in creating that report or receiving it?
1. 1. Creating
2. 2. Receiving
3. 3. Other (please specify) _____

Q4

How would you describe the quality of that report?
1. 1. Very Poor
2. 2. Poor
3. 3. Fair
4. 4. Good
5. 5. Very Good
6. 6. Excellent
7. 7. Not Sure

Q5

In what ways (if any) was the report poor? Please type you answer in the box.

Q6

In what ways (if any) was the report good/excellent? Please type your answer in the box.

Q9

Which of the following do you think are most important for an 'Excellent' report - please pick up to three.
1. 1.　　　Concise
2. 2.　　　Detailed
3. 3.　　　Insightful
4. 4.　　　Objective
5. 5.　　　Practical
6. 6.　　　Rigorous
7. 7.　　　Other (please specify 1 or more Others) _____

Q7

Compared with two years ago, do you think that generally the quality of market research reports now is ...
1. 1.　　　Much worse
2. 2.　　　Worse
3. 3.　　　About the same
4. 4.　　　Better
5. 5.　　　Much better

Q10

Great, many thanks, now we'd like to ask a few, quick descriptive answers to help us interpret the information.Which region best d
where you are normally based?
1. 1.　　　Africa
2. 2.　　　Asia
3. 3.　　　Europe
4. 4.　　　Middle East
5. 5.　　　North America
6. 6.　　　Oceania (e.g Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia & Fiji)
7. 7.　　　South and Central America
8. 8.　　　Other (please specify) _____

Q11

Which of the following best describes you or your organisation?
1. 1.　　　Buyer/user of research
2. 2.　　　Provider/vendor of research
3. 3.　　　Supplier or services to the the research industry
4. 4.　　　Academic
5. 5.　　　Other _____

Q12

Which best describes your role?
1. 1.　　　I am the end user of the research
2. 2.　　　I manage research within the organization

Q13

Years of research experience?
1. 1.　　　Less than 1 year
2. 2.　　　1 to 2 years

3. 3.   3 to 5 years
4. 4.   6 to 10 years
5. 5.   11 to 20 years
6. 6.   More than 20 years

Q14
Finally, is there anything else you would like to add about market research reports or this survey?