

#NewMR

How is AI going to impact market research and insights over the next ten years?

Ray Poynter, February 2023

Introduction

This brief report looks at how much impact research and insight professionals expect AI and Automation to have on their working practices over the next ten years. The report is an update of a study NewMR conducted in 2021.

The three topline findings are:

1. People expect AI / Automation to have a big impact on quantitative research and the coding of open-ended responses, and a smaller, but still substantial, impact on qualitative research.
2. People can see the speed, cost and efficiency benefits, but many of them worry that quality could suffer, especially if the human element is lost.
3. The views expressed in 2021 are remarkably similar to those reported in 2023.

My opinion is that we are closer to large-scale AI automation now than we were two years ago. I think the assumption that the coding of open-ended responses and quant analysis will move faster than, say, focus group moderation is correct. However, I disagree with the majority about project design and project reporting – I think these will be significantly automated soon – especially in the area of DIY research.

Caveats and Context

Please keep in mind that the fieldwork for this report was conducted with people who are associated with NewMR (e.g. they subscribe to our newsletter, follow us on social media, attend our webinars etc). The sample is not representative of the industry.

The second key context is that the fieldwork was conducted between January 8 and 28, 2023. During these 20 days, there was substantial interest in the recent launch of ChatGPT, which could have had some impact on the data.

The sample base was 240 people in 2023 and 181 in 2021. Check out the sample profile in the Treasure Chest at the end of the report.

Which One Word Describes the Impact of AI and Automation?

We asked the participants “Which one word best describes what you think about the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the business of insights and research?”. Their answers were summarized using [Word Cloud Plus](https://wordcloudplus.com) and you can see the results below.



The words highlighted in green suggest that quite a few of the participants see AI as being a ‘good thing’. In contrast, the more negative ‘hype’ and ‘minimal’ were mentioned by far fewer people. Beyond the positive/efficiency message there are a large number of people talking about disruptive, transformative, massive game-changing impacts.

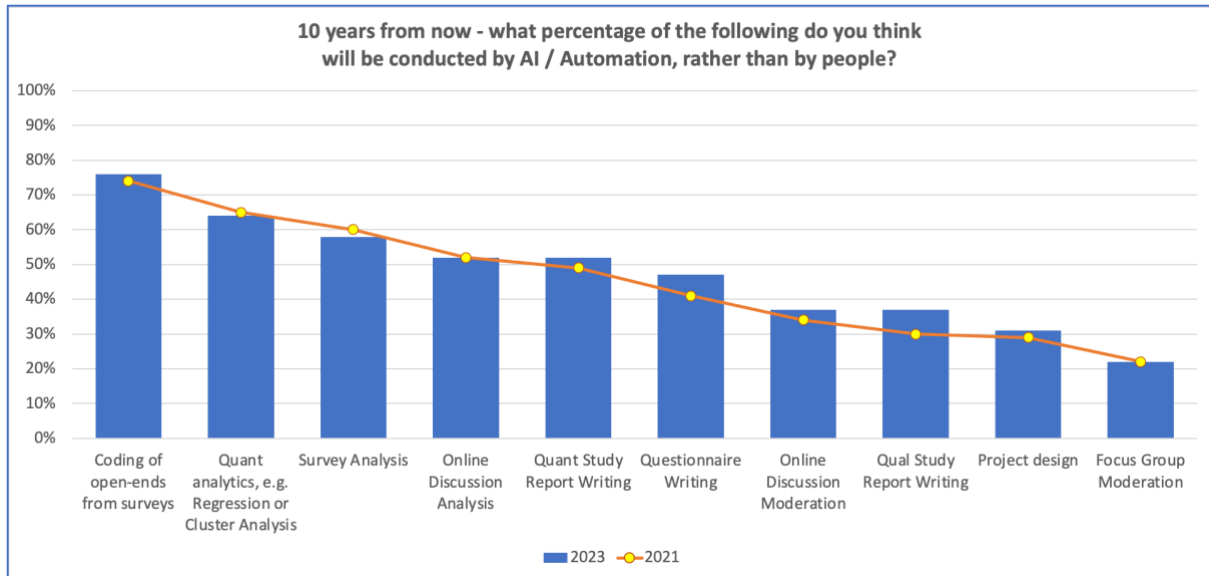
The clear message from this exercise is that people are expecting AI to be a big issue for research and insights, changing and disrupting many currently practices.

What will the impact of AI and Automation be in ten years?

We asked our participants to answer the following question “10 years from now - what percentage of the following do you think will be conducted by AI / Automation, rather than by people?”

We included eight types of activities and the results for 2023 and 2021 are shown below. For each of the eight activities the participants picked one of the following options ‘0% AI / Automated’, 25%, 50%, 75%, ‘100% AI / Automated’.

Note, the numbers behind the chart are shown in a table in the Treasure Chest at the end of this report.



The orange line, showing the 2021 data, is very similar to the 2023 data. The data suggest that views have changed very little over the last two years. Interestingly, this indicates that AI / automation is not seen as being any closer today than it was two years ago, the horizon is just as far away.

The coding of open-ends is an area where people have been promoting the use of AI and automation for some time and it is the clear leader, with our participants forecasting that about three-quarters of coding will be automated in ten years.

For me the big surprise in this list is the score for Project Design. The participants forecast that in ten years about one-third of project design will be automated. My feeling is that this will be much higher – I think most DIY projects will have automated designs, and many bespoke, full-service projects will also be designed by AI.

As well as the overall scores, it is interesting to look at the breakdown of some of the data. For example, on average people forecast that 22% of focus group moderation would be handled by AI automation. This score comprised 40% of people saying 0% would be delivered by AI Automation, and a single person saying it would be 100% delivered by AI Automation.

In contrast, 32% said that 100% of coding would be done by AI automation, and just 1% said that the share for AI automation in coding would be 0%.

Tell us a bit more about AI and Automation

We asked the participants “What else would you like to tell us about AI or Automation?”

We used Word Cloud Plus to kickstart the analysis of the answers (see the word cloud below), but the interpretation of the data required quite a bit of linking back to the underlying text.

These open-ended comments produced a more nuanced response. People could see the potential for AI automation to tackle repetitive jobs, or the ‘grunt work’ as some people called it. However, participants expressed several concerns.

- Would the quality be worse?

- Would it encourage fraud?
- Will we still need human input and if so, would we still have human input?
- Would the impact on the research industry be negative, for example if researchers were bypassed?

The overall feeling was that AI and automation were going to have a big impact on the research industry, but it might not be a desirable impact in terms of quality.



Word Cloud generated by [Word Cloud Plus](https://wordcloudplus.com)

So What?

The people we surveyed seem pretty sure that AI and automation are going to have a big impact over the next ten years. People are mostly agreed that it will make many things faster, but there is widespread concern that quality could decline if the role of humans in the process is not respected.

My own feeling is that, in general, the quality of typical AI and automation will be higher than 50% of projects currently being handled by people. However, I suspect that AI and automation will make some bad mistakes.

I will be looking to be an early adopter of the next wave of AI automation, but I will certainly be looking under the hood to see whether it is producing good stuff!

Treasure Chest

In this section, you will find several resources that may be of interest to you, but which did not make the cut to be in the main story. Some people call this section the Appendix, but I prefer Treasure Chest.

Why Combine AI and Automation?

We were asked why we grouped AI and automation together. Clearly, there are differences between what people mean by AI and automation. One can have automation without AI (think about a coffee vending machine for example). We can also have AI without automation, for example, if a chess-playing machine is built for a specific competition (such as when IBM's Deep Blue beat Gary Kasparov in 1996). However, over the next ten years, the key changes to people's research lives will come from tasks that are automated, and in most major automation over the next ten years there will be some AI at or near the centre of it.

Key Data Tables

Here are the numbers that underpin the commentary and charts in this report.

10 years from now - what percentage of the following do you think will be conducted by AI / Automation, rather than by people?		
Activity	2023	2021
Coding of open-ends from surveys	76%	74%
Quant analytics, e.g. Regression or Cluster Analysis	64%	65%
Survey Analysis	58%	60%
Online Discussion Analysis	52%	52%
Quant Study Report Writing	52%	49%
Questionnaire Writing	47%	41%
Online Discussion Moderation	37%	34%
Qual Study Report Writing	37%	30%
Project design	31%	29%
Focus Group Moderation	22%	22%
Base	240	181

Which region best describes where you are currently based?		
Response	2023	2021
Africa & Middle East	3%	2%
Asia Pacific	19%	19%
Europe	40%	38%
Latin America	2%	1%
USA & Canada	36%	40%
Other	0%	1%
Base	240	181

Which if the following best describes your relationship to research and insights?	
Response	2023
Research Buyer / User	11%
Research or Consultancy Supplier	73%
Supplier to the Research Industry (eg software or fieldwork)	10%
Academic	3%
Other	3%
Base	240

How would you rate this survey?	
Responses	%
Very Unsatisfied	0%
Unsatisfied	3%
Neutral	22%
Satisfied	53%
Very Satisfied	22%
Base	237%

We asked people why they rated the survey the way they did. Those rating it the highest made comments such as “Short & thought provoking”, “Short sweet and to the point”, and “Easy and relevant”. Those giving it low marks said things like “You could have used a survey tool which incorporates AI (eg AI probing of open ends)” and “AI will effect far more than research”.

Word Clouds and Word Cloud Plus

Word clouds are a convenient way to jumpstart the analysis of text. Word Cloud Plus is a free application that has been developed by Ray and Will Poynter. You can find out more about it by [clicking here](#).

Questionnaire

The survey was conducted via QuestionPro, who are a sponsor of NewMR. Here is the questionnaire that was used in 2023. This questionnaire is broadly similar to the previous wave.

Hi, this is a short questionnaire to explore how substantially people think AI is going to impact market research over the next ten years. We will share the results via the NewMR.org website, social media, and our newsletter. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. The study is being conducted using QuestionPro's strict anonymity setting, we will not know who you are. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Ray Poynter & NewMR by email at ray@new-mr.com

Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start the survey now by clicking on the Start button below.

Which if the following best describes your relationship to research and insights?

1. Research Buyer / User
2. Research or Consultancy Supplier

3. Supplier to the Research Industry (eg software or fieldwork)
4. Academic
5. Other (please type) _____

Which region best describes where you are currently based?

1. Africa & Middle East
2. Asia Pacific
3. Europe
4. Latin America
5. USA & Canada
6. Other _____

Which one word best describes what you think about the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the business of insights and research?

10 years from now - what percentage of the following do you think will be conducted by AI & Automation, rather than by people?

	0% AI/ Automated	25%	50%	75%	100% AI/ Automated
Online Discussion Moderation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Online Discussion Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire Writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quant Study Report Writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus Group Moderation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Project design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coding of open-ends from surveys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Qual Study Report Writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quant analytics, e.g. Regression or Cluster Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What else would you like to tell us about AI or Automation? Note, we will be sharing the comments in the report, so please do not identify yourself or use words that might cause offence to other readers.

How would you rate this survey?

1. Very Unsatisfied
2. Unsatisfied
3. Neutral
4. Satisfied
5. Very Satisfied

Please tell us why you picked that rating



Many thanks for helping, the results will be presented via NewMR.org, social media, and our newsletter. Please click Done, and you will then be taken to the NewMR.org Home Page.