#NewMR

The State of Insights
June 2023

NewMR Report
Ray Poynter, July 2023

Contents

Introduction

The top line from this study is that the people we spoke to were generally, but not universally, optimistic. Most people expect AI to be beneficial to insights, but there are some reservations. The key test will be to see how these values change over time.

Another point is that, on balance, clients seem to be recognising the need for research and the research industry is doing a good job of adapting to changes.

This is the first report in what is intended to be an ongoing series of reports looking at the state of the insights industry. The main caution that needs to be shared relates to the data. This study is based on 270 people who are connected to NewMR and me, Ray Poynter. It is not a random cross-section of the insights industry. It is a piece of the total picture, but it is not the total picture.

The study looks at two elements of insights, the first is optimism and what is going well and what is going less well, and the second is the direction of travel in terms of what are the things that people are expecting to use less of and more of over the next 18 months.

Optimism

Optimism was asked using a 5-point smiley scale, ranging from Very Pessimistic through to Very Optimistic.

**How optimistic are you about the state of insights and research?**

Options	%
Very Pessimistic	2%
Pessimistic	9%
Neutral	28%
Optimistic	51%
Very Optimistic	11%
Base	*270*
Total Pessimistic	10%
Total Optimistic	61%
Net Optimism	*51%*

How optimistic are you about the state of insights and research?
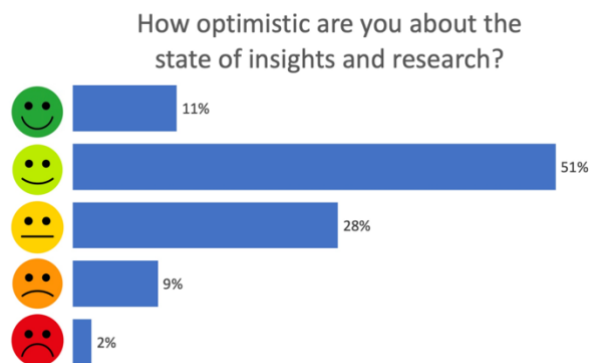
The Table and chart above show that two-thirds of the participants in the study were optimistic, but 10% were pessimistic. The net position is +51% for optimism. It will be interesting to see whether this number changes in a few months when this study is repeated.

Net Optimism	Research Buyer / User	USA & Canada	Supplier to the Research Industry	Total	Asia Pacific	Europe	Research or Consultancy Supplier
Base	*36*	*83*	*43*	*270*	*51*	*117*	*178*
Total Pessimistic	6%	10%	7%	10%	10%	9%	13%
Total Optimistic	64%	66%	60%	61%	61%	58%	58%
Net Optimism	**58%**	**57%**	**53%**	**51%**	**51%**	**49%**	**46%**

With these sample sizes and this sample frame, I am happy to note that the level of optimism amongst Research Buyers and people in North America is higher than the level of optimism amongst Research Agencies. However, I am going to wait until the next wave before forming an opinion about whether this is signal or noise.
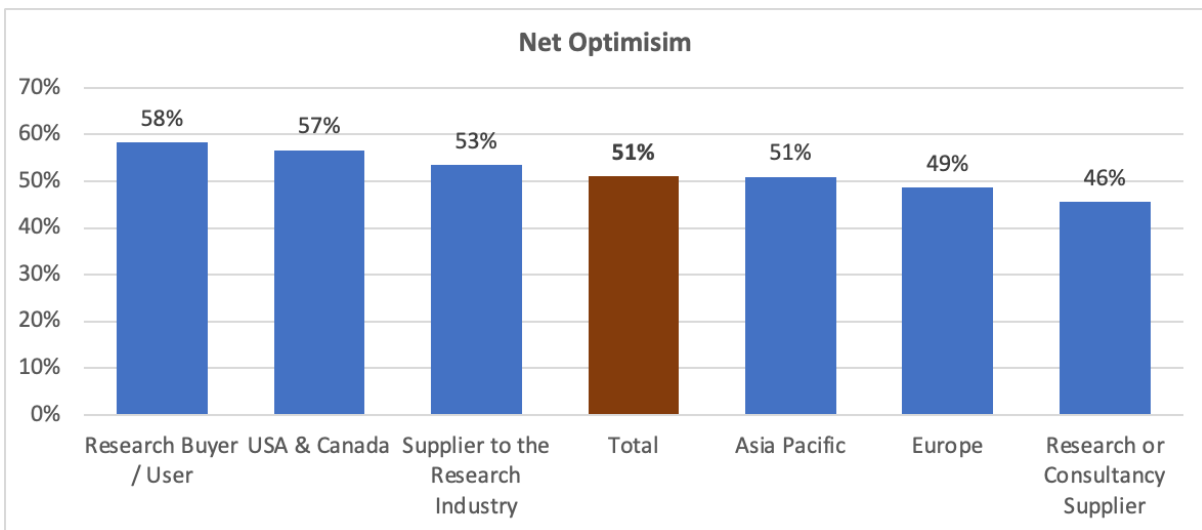
The most positive things in 2023

We asked the participants to say "What are the most positive things about the insights and research world in 2023?" in their own words. This generated, broadly three themes, ranked in descending order of mentions.

1. **The Adoption of Innovation, Technology, and especially AI.** For example, "*The introduction and growth of AI and AI applications has enabled agencies to work faster, better and more accurately, and far more economically.*" And "*The development and wide availability of ChatGPT and other AI opportunities*"

2. **Recognition of the Value of Insights.** For example, "*The world keeps spinning. Leaders need intelligence they can trust to navigate an ever-changing landscape, and they turn to insights for that.*" and "*More people seem to understand that WHAT people do is one thing, but understanding WHY they do it is something else (as is HOW these activities can be influenced).*"

3. **The ability of the insights industry to adapt to change.** For example, "More sharing of methods and study execution experiences through professional forums online." and "Research seems to be ahead of the game in adjusting with and accepting wfh - which may help with some of the talent-attraction issues in the sector."

The word cloud below, produced by [Word Cloud Plus](#), shows a similar picture, with AI and technology leading the way and the changing world is a key feature of the responses.

The most negative or worrying things in 2023

We asked the participants to say, "What are the most negative or worrying things about the world of insights and research in 2023?"

The main worry that was mentioned related to concerns about the impact of AI on the industry. For example, "*AI taking over our jobs*" and "*Misuse of generative AI tools by people who don't understand research*".

There were three other themes relating to worries and concerns about what is happening in the world of insights, for example:

- Budget cuts and lack of spending on research, e.g.
  "The immediate worry is the pull back on spend I'm seeing among my clients (mostly tech brands). This is going to be a challenging year."
- The decline in the quality of data and sample sources, e.g.
  "Poor data quality, lack of survey respondents, fraud, bots, lack of engagement, and perhaps lack of representativeness of our sample universe"
- The rise in DIY tools, e.g.
  "I am concerned that the ready availability of DIY tools means non-researchers are doing their own surveys, resulting in a degradation of quality, which may cost us our seat at the table."

These themes are highlighted in the word cloud shown below.
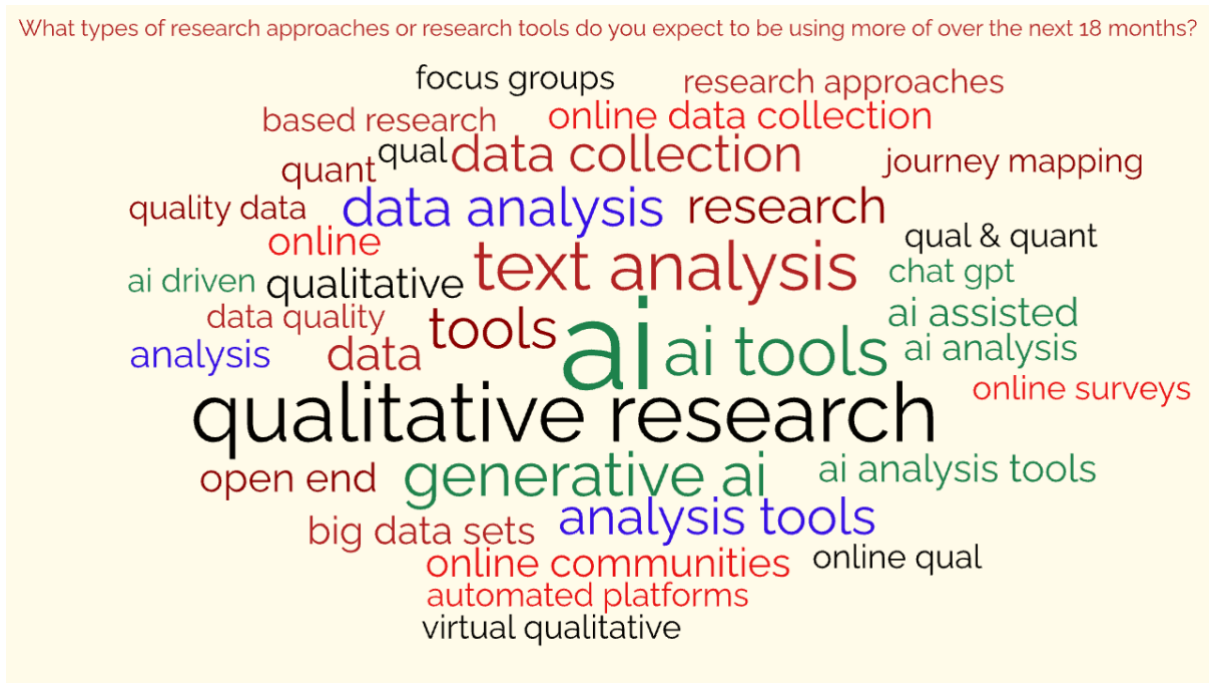

What is going to be used more?

To get a sense of which aspects of research are going to be used more and those that are going to be used less in the near future, we asked the participants to describe their expectations via open-ended questions. To investigate where the increases would be, we asked: "What types of research approaches or research tools do you expect to be using more of over the next 18 months?"

The main approach that people mentioned was using more AI, for example, "Conversational AI, tools built on LLMs for design and analysis" and "AI Connecting further the dots between data (data democracy)".

Other major themes mentioned were:
- Qualitative research, along with more qual quant research, e.g. "Qualitative research to contextualise the amount of data we will collect automatically"
- Online and digital research tools, e.g. "Mostly online/ digital mode for all kinds of qual quant studies"
- More analysis, e.g. "Online analytics, data visualisation tools like Tableau"

The word cloud below highlights what is being used more.

What types of research approaches or research tools do you expect to be using more of over the next 18 months?

What is going to be used less?

We asked the participants, "What types of research approaches or research tools do you expect to be using less of in the near future?" Many of them said there was nothing they were expecting to use less of over the next 18 months.

There are two categories of things that people expect to be using less.

1. In-person or face-to-face research, especially F2F qualitative research, e.g. "Less in-person focus groups are likely as they are replaced by virtual groups or IDIs."
2. The second group encompasses a wide range of traditional research, e.g. "Agency-led brand tracking - most enterprise insight teams can do it themselves."

What types of research approaches or research tools do you expect to be using less of in the near future?
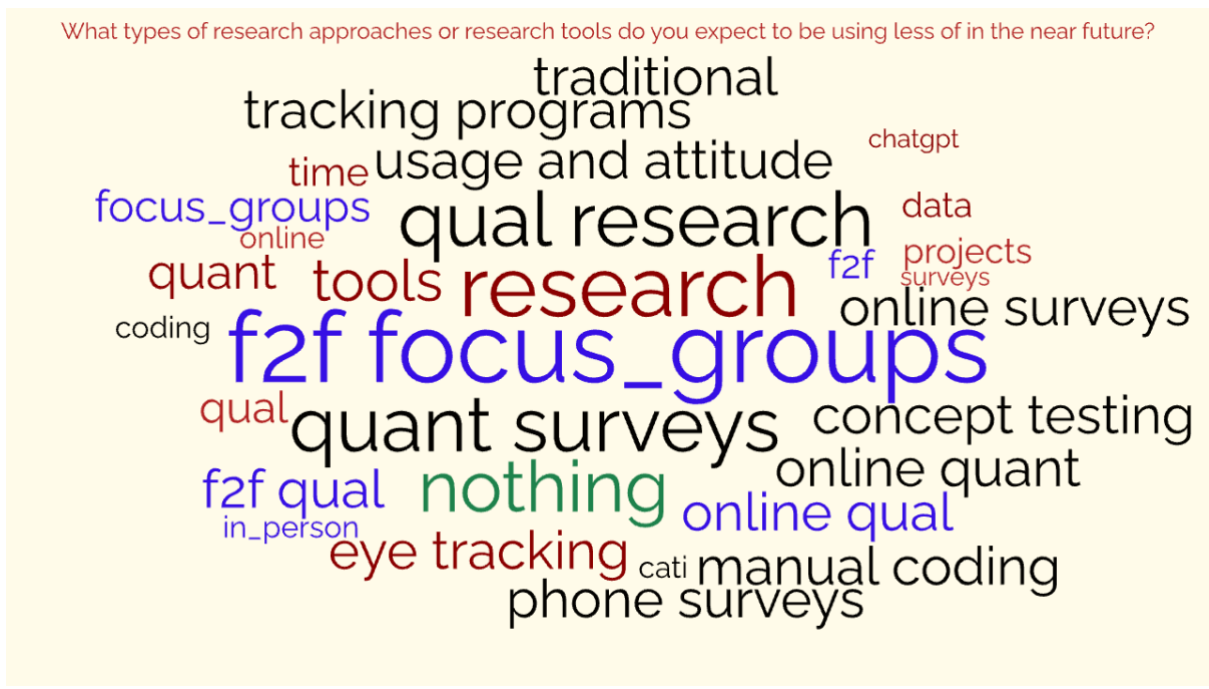
What else did people say?

In every NewMR study, we finish by asking people whether there is anything else they would like to say about this topic or, indeed, this study.

The majority of participants did not leave an additional comment. Amongst those who left an on-topic comment, themes included:

- Concerns about the impact of AI on insights.
- The need for stronger collaboration and innovation in the industry.
- The importance of maintaining data quality standards.
- Uncertainty about the challenges the industry is facing, including financial challenges.
- Optimism about the industry and its ability to adapt.
- A desire for more sharing of information and case studies.

So What?

The main message from this study is that the insight professionals we spoke to tend to be optimistic about the state of insights. When we collect the next wave of data later in the year, we will get a better indication of the way things are going. However, it is also important to note that 10% of our participants described themselves as pessimistic about the state of insights.

Our participants mostly see AI as a positive thing, with some reservations. People expect it to make things faster, to enable the use of more qualitative information, and to improve analysis. The main reservations relate to sub-standard research being enabled by AI, implemented by non-researchers.

The other sentiment that merits highlighting is the underlying unease about the state of the economy and, therefore, the insights ecosystem. However, participants in this study felt, on balance, that organisations tended to recognise the need for research and that insight professionals were adapting to changes well.

Appendix

The appendix includes the questionnaire, a hole count of the data, information about the author, NewMR & The Future Place, and information about Word Cloud Plus.

The Use of AI in Creating This Report

ChatGPT 4 was used to aid the analysis of the open-ended responses, as was Word Cloud Plus. Grammarly was used to aid the proofreading, as was the Mac dictation of text (I spot errors better when I hear them, as opposed to read them.)

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was fielded via the QuestionPro platform (many thanks to them for providing it). The study was conducted using QuestionPro's maximum anonymity setting, which means that passive data such as IP address were not collected. Below is a copy of the questionnaire, which comprised three closed questions and five open-ended questions.

The State of Insights and Research in June 2023

Hi, this is a short questionnaire to explore the state of insights in June 2023. The results will be shared via NewMR's website, newsletter and social media channels.

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 of 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.   Prefer not to say
6.   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.   Prefer not to say
7.   Other _____

How optimistic are you about the state of insights and research?
[Asked via five smileys]
1.   Very Pessimistic
2.   Pessimistic
3.   Neutral
4.   Optimistic
5.   Very Optimistic

What are the most positive things about the insights and research world in 2023?
[Open-ended question]

What are the most negative or worrying things about the world of insights and research in 2023?
[Open-ended question]

What types of research approaches or research tools do you expect to be using more of over the next 18 months?
[Open-ended question]

What types of research approaches or research tools do you expect to be using less of in the near future?
[Open-ended question]

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this topic or this survey?
[Open-ended question]

Many thanks for helping, the results will be presented via a NewMR Webinar, NewMR.org, social media, and our newsletter.
Please click Done to ensure your answers are submitted.

Hole Count
A hole count refers to a summary of all the totals from a project. In olden times, the data were stored as a series of holes on punch cards. To get all the totals from a project, the card counter simply counted all the holes.

In this study, there are only three closed questions, and here are their totals.

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

Options	Count	%
Research or Consultancy Supplier	178	66%
Supplier to the Research Industry (eg software or fieldwork)	43	16%
Research Buyer / User	36	13%
Academic	3	1%
Other (please type)	9	3%
Prefer not to say	1	0%
Total	*270*	*100%*

Which region best describes where you are currently based?

Options	Count	%
Europe	117	43%
USA & Canada	83	31%
Asia Pacific	51	19%
Africa & Middle East	9	3%
Latin America	8	3%
Other	2	1%
Total	*270*	*100%*

How optimistic are you about the state of insights and research

Options	Count	%
Very Pessimistic	5	2%
Pessimistic	23	9%
Neutral	76	28%
Optimistic	137	51%
Very Optimistic	29	11%
Total	*270*	*100%*

Ray Poynter, NewMR & The Future Place

The author of this report is Ray Poynter, the founder of NewMR and the Managing Director of The Future Place.

Word Cloud Plus

The word clouds in this report were created by Word Cloud Plus, a system that has been created by Ray and Will Poynter. You can try Word Cloud Plus for free by clicking here.