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Is truth the first victim of research automation?

As artificial intelligence gets smarter, automated market research and survey programs are becoming ubiquitous. But is truth the first victim of automation.

According to David Autor, an economist at MIT, this kind of automation is best applied to explicit, codifiable procedures where automation vastly exceeds human labour in speed, quality, accuracy and cost efficiency.

Tasks that have proved most difficult to automate, he adds, are those that demand flexibility, judgement and common sense.

Automated surveys are good at posing the questions and collecting, even organising the answers – that’s a rational, codifiable procedure.

But what about the analysis of oceans of data? That’s where the human traits of flexibility, judgement and common sense come into play.

Data scientists and analysts bring a higher level of abstraction than any computers can deliver. Human analysts can interpret human data in ways that no machine can. How? Because they’re human.

Additionally, while machine analysis efficiently aggregates and scores responses it cannot see the ‘story’ in the data. The narrative (what is it telling us?) is the at the heart of why we do research in the first place. And it almost always requires judgement, context and common sense to deliver the rich insights we need.

Only humans can innovate, and finding new ways of interpreting data requires imagination and innovation.

According to the Roy Morgan Research Institute, trust and truth are treasures in a world of disposable, phoney information.

“When the Australian Human Rights Commission commissioned a study on sexual assault and harassment in Australian universities, trust was a central plank of their process,” said Tania Sperti from the Roy Morgan Research Institute.

“The Human Rights Commission trusted our human driven processes and the students trusted us with their responses, including very sensitive accounts of often harrowing experiences.

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“And critically, the sensitive data analysis required human flexibility, judgement and common sense through the lens of reliable statistical practices” she said.

“To guarantee truth, a survey methodology expert externally validated the entire human process. The data in the Human Rights Commission Report showed that one in five students experienced sexual harassment in a university environment in 2016. An uncomfortable truth.”

Also this week, the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research released their [Statistical Report](#) from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. Roy Morgan has been trusted to manage the longitudinal data collection for HILDA since 2009 and interviews up to 10,000 households face to face per year across Australia. Data collected ranges from health, wealth, retirement planning and household composition.

“Again the Roy Morgan name is the trusted research brand to undertake this landmark study,” said Ms Sperti.

“Roy Morgan continues to be trusted to collaborate with clients to develop and collect this information. We see our role as bringing the important stories to all Australians.

“We take our involvement in all government and social projects very seriously, understanding that these significant projects can lead to great change for all Australians. We know the data must be collected in a statistically reliable and valid way. Roy Morgan always pursues the highest quality in methodology and research.

“Our data scientists use world class survey methodologies and the deep data in Roy Morgan’s proprietary database, Single Source™, to create stable, predictive analysis and deep insights for our clients.

“After 75 years, only Roy Morgan has the experience to recognise and reveal the human truths behind the rational data. Our client relationships reflect strong values, integrity and constant reinvention that have seen us thrive for more than 75 years,” she said

For more information about Roy Morgan Research’s government and social research, contact:

Tania Sperti, Head of Government and Social Research

Office: +61 (3) 9224 5160

Tania.Sperti@roymorgan.com

About Roy Morgan Research

Roy Morgan Research is the largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state of Australia, as well as in Indonesia, the United States and the United Kingdom. A full service research organisation specialising in omnibus and syndicated data, Roy Morgan Research has over 70 years' experience in collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

Margin of Error

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
5,000	±1.4	±1.2	±0.8	±0.6
7,500	±1.1	±1.0	±0.7	±0.5
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
20,000	±0.7	±0.6	±0.4	±0.3
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2