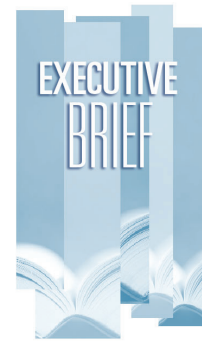


Surveying Among Gays and Lesbians

Harris Interactive's Techniques to Achieve Representative Data

Abstract

This brief outlines what marketers targeting the gay community should understand relative to the integrity of their market research data. Namely, what sources of error to recognize and account for when it comes to ensuring the representativeness of your data.



What is the Size of Gay Population in the United States?

There is no precise answer to this question. Demographers and market researchers today estimate a possible range between 4% and 9% of adults who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Our partners at Witeck•Combs Communications, experts in the gay marketplace, roughly estimate 6.8% of all adults self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT) based on the past seven years of sampling. In 2007, that would total approximately 15 million adults.

US Census data of same-sex unmarried partner households is another approach to understanding the population. However, this survey understandably undercounts the population by not including single gays and lesbians and also by not counting same-sex couples who do not happen to reside together. In 2005, the latest Census snapshot conservatively estimated over 1.5 million American adults living together as unmarried same-sex partners.

How Does Harris Interactive Ensure the Representativeness of Research Data Collected Among the US Gay and Lesbian Population?

Given that there is no definitive source today to accurately profile the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community, Harris Interactive takes several steps to ensure the

representativeness of the data collected among this hard-to-find population.

These steps include:

- Diverse Panel Recruitment
- Scientific Sampling
- Demographic Weighting and Propensity Score Weighting

For the past seven years we've conducted over a hundred studies that include GLBT populations. During this time we worked with Witeck•Combs Communications to refine our disciplined 4-step approach to apply to this target market. This approach differs from most research providers in that we seek to minimize the total error, not just sampling error.

Diverse Panel Recruitment

The regular, yet constant growth and replenishment efforts of our multimillion member online panel require recruitment from scores of offline and online sources. At any one time we have over 75 different campaigns to recruit a variety of diverse populations to our panel. When consumers join our panel we collect valuable demographic and psychographic information and, when possible, take care to evaluate this information against current US Census profiles. For example, if GLBT respondents are recruited exclusively from gay media sources, it's very unlikely that the data can be

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representative of the gay population at large as only a portion of the gay population subscribe to and consume such media.

We believe Harris Interactive today has the largest specialty panel of adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual (or who may identify as transgender, when asked their gender identity) than any other research organization. In 2007, our GLBT panel comprises over 45,000 individuals, and growing.

Scientific Sampling

Scientific sampling is among the best ways to ensure representativeness of a specific target market especially when conducting research via the Internet. To properly construct sample for all online studies, Harris Interactive uses non-personally identifiable information to construct targeted, representative sample sets. In alignment with our TRUSTe-approved privacy policy, we protect respondent privacy and anonymity. Ensured anonymity is an important aspect in getting complete information out of respondents when they might consider a particularly issue sensitive, as some might consider the issue of their sexual identity.

Demographic Weighting

When appropriate, we employ careful weighting techniques. These are similar to those used in almost every scientific survey whether conducted by mail, on telephone or online. Given the understandable difficulties in finding this not-always-visible population, our preferred research method is to conduct online surveys among a GLBT sample set, weighting the data so it is as representative of this population as possible. The data are weighted in several ways to achieve representativeness and to minimize possible flaws inherent with convenience samples and data collection mode.

The first way the data is weighted is to ensure that the sample matches the GLBT population at large with regard to age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, and household income characteristics. Again, although there is no definitive source as to the profile of the over-18 GLBT population, Harris Interactive has gathered significant information from over 100 surveys in order to intelligently profile this population. The GLBT population characteristics have been reasonably stable over time, giving us confidence that we know how to representatively profile this population.

Propensity Score Weighting

Every data collection mode has its inherent advantages and disadvantages. When making decisions regarding the GLBT population, we strongly advise clients to consider online data collection. After seven years of conducting parallel research

studies to understand the differences between telephone and online data collection, we find that GLBT research is more representative when there is no interviewer present. This results in greater honesty in both the self identification by those within the population and in the authenticity of their responses.

That being said, we also recognize there is an inherent bias in conducting surveys online as not all members of the population of interest are online. We believe so strongly in minimizing total error that we employ a second, proprietary type of weighting that is used to ensure the representativeness of the target population: propensity score weighting.

Propensity score matching is a statistical technique that tries to address the “selection bias” that the respondent is online, joins a panel, and completes a survey. Each respondent is given a propensity score calculated by estimating a probability of being in a given group given solely the characteristics of the individual in question. The characteristics used to estimate the propensity score include demographics, attitudes and behaviours.

A statistical property states that any two respondents with the same propensity score are very similar to each other. By using propensity scores to match respondents in an online survey to respondents from a probability sample in another mode, such as telephone, we further ensure representativeness beyond that offered by standard demographic weighting. The goal is find a respondent in the online sample to proxy for each respondent to the probability sample. If this is the case, then it is just a matter of putting the respondents into the right proportions within the online survey in order to adjust for the bias inherent in online surveys.

We have conducted many parallel surveys (i.e. using the same or equitable survey instrument for side-by-side telephone and online surveys). We make this investment in order to test and refine our propensity weighting approach with proven success in terms of how well we can ensure the representativeness of our data. This proprietary technique has enabled us to more accurately project the findings of a sample and report data that we trust is representative of the GLBT community within reasonable margins of error.

By utilizing both types of weighting in GLBT studies, our clients can be rest assured they gain a more accurate picture of the attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics of the gay population.

How Does Your 4-step Approach Differ From Other GLBT Research?

To our knowledge, we are the only research provider to apply such a holistic approach to our research from survey design to sampling through to weighting. We see it as our responsibility to provide clients with projectable data regarding any population of interest—GLBT included.

As important, we consistently are able to provide weighted samples of non-gay adults that provide clients with parallel data. For the first time, this allows clients to intelligently compare and distinguish gay and non-gay adult samples on their behaviors, attitudes and preferences.

Finally, we conform to the standards of public disclosure for all our studies that are maintained by the National Council on Public Polls to ensure transparency in how our research is conducted, weighted, and fully reported.