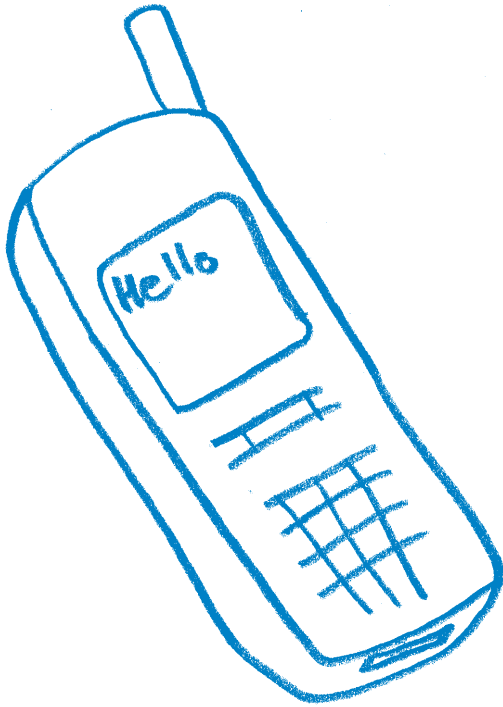


ESOMAR WORLD RESEARCH CODES & GUIDELINES

# CONDUCTING SURVEY RESEARCH VIA MOBILE PHONE



WORLD

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Issued April 2010

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# CONDUCTING SURVEY RESEARCH VIA MOBILE PHONE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With mobile phones becoming the preferred mode of telephone communication on a global scale, it is critical for ESOMAR, working with the global research industry, to establish clear guidance on the conduct of market, social and opinion research via mobile phone. By doing so, the aim is to promote professional standards, best practices, and respectful relationships with the individuals being called.

This document provides guidance to assist researchers in addressing the legal, ethical, and practical considerations of conducting research via mobile phone. It is meant to serve as the framework for a subsequent series of FAQs on research via mobile phone that will be developed as this technology evolves. It does *not* address methodological issues related to research via mobile phone, such as coverage and sampling, non-response, measurement, and weighting.

Mobile phone technology and communications have grown rapidly in some countries and at a slower pace in others, and mobile communication laws and regulations are still evolving. Only a few countries have addressed the legal parameters for unsolicited communication and interaction with mobile phone

users. The regulatory dimension is magnified and complicated by the multiple communication media that the mobile phone provides to the user.

Furthermore, there may be national laws that pertain specifically to the mobile phone user, e.g., restrictions on using mobile phones while driving. Such regulations indirectly affect, and could potentially be construed as establishing legal liability for a researcher contacting a potential survey participant via mobile phone.

In many countries it can be impossible to identify whether a given telephone number relates to a mobile or a fixed-line phone and, in any event, a fixed-line number may be set to divert to a mobile, making it impossible for the caller to know that they are calling via a mobile phone. Some sections of this guideline may therefore be applicable to any form of research via telephone even where the intent is not specifically to call a mobile.

## 2. SCOPE

Under the above conditions, it is critical that the researcher is aware of and responsive to existing national laws, stricter standards or rules that may be required in any specific country, and the local regulatory climate and cultural

disposition toward contacting mobile phones. Further, the researcher should determine at the start of the contact if the number they are contacting is a mobile or fixed-line.

While recognising that mobile phones permit the use of various research methodologies, including e-mail and web surveys, this guideline applies only to market research conducted by using voice or text message (SMS) to contact respondents on their mobile phones. The guideline does not cover the use of interactive services on a mobile phone for research purposes. This subject and related issues are covered in *ESOMAR's Guideline on Conducting Research using the Internet*.

This guideline shall be read in conjunction with the *ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research* and other ESOMAR guidelines available at [www.esomar.org](http://www.esomar.org).

### 3. KEY PRINCIPLES

As a general rule, researchers knowingly calling or sending text messages to a mobile phone for the purpose of conducting a survey shall observe the principles of respect and disclosure that are practised in fixed-line telephone

research. These include identification of the calling party, notification as to the purpose of the call/survey, the voluntary nature of participation, the guarantee of confidentiality and consideration of local expectations about appropriate times for telephone calls.

Due to the nature of mobile phones and the patterns of use that have evolved over time, there are a range of additional legal and ethical considerations to be observed. While these considerations may vary by country and culture it is essential that researchers understand those variations and adapt their survey protocols accordingly. For instance, while most legislation restricts unsolicited calls for commercial purposes but not market research, it is mandatory to consult and apply research-specific do-not-contact lists for mobile as well as fixed-line phones if such exist. Similarly, prior consent is required for unsolicited text messages in a number of countries although these regulations may not always apply to research. If text messaging is used to contact respondents, the researcher shall provide the opportunity to opt out in order to meet the requirement to ensure the voluntary nature of research participation.

Researchers shall remain mindful of concerns about privacy and intrusion,

and politely terminate the call when it becomes apparent that the recipient is not in a position, or does not wish, to take the call, is not competent, or is a child (unless the researcher receives verifiable, informed consent from an appropriate adult to proceed with the call) (see *ESOMAR Guideline on Interviewing Children and Young People*, section B10).

#### 4. RESPONDENT COMPENSATION

In some countries, calls to mobile telephones, unlike fixed-line calls, can involve a charge to both the caller and the recipient. Also, in instances where survey calls are made to mobile numbers across regional or national boundaries, additional ‘roaming’ charges may be incurred by the called party and this can also apply to sending and receiving an SMS.

As a consequence, researchers shall recognise that making calls to mobile phones could place the researcher in breach of their obligation under the ICC/ESOMAR International Code to ensure that a potential respondent is in no way disadvantaged by participation in a research survey. The researcher should offer compensation for the cost of the call at the start of the contact,

and if the issue of compensation cannot be satisfactorily addressed, the call should be terminated at this point and that number should not be re-contacted by that company. Alternatively, the researcher may decide that an offer to reimburse the respondent in a transparent and convenient manner is practicable in order to permit continuation of the interview.

#### 5. RESPONDENT SAFETY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Due to the nature and usage patterns of mobile telephones, researchers sometimes will contact potential respondents who are engaged in an activity or in a setting not normally encountered in fixed-line calling. This might include driving a vehicle, operating machinery, walking in a public space, or when the caller is in another country/time zone. The researcher has an obligation to take all reasonable precautions to ensure that respondents are not harmed or adversely affected as a direct result of participating in an interview. Therefore, where it is known that the call is to a mobile number or there is cause to believe this to be the case, the researcher should confirm whether the potential respondent is in a situation where it is legal, safe and not inconvenient to take the call. If the researcher

does not receive confirmation, then the call should be terminated while allowing the possibility of making further attempts at another time.

Furthermore, a researcher might contact a potential respondent who is engaged in an activity or in a work or social situation where others may overhear the call and confidentiality is compromised. Since a respondent could be reached in a public or semi-private space, the researcher must consider the nature of the survey content in light of the possibility that the respondent might be overheard and personal information or behaviour inadvertently disclosed or responses modified on account of the respondent's situation. If appropriate, the call should be rescheduled to another time or location when confidentiality will not be compromised.

## 6. CALLING TIMES

A number of countries have laws or standards that specify calling hours allowed for unsolicited calls of any type and these should be observed for surveys via mobile phones as well. In the absence of such requirements, researchers should observe the same calling hours as for fixed-line phone surveys. For telephone surveys in the

business to business sector, acceptable times are implicit in the office hours of the business concerned.

Mobile phone numbers rarely indicate the respondent's location and it is therefore incumbent on the researcher to anticipate that the person being called might be in a different time zone, and to verify the convenience of the time, location and situation.

## 7. INTERVIEW DURATION

While there is little empirical evidence, some researchers report anecdotally that mobile telephone respondents are more difficult to keep online than are respondents called on fixed lines. It may well be that the nature of mobile technology means that respondents are more easily distracted or more likely to lose concentration, or that the call is more likely to be interrupted or dropped. In addition, the respondent's environment may change during the course of an interview to one where safety or confidentiality is at risk. The researcher should take these issues into consideration and ensure that the interview length is not burdensome and kept as short as possible.

## 8. USE OF AUTOMATED DIALLING AND CALLING EQUIPMENT

Researchers should note that a number of countries restrict the use of auto-diallers and other automated dialling equipment, including predictive diallers<sup>1</sup>. These limitations may also apply to text messages. Some countries<sup>2</sup> may permit the use of such equipment only if a respondent has given prior explicit consent (for example, as a member of an opt-in panel) to be dialled by automated dialling equipment. Where automated diallers are permitted and used, 'abandoned' or 'silent' calls, where no live interviewer is immediately available, are not allowed.

## 9. CALLING PROTOCOLS

Some people consider their mobile phone to be a personal and private instrument. The researcher has an obligation to be sensitive to these privacy concerns. It is appropriate for the calling protocols for research via mobile phone to differ from the practices that are used in fixed-line telephone research. For example, the researcher should consider limiting the number and pattern of call-backs when contacting a known mobile number.

In line with the ICC/ESOMAR Code requirement that researchers shall identify themselves, calls to mobile numbers should be set to allow the display of the caller's number where this is possible, and this facility should not be deliberately suppressed. If the researcher chooses to leave a voicemail message for a potential respondent (who may have to pay to retrieve the message) then this message should detail how the researcher will offer to recompense for the cost of retrieval.

Wherever feasible, it should be made possible for the called party to contact the researcher by calling the number displayed and to establish the researcher's identity. It is good practice to provide a toll-free contact number (recognising that this facility may only be available over a fixed-line) and for the respondent to be able to reach a 'live' party or leave a message requesting a call-back with costs being covered by the research company where relevant.



## 10. FURTHER INFORMATION

The use of interactive services on a mobile phone for research purposes will be covered in *ESOMAR's Guideline on Conducting Research using the Internet* and a series of FAQs on research via mobile phone is also being developed as this technology evolves.

Queries about implementing the Guideline should be sent to the ESOMAR Professional Standards Committee, [professional.standards@esomar.org](mailto:professional.standards@esomar.org)

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“Market research, which includes social and opinion research, is the systematic gathering and interpretation of information about individuals or organisations using the statistical and analytical methods and techniques of the applied social sciences to gain insight or support decision making.

The identity of respondents will not be revealed to the user of the information without explicit consent and no sales approach will be made to them as a direct result of their having provided information.”

Definition of market research contained in the ICC/ESOMAR International Code

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ESOMAR is the world organisation for enabling better research into markets, consumers and societies.

With approximately 5000 members in over 100 countries, ESOMAR's aim is to promote the value of market and opinion research in illuminating real issues and bringing about effective decision-making.

To facilitate this ongoing dialogue, ESOMAR creates and manages a comprehensive programme of industry-specific and thematic events, publications and communications, as well as actively advocating self-regulation and the worldwide code of practice.



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