



Open Letter to the UK Market Research Industry:

National Representation and Minority Groups in UK Research Studies – A call to action...

The killing of George Floyd and its aftermath has sent shockwaves, protests and action through the world. The impact of this, both personally and within our organisation, has been profound. We have been discussing the issues that have been raised internally and throughout our professional network. Our eyes have been opened to things we were previously blind to. We thought we were aware, but we were not. The reality that ethnic groups are still being unfairly treated in every walk of life, that discrimination is often systemic and so taken for granted that we don't actually recognise it, tells us that being against racism and discrimination just isn't enough. Working to end racism and discrimination in all its forms is now a central consideration in everything we do.

We are not the only organisation to be feeling this way and we've been involved in a lot of discussions about how we can do more, be better and affect change for the long term. It's been a challenging, upsetting and uncomfortable time (for all the right reasons). It has become clear that unconscious bias is one of our society's greatest challenges. The hustle of daily life – particularly in these times – can often leave us unaware of how the information around us is impacting our subconscious thinking and in turn our behaviours.

Through all of our discussions we've reviewed and reflected on these biases and how they affect our approach to things including the products and services we offer. And we noticed one key issue sitting right under our noses. It's an issue that we face collectively as an industry and one that needs to change.

Throughout my almost 20 year involvement with market research, one of the most frequently used online research target groups has been the Nationally Representative (NatRep) UK adult sample. The NatRep sample is the cornerstone of much of our industry, supporting commoditised services such as Omnibus through to global tracking services (syndicated and custom), where clients can get access to interactive real time dashboards, reports and whitepapers with tailored insights across a wide-ranging number of data points from shopping behaviour to political views for minimal budget outlay.

Vitreous World along with media agency the7stars, Communications Agency FleishmanHillard Fishburn, Brand Consultancy The Barber Shop and Market Research Agencies Touchstone Partners & Shoppercentric has identified a need to review how we define the NatRep sample for UK consumer research studies. Historically, the standard criteria for a NatRep UK sample has been reflective of UK Government **Census data** based on Age, Gender, Region of residence and occasionally social grade via the 'ABC1' system.

This completely overlooks demographics that relate to minority groups. For example, I have detailed below the current **Census Data 2011** - the 2011 Census is the most recent and trusted source available - showing the split of population based on ethnicity.

I have also detailed the number of interviews that would be required to be representative of ethnicity within the current standard omnibus online research sample of 2000 interviews:

| Ethnic Group | % | Interviews |
|-----------------|-----|------------|
| White British | 82% | N=1640 |
| All Other White | 5% | N=100 |
| Mixed | 2% | N=40 |
| Asian | 7% | N=140 |
| Black | 3% | N=60 |
| Other | 1% | N=20 |

Furthermore, we want our sample to be representative **on sexual orientation and disability as well.** **Regarding sexual orientation**, we can look to the **2017 Office of National Statistics NPS Data** for guidance (as sexual orientation questions were not included in the 2011 Census). This covers LGB minorities and states they make up 2% of the UK population (or 40 Interviews in a 2000 sample).

Please Note: *This does not cover the 'QT+IA' demographics but as yet there is no government data for us to use. This does seem to be being addressed and more information on what the Government is doing in regard to sexual orientation in the 2021 Census can be found here.*

For disability we have referenced the UK Government's [Disability prevalence estimates 2002/03 to 2011/12 \(Apr to Mar\)](#) to guide us. From this we estimate that a quota needs to be applied to ensure 20-22% of the sample come from one of the listed disability areas (or 400-440 Interviews in a 2000 sample).

The current standard approach to UK NatRep sampling means, although anyone from a minority background can complete a survey, it is highly unlikely that the total sample will be representative of all of these groups. In many cases their ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability may not even be recorded. These groups represent around one third of the UK adult population (or c700 respondents in a 2000 NatRep sample), their views are very important and need to be proportionately recognised in order to avoid any potential impact on the findings of a study.

The bottom line here is that if your current approach to nationally representative consumer research is based on sampling that excludes quotas on ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability it is not fit for purpose. This is a prime example of the unconscious bias that exists in our industry, and one that we are now taking a first step towards addressing.

Since the 20th of July 2020 the Vitreous World Consumer Omnibus and all UK NatRep Samples delivered by Vitreous World have been, and will continue to be representative of the population based on age, gender, region of residence, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability as standard. We have worked with our network of suppliers to meet this need and there will be no additional costs incurred to our current delivery model or premium charges passed on to clients.

We believe this approach should be the new standard and minimum requirement for all UK NatRep Consumer Research. To that end, Vitreous World will be sharing intelligence with the wider industry

to support other market research firms in committing to the cause. There will be no commercial advantage sought from this move.

As a first step to achieving this wider industry goal Vitreous World, the7stars, FleishmanHillard Fishburn, The Barber Shop, Touchstone Partners and Shoppercentric have come together to create (and are the founding signatories of) 'The Voices4All Initiative' which has the aim of encouraging and facilitating the use of truly representative research across the marketing industry. In this open letter we invite any and all organisations involved in the procurement, delivery or use of NatRep UK Consumer Data to sign up to adopt the same approach detailed above and join us in guaranteeing that all UK Consumer Research samples are inclusive, socially responsible and a true representation of our wonderful and diverse nation.

To register your interest visit www.voices4all.co.uk and submit your details. We hope that this platform will create a forum for constructive discussion and innovation regarding diversity and inclusion for all in our industry.

