

MRS SINGAPORE AND ESOMAR DENOUNCE COMPANIES THAT CHARGE RESPONDENTS FEES TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Recently international media have put the spotlight on two companies running alleged pyramid marketing schemes which offer participants, after paying a large fee to receive a survey, rewards for completing research questionnaires. The companies, based in India and in Singapore, also state that they will pay participants an additional fee for referring others to join market research survey panels.

ESOMAR, the World Association of Research Professionals and the Marketing Research Society (Singapore), denounce this practice as unethical, misleading, and in breach of the key fundamentals of the ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market Research, which has been undersigned and adopted by all ESOMAR members and over 55 market research associations worldwide.

“Market research depends on public confidence that it is carried out honestly, objectively and without disadvantage to its participants” noted Finn Raben, ESOMAR’s Director General. “Respondents should never be expected to pay for participating in a survey and this practice is highly damaging to the image of market research.”

“A key tenet of the ICC/ESOMAR International Code is that market researchers shall behave ethically and not abuse the trust of respondents or exploit their lack of experience or knowledge.

“People participate for all sorts of reasons, not least because they want to share their thoughts about the products and services they use and how they would like them to be improved. Whilst they may receive small incentives for giving up their free time to answer a questionnaire, it is unheard of that respondents should pay to participate in research.”

“Charging people to join a survey panel is tantamount to asking people to invest their own money in completing our surveys and this could have a huge impact on the quality of the research results” explained Raben. “This is behaviour that has never been practiced by any responsible market research company, or member of ESOMAR; if it were, it would result in immediate expulsion.”

Greg Coops, ESOMAR’s representative in Singapore and head of MRS Singapore’s Professional Standards Committee, commented that while one of the companies allegedly involved is registered in Singapore it runs no panels there. Coops cautioned “We would strongly urge potential research respondents to avoid any panel operations that charge fees to join. A list of responsible research firms and panel providers can be found on the ESOMAR and MRS Singapore websites. All our members agree to abide by the ICC/ESOMAR Code and would never charge respondents to join a panel.”

ESOMAR has published [26 Questions to Help Research Buyers of Online Samples](#) and advises clients to use this resource when selecting panel suppliers to avoid poor quality surveys. The questions highlight the importance of knowing how the panel has been recruited, how it is managed, and the processes in place to ensure that respondents do not answer a questionnaire more than once as this would skew the results.

ESOMAR has also just updated its [Guideline on Online Research](#) which clarifies the key ethical, technical and legal issues for researchers. The guideline requires researchers to treat respondents with respect, to ask for consent if personal data is to be used for a non research purpose and to maintain a clear distinction between research and commercial activities such as direct marketing.

The guideline also requires researchers to refrain from unsolicited email and to take special care when interviewing children and young people. Research companies must post clear and prominent privacy policies including whether they use cookies and if so why, and transparent disclosures before or at the time of data collection if they use technologies that identify or track respondents.

For more information contact MRS Singapore's Professional Standards Committee
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