



**RESEARCHING
THE ROBOT:
A NEW ERA FOR
MARKET RESEARCH?**

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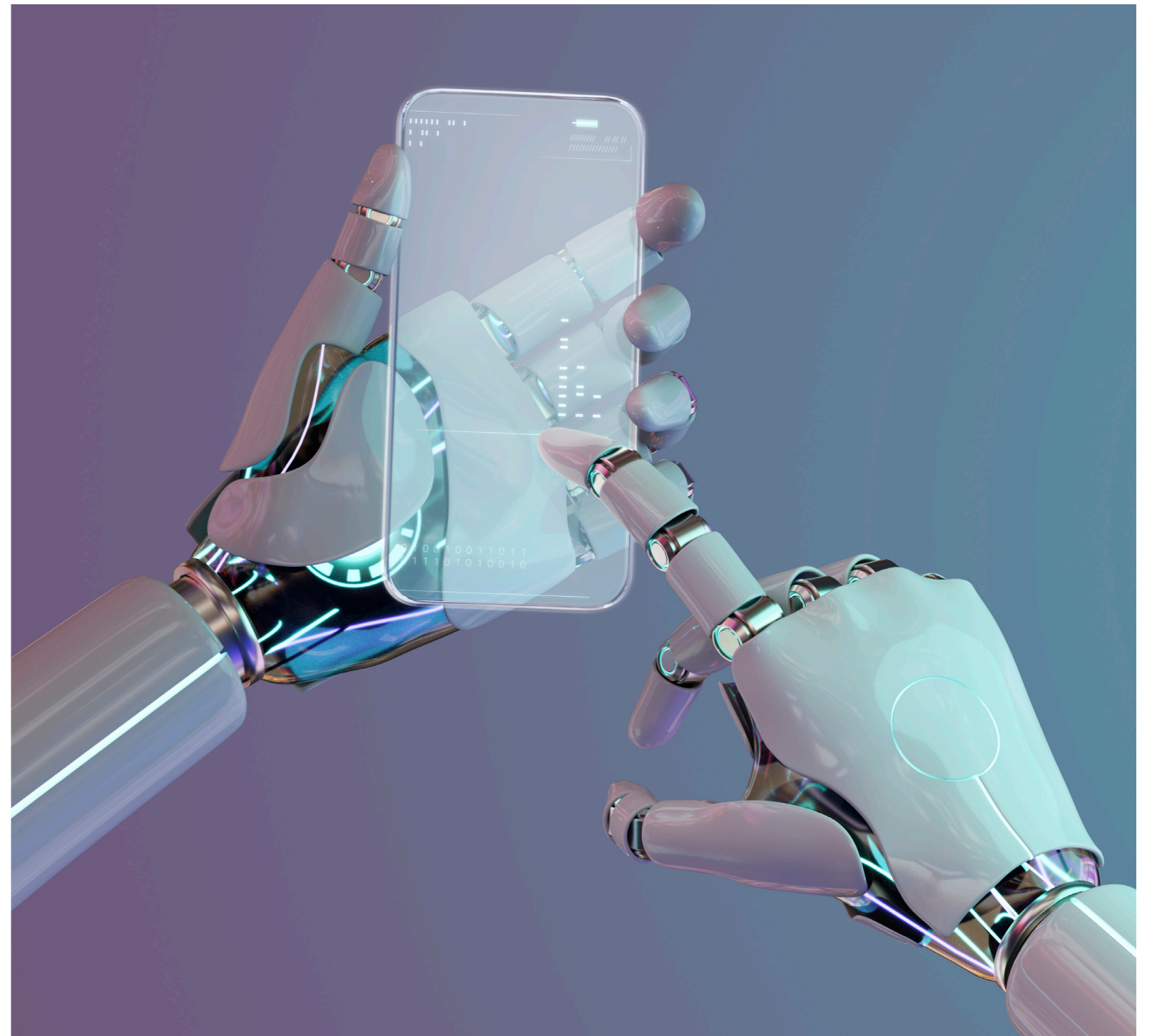
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1.0

Introduction

The Latest AI Landscape



Lately, you can't turn on the news, read a paper, or open any social media app without being bombarded with stories of AI advancement; some good, some bad. In the field of media research specifically, AI has also seen vast growth.

Most notably, it is starting to be used to process and analyse large, unstructured data sets and to aid in survey creation. Many have now seen first-hand the ability of AI to efficiently produce, for example, a questionnaire from a few simple prompts.

Undoubtedly, there is uncertainty about AI's implications. To truly understand the potential benefits of using AI in media research, it's important to explore its capabilities and outcomes and 'research how we research'.

2.0

Testing AI within media research

As two leading and innovation-driven insight teams, the7stars and Differentology paired up to explore the application of AI within the market research process. More specifically, we focussed on a new AI-driven, cutting edge survey technique. This new survey technique replaces standard (pre-programmed), open-ended questions in quantitative surveys with 'smart probing' questions, building on the technology used in powerful tools (like ChatGPT) by embedding 'conversations' within surveys and enhancing the survey methodology.

The research aimed to investigate the impact of an AI survey on respondents when compared to a standard survey with a focus on three key questions:

1) How does an AI environment impact engagement and openness of response within a survey format?

2) How does an AI-enhanced methodology influence the quality of response, and does it impact on the level of detail and emotion behind responses?

3) Can AI-enhanced surveys better connect us with hard-to-reach audiences?

To do this justice, we picked a subject which everyone could offer an opinion on; finance. Within this topic, we had a range of sensitivity levels, from low sensitivity questions such as, "Where, if at all, have you made any swaps or compromises to save any money?" to high sensitivity topics about mental health such as "What are some of the ways your financial situation affects or has previously affected your mental health, if at all? This could also cover any feelings of guilt, inadequacy, or embarrassment due to having too much or too little money."

We spoke to a nationally representative sample (total UK population) of 2,000 individuals using the7stars Voices4all sampling approach. Demographic data was collected in the standard survey. Then half of the sample were moved into the AI driven survey and were given conversational prompts, whilst the other half were presented with standard open-ended questions with pre-determined follow ups.

Good morning! 😊

Hi there,

I'm a new survey software system that Differentology are testing.

It would be great if you'd answer the questions I have for you today. It should only take around 5 minutes

First I'd like to talk about the impact of the cost of living crisis.

Where, if at all, have you made any swaps or compromises to save any money? Please give as much detail as possible.

Instead of doing all of my shopping at Tesco, I now shop around more when doing my weekly shop. I also shop for food on a week to week basis now rather than once a month.

What other stores do you shop at now?

I shop at Aldi a lot more now

Thanks for sharing that with us - I now have some questions around personal finance and the worries that come with that.

Thinking about discussing your personal finances (covering, personal debt, monthly salary, any loans you may have) how would it make you feel talking about this in depth with your loved ones? Please tell me why you feel this way and if you already do this.

I wouldn't like to discuss this type of topic with loved ones - I just don't want to burden them or feel like I am letting them down

I understand. What other resources do you think you could use to help you manage your finances?

I'm not sure what resources are out there but I could look into a support group of some kind

When it comes to your finances, what would you say, if anything, is the biggest source of worry for you? Please give as much detail as possible.

Not being able to provide for my family

What do you think would help you feel more secure in providing for your family?

Costs are rising and I would like the government to put measures in place to help prevent the rises and bring things back down to reasonable levels

3.0

Embrace AI to improve engagement levels and candidness of response



ENGAGEMENT & EXPRESSION

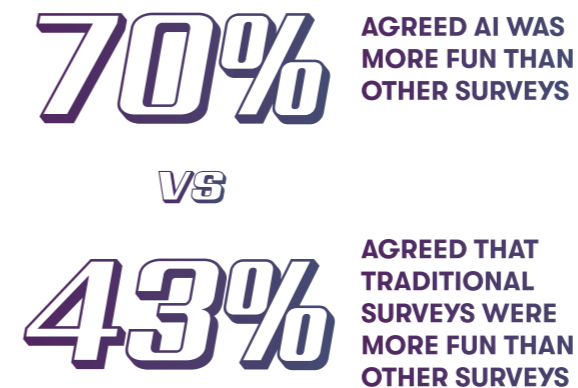
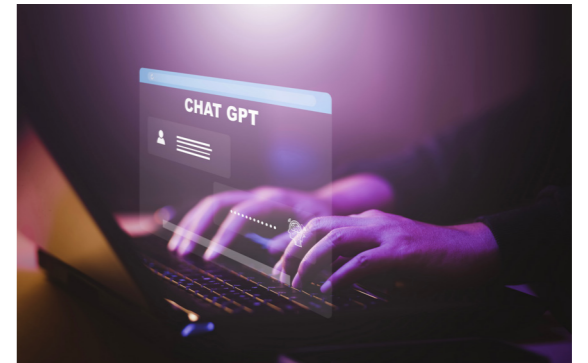
Creating surveys that are engaging and worthy of undivided attention is something the research world is consistently improving on, particularly with the rise of mindless short video content taking up time and split screening already being so established. We found that 70% of those in our AI-enhanced cohort agreed that our survey was more engaging than other surveys they have taken in the past (vs. only 43% for the non-AI cohort). In turn, 69% in the AI-enhanced survey group felt it allowed them to better express their opinions, better than other surveys they have taken historically (vs. 48% non-AI). We found that participants of the AI-enhanced survey generally told us more, with this group averaging 8 words more per response than those who took the traditional survey. This provides researchers with more data to pull insights from.

OPENNESS OF RESPONSE

Typically, as questions ramp up in sensitivity levels, the length and quality of responses tend to decrease as people can find the subject matter uncomfortable. This is where qualitative methodologies come into their own, allowing us to probe and delve into the 'why' behind the 'what'. However, with budget constraints and quick turnarounds, quantitative methodologies can become the default preference.

Our findings verify this observation, with average word count per response in the traditional survey dropping ~2 words each time the topic increased in sensitivity. Conversely, the word count increased for the AI-enhanced survey. With participants delivering 6 more words per response for high sensitivity questions when compared to medium sensitivity and 13 more words per response than the traditional survey.

It's clear that AI-enhanced survey methods engender higher levels of engagement and thus longer and more detailed responses, particularly for high sensitivity topics. Thus, highlighting how an AI survey environment may prove a potential remedy to the challenge of participant engagement when broaching tougher subject matters.



4.0

Utilise AI-enhanced surveys to influence better quality and detailed responses

QUALITY

Having quality data is a fundamental building block of any successful research project, with researchers needing a stream of both useable and useful data from participants. In our traditional (non-AI) survey, 9% of the responses gathered contained no useful information in them. However, this figure drops to 5% in the AI-enhanced survey. Interestingly, whilst low-and medium-sensitivity topics saw some increases in usable data between the AI-enhanced survey and the traditional one, these do remain largely consistent - highlighting the suitability of traditional surveys in this case. As questions become more sensitive, AI's ability to collect more useable data becomes imperative.

We also observed significant fall in dropouts in our AI survey (5% AI vs. 7% traditional). This is a pertinent finding because as questionnaire lengths increase and topics become more sensitive, every quality response matters. As questions become more sensitive, AI's ability to collect more useable data becomes imperative.

THEMATIC BREADTH

Similarly, we found that the AI-enhanced survey increased the number of key analysis themes generated in the open-ended responses, compared to the traditional survey format. The traditional (non-AI) survey delivered an average of 3.9 themes per question overall. In comparison the AI-enhanced survey provided an additional 1.7 more themes on average (totalling 5.6), giving us more comprehensive datasets to derive insight from. Again, the largest disparity was observed within the high sensitivity responses, with the AI survey delivering an additional 2.4 themes per response.

5.6 AVERAGE THEMES PER QUESTION IN AI-ENHANCED SURVEY

vs

3.1 AVERAGE THEMES PER QUESTION IN NON-AI SURVEY



SENTIMENT & EMOTION

Further AI analysis found that the AI-enhanced survey, elicited a more emotional response than the traditional survey albeit at a topline level. Taking the number of emotional responses detected for the first high-sensitivity question in each survey, the AI-enhanced survey comes out on top, with 33% of the responses rated as being emotive, compared to the traditional survey at 24%. This uplift in emotional response was also seen for the second high-sensitivity question, with 48% in the AI-enhanced survey having an emotional response compared to 38% in the traditional survey.

However, we did not observe significant emotive differences for medium- and low-sensitivity topics, with AI either unable to detect emotion in responses at these sensitivity levels...or these questions simply did not elicit emotional responses. This suggests that even with AI's advances there is still a distinct need for human intervention to sense check and validate findings and delve into the nuances and language. Thus, while traditional survey methods are useful (especially for less sensitive topics) we have found that AI excels in eliciting higher quality, more thematically dense and emotionally driven responses.

5.0

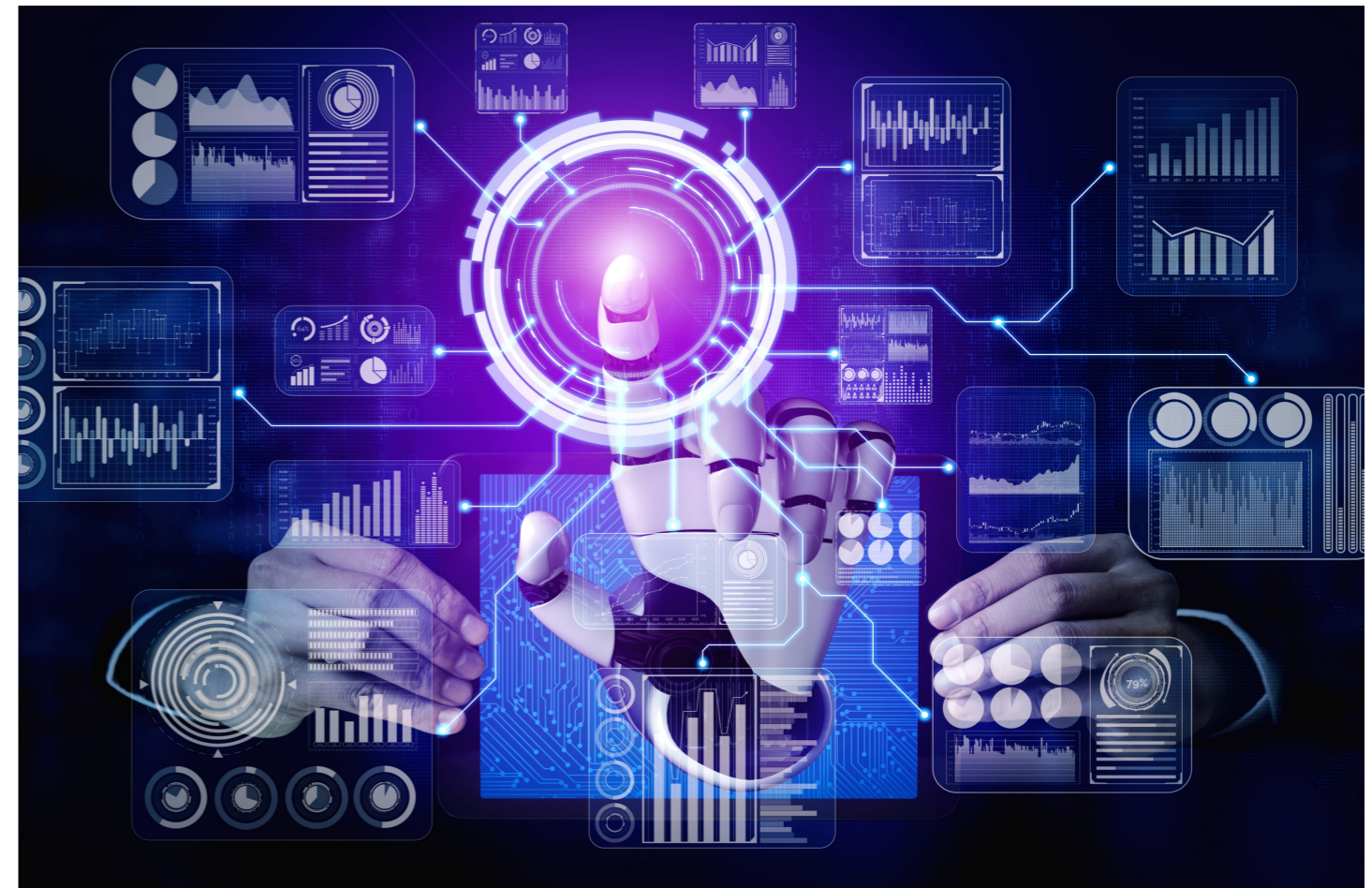
Use AI to your advantage to speak to hard-to-reach audiences

It's no secret that some audiences are harder to find in market research and that there can be a lack of diversity on research panels, with issues of access easily arising i.e., not all surveys are suitable for those who are neurodivergent. Whilst much is being done to address these issues and remove biases, our research sheds light on how AI-enhanced surveys can aid a wider reach.

The novelty of the AI-enhanced survey and intuitive prompts appears to significantly boost overall engagement for typically hard-to-reach groups. For instance, those from Black communities were more engaged in the AI-enhanced survey (75% AI vs. 54% traditional) as were those from South Asian communities (73% AI vs. 43% traditional), compared to White communities (69% AI vs. 43% traditional). When asked how 'fun' the surveys were, we saw a similar pattern for those with a disability (60% AI vs. 33% traditional). Similarly, 73% agree that the AI-enhanced survey better allowed them to express themselves when compared to other surveys they have taken, compared to 66% for those with no disabilities. This feeling of being better able to express themselves led to significantly more key analysis themes for high sensitivity questions for those respondents with a disability compared to those with no physical or mental disabilities.

This higher level of enjoyment and engagement ultimately led to greater claimed self-expression (i.e., feeling like they are better able to express themselves) from participants too, especially amongst Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority participants (72% AI-enhanced vs. 47% standard) and people with disabilities (73% AI-enhanced vs. 50% standard). This method could help us bridge the gap between standard quantitative surveys, where we can struggle to get rich in-depth answers for high sensitivity topics, and focus groups which can be costly for clients and sometimes difficult to recruit.

By being able to better engage and keep harder to reach audiences in surveys, and those surveys allowing these audiences to better express themselves, we will have a better understanding and subsequently be able to engage with people who often feel unheard, allowing us as researchers to elicit insight from more inclusive and representative audiences.



73% OF THOSE WITH A DISABILITY COULD BETTER EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN THE AI SURVEY

VS

66% OF THOSE WITHOUT A DISABILITY COULD EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN THE AI SURVEY



6.0

Will AI replace the role of a traditional researcher?

We identified four actionable ways to integrate AI into research techniques that will ultimately enhance the participant experience and generate deeper and more valuable insights for brands.

1. DUE TO THE PROBING NATURE OF THE AI METHODOLOGY, IT CAN BE USED TO GLEAN HIGHER QUALITY RESPONSES.

This is exciting news for us as an industry. With the need for quality consumer insight high on the agenda to help brands keep close to their customer and make evidence-based decisions.

2. AI-ENHANCED SURVEYS CAN ENGAGE RESPONDENTS.

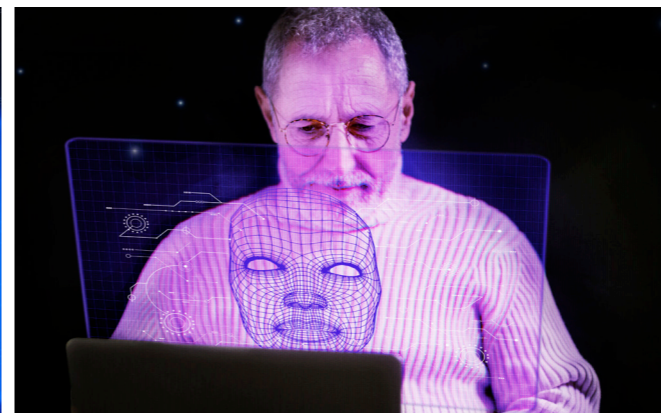
A powerful remedy to industry wide respondent fatigue and survey complacency.

3. HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS CAN BE REACHED.

Groups typically less open to market research find AI surveys more engaging, meaning voices can be accurately represented. This type of innovation is a very welcome advancement and addition to our sampling toolkit.

4. THE INTUITIVE AI TECHNIQUE ALLOWS SENSITIVE TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED IN DEPTH.

It can act as a halfway house to the robustness of quantitative methodologies whilst giving a proportion of the probing and prompting that qualitative methodologies provide, thus providing stronger insights.



It is important to note that this doesn't mean that traditional surveys are defunct. Rather, there is still a distinct need for researchers and a human touch, especially for understanding nuances in language and what constitutes an 'insight'. Clearly AI is here to stay, and more research is required to unpick this juxtaposition, so rather than thinking of AI replacing the role of traditional research, it's best to think of using AI alongside it.

A note on Methodology

the7stars and our partner Differentology spoke to a NATREP sample of 2,000 individuals between the 19th – 30th May using our Voices4all sampling approach. Demographic data was collected in the standard survey, then half of our sample were moved into our AI driven survey and were given conversational prompts whilst the other half remained in the standard survey.

The study maintained control between both survey groups by showing identical questions across each, with these questions increasing in sensitivity as the survey progressed.

the7stars is a founding partners of Voices4all, which ensures nationally representative samples not just include age, gender, region and social grade, but also sets hard quotas on ethnicity, sexuality and disability. This ensures we are truly representative of the population, and are inclusive of previously overlooked groups in research.

Please note fieldwork was conducted 19th – 30th May 2023.

<https://www.the7stars.co.uk/>

<http://www.differentology.co.uk/>

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