

GUIDELINE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONTACT

Version 2017.1



1. INTRODUCTION

With the increase in approaches of contacting respondents it has become necessary to provide guidance to support researchers and safeguard the public goodwill when collecting data from consumers. The SAMRA and ICC ESOMAR Code of Conduct requires that researchers “must not do anything that might harm a data subject or damage the reputation of market, opinion and social research. SAMRA aims to protect consumers from excessive contact by researchers so that research is not experienced as a nuisance, and to prevent unreasonable intrusion into the private lives of respondents.

These guidelines apply specifically to the following data collection methods, irrespective of the type of research or client:

- Computer-aided telephone interviewing, including mobile voice calls
- Online quantitative data collection, including via mobile/smartphones

2. DEFINITIONS

Research participant(s) is a person(s) that is interviewed and provides information during a survey administered telephonically or online.

Research participant contact refers to the number of attempts, and the timing of such attempts (i.e. days and times), made by a researcher to reach a potential research participant, whether for the purpose of soliciting participation in research or for data collection for research purposes.

3. REQUIREMENTS

Data collection can be divided into three categories based on the timing of the data collection, that determine the requirements for contact, irrespective of the technology used:

- 1) Data collection which occurs at the time of the respondent’s actual interaction / transaction. The data collection focuses on evaluating this transaction.
- 2) Data collection which is conducted soon after a particular interaction / transaction has occurred, thus research participation is requested after some delay.
- 3) Data collection which is requested from a respondent in more general terms, based on previous behaviour / experiences and not linked to a specific interaction / transaction. For this, the request is implied to occur after interactions / transactions.

3.1 General

- All legal requirements regarding digital contact, including telephone and mobile calls, email contact, and text messaging, as well as opt-out requirements must be complied with.

3.2 Contact Frequency

- SAMRA requires that research participants do not participate in research more than once every 6 months.
- The maximum number of calls to a (potential) research participant per day is 4.
- The maximum total call attempts to a (potential) research participant, irrespective of the number of contact numbers, is 10
- The following time lapses apply, **before redialling (i.e. next call attempt)**:

Scenario	Next Step	Time Lapse Required
A respondent is called and there is no answer	Redial	4 hours
A respondent's number is engaged	Redial	15 minutes
A respondent does not complete a survey in one sitting	Make an appointment to complete, or redial	4 hours
Caller reaches an answering device or service	Redial	4 hours
Soft (open / tentative) appointment with a respondent	Redial	15 minutes
Definite appointment with a respondent	Redial	15 minutes

3.3 Contact Times

Contact via household landline telephone or mobile telephone (including text messages) for recruitment for research participation (including face-to-face in-home interviews) and for participation in research via household landline telephone or mobile telephone must NOT be made, unless by prior appointment:

1. Before 08h30 Monday to Saturday
2. Before 10h00 on Sunday and public holidays
3. After 20h30 Monday to Friday
4. After 13h30 on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

Channel Examples	Considerations	How ONE contact attempt is defined	Allowable Times
Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Web Pop-Ups Quick Response (QR) Codes in branches Kiosks Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD)	Since the user initiates the event during which invitations to participate are made, these surveys could be offered at any time.	The offer to participate could be persistent/continuous, and so contact attempts are not defined. Only completes are defined.	Any time. Based on users opting in.
Text messages (i.e. using a Short Message Service) Email CATI Push IVR Push USSD	For text messages specifically, delays on the mobile network are beyond the control of the researcher and due care should be exercised when queuing messages late on a given day.	A confirmed "DELIVERED" status report from the mobile network is one attempt. This denotes that the message arrived on the user's handset.	08h30 to 20h30 from Monday to Friday. Interactions / transactions which occur on Fridays, which would ordinarily be surveyed on Saturdays should be queued to deliver on Mondays, ensuring no weekend requests.
Web-based CATI Telephonic approaches/requests for face-to-face interviews		A call that is successfully connected on the number of the user, whether the call results in a conversation or not	08h30 to 20h30 from Monday to Saturday. 10h00 until 13h30 on Sundays and Public holidays, or per appointment.

3.4 Channel Considerations

Researchers must consider the following regarding the technologies used for interviewing:

- 1) When analysing reply rates for requests for feedback from customers using text messages on mobile phones, response rates tend to peak daily at certain times, depending on the country where the research participant is. For example, in South Africa, the peaks are at 09h00 and 13h00. Optimal times must be identified to send text messages via mobile phone, drawing on the inference that higher engagement rates indicate higher acceptance of research requests in general.
- 2) The mobile network infrastructure in a number of countries, including South Africa, does not allow for cancellation of a text message once it has been queued with the text message network service provider. For this reason, sending text messages late in the day at high volume times could lead to the actual delivery of text messages being delayed and arriving at the user's handsets later than the indicated cut off times specified above. Delays of this kind must be avoided.
- 3) With the advent of large-volume surveying, for example, where all customer interactions for a large organisation are queued and processed in real time, it is important to test and consider the actual time to send as this can cause delays. A system may say the send time is 09h00, but due to large volumes in the system, messages are only delivered many hours later. This must be addressed as part of planning and rollout.

3.5 Contact Termination

Regardless of the channel or technology used, a participant should always have a reasonably easy mechanism to opt out of research or the channel it is offered on, at any time.

Opt-out examples are listed below, per channel, but this list is not exhaustive.

Channel	Opt-out mechanism
SMS	Reply with the word "STOP" (as required by the Wireless Application Service Providers' Association – WASPA)
IVR	Press "X" to not hear this invitation again
USSD	Select option "X" to not receive further surveys
Email	Click on the link to unsubscribe from research surveys by X/ from research surveys for Y
CATI	Recorded request to be removed from the researcher's contact database and request confirmation
Face-to-face	Recorded request with interviewer not to be contacted for or included in future research

3.6 Predictive Dialler Management

- An up to date archive of predictive dialler statistics must be maintained. This must include a daily summary of:
 - The total number of calls attempted.
 - The total number of silent calls generated by the dialling equipment.
- Records of predictive dialler statistics (in summary form) must be retained by all centres that use predictive diallers for a minimum of 6 months and must be available for inspection. The statistics can be stored in either electronic or hard copy format; and can be kept centrally or at each call centres.
- Written procedures must be available which detail the following:

- How predictive diallers are set;
- How silent call generation is monitored;
- How silent call complaints are dealt with.
- Researchers must ensure that their (CATI) predictive diallers are adjusted to ensure a minimum ring time of 15 seconds for all calls before a call is terminated.
- When using a predictive dialler, the predictive dialler must at all times be adjusted to ensure that the rate of calls abandoned (i.e. calls ended before any conversation occurs) is no more than 3% of live calls calculated per project (i.e. across call centres) or per call centre (i.e. across projects) over a 24 hour period (i.e. between midnight and midnight on a calendar day).
- Statistics which record compliance with the abandoned call threshold must be created daily across all call centres operating for and in a research organisation. Monitoring must be sufficient to identify any single call centre or predictive dialler which consistently generates more than 3% of abandoned calls, per country.
- Predictive dialler users may **exclude** a reasoned, robust estimate of calls abandoned to (confirmed / actual) answering machines. A reasoned, robust estimate of **false positives** in terms of calls abandoned to answering machines must be **included** in the abandoned call rate computation.