

Market Research Trends 2025

6 Forces Shaping the Future of Insights

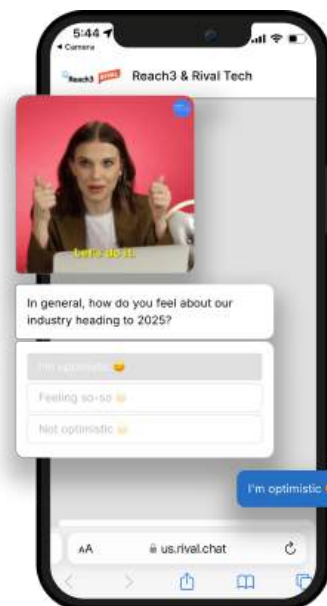
Introduction:

Forget crystal balls and Tarot cards—predicting the future of market research doesn't require mysticism (or outdated methods). Instead, we did what we know best: we did our research.

Now in its fifth year, this edition of **Market Research Trends** features commentary from experts and insights from industry reports. But this year, we've added something special: findings from our own December 2024 study. Using our own [conversational research platform](#), we engaged close to 120 researchers in a short chat survey and captured robust and rich quant, qual and video feedback.

Their insights help tackle some of the biggest questions in the industry: What's trending? Which tools are making waves? And, of course, how is AI changing the game?

While our industry is complex (just look at benchmarks like [GreenBook's GRIT report](#) or [ESOMAR's Global Market Research report](#)), our research shows glimmers of optimism and innovation. Less than 9% of participants are worried about the future, and over 70% are already using AI at least a few times a week in their work.



Not surprisingly, AI is leading the charge. As Bill Trovinger from Albertsons Companies put it: "AI is going to level the playing field in terms of speed and efficiency. Whoever can dig deeper—whether using AI or not—will be the winner in 2025."

But it's not all about AI. Our research uncovered other key trends shaping the future of insights:

- **Tech meets human expertise:** Striking the right balance is becoming crucial.
- **Qualitative research goes digital:** It's scaling like never before.
- **DIY research tools:** Empowering teams to take the reins.
- **Participant experience:** Finally getting the attention it deserves.
- **Data quality:** Still the MVP, holding strong in the spotlight.

These aren't just random guesses—they're backed by hard data and expert insights pointing to exciting growth ahead. With the industry projected to top \$150B globally by year's end (ESOMAR, 2024 GMR), there's never been a better time to be part of this transformation.

Whether you're an insights veteran or a curious newcomer, this report is your glimpse into what's next for a rapidly evolving field.

“2025 will be a transformational year in market research as brands will continue their drive to get closer to consumers and agencies will increasingly leverage new technologies to enable more organic, natural and authentic human understanding.”

Matt Kleinschmit, CEO and Founder, Reach3 Insights

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TREND #1: THE AI TAKEOVER

Trend #1: The AI Takeover

I am most excited to see AI become more conversational.”

Bill Trovinger, Director of Customer Insights - Health & Wellness, Albertsons Companies

Let's talk about the elephant in the room: AI. It came up constantly in our findings, no matter the question. Researchers are using AI in all kinds of ways—writing surveys, analyzing responses, creating visual reports, and speeding up timelines. In fact, 67% of our respondents said AI capabilities are critical or a key consideration when choosing a research vendor.

ESOMAR's Global Market Research Report backs this up: “The introduction of large language models like ChatGPT at the end of 2022 has brought rapid change. Firms must adapt, whether through acquisitions or by developing their own tools.”

In 2025, it's not just about using AI—it's about using it wisely. AI is becoming a co-pilot, handling repetitive tasks like cleaning data or coding responses. This frees researchers to focus on what they do best: asking smarter questions, digging deeper into insights, and telling impactful stories.

Of course, there are challenges. Michael Wehrman, Senior Manager, Growth Insights at Comcast, stresses that “the industry also will need to reckon with the economic and environmental impact of the machinery required for AI to function – the resources needed to build and maintain the machinery as well as the energy needed to supply it as well. AI may yet shift paradigms, but open discussion about tradeoffs as well as upsides is where we need to focus.”

For buyers navigating AI-powered services, resources like [ESOMAR's 20 Questions to Help Buyers of AI-Based Services](#) and the Market Research Society's [MRS Standards Guidance on AI](#) can help.

AI is speeding things up and raising expectations. Researchers are using it to personalize experiences, identify data themes, and even simulate test audiences. The challenge for 2025? Balancing automation with the human creativity and critical thinking that make research meaningful.

AI Adoption in Insights

Most researchers today are incorporating AI in their role, using it to improve their efficiency and speed.

How frequently do you use AI?

Every day: **36.2%**

Once or a few times a week: **35.3%**

Less than once a week: **20.7%**

I don't use AI: **7.8%**

How important is AI when evaluating research suppliers?

Critical to my decision: **14.7%**

A consideration, but not critical: **47.4%**

Not critical: **25%**

I don't work with suppliers: **12.9%**

How researchers are using AI today

Using the [Rival AI Summarizer tool](#), we identified these top use cases for AI in research.

1. Communication and writing assistance (including drafting outlines and questionnaires).
2. Research and data analysis, including capturing themes from qual and video feedback.
3. Optimizing tasks like coding and translation.
4. Creative support and ideation.
5. Survey drafting and refinement.

Exciting Uses of AI

While we've already seen many AI features and products in the insights industry, we're likely just scratching the surface. We asked research leaders which applications of AI they're most looking forward to seeing and why.

"I'm most excited about AI optimizing our social role as researchers, particularly in time-consuming or repetitive tasks. For instance, I've been hearing a lot about insights teams using AI to put together bite-sized video and audio clips that summarize learnings, to share with stakeholders. Switching to more digestible deliverables helps free up time for more strategic thinking."

Sofia Gomez Garcia, Executive Director in Innovation, Special Projects & Global Community Management, Warner Bros. Discovery

"The quality and latency of voice-enabled conversational AI will dramatically change the way that researchers collect data and participants give feedback. It's already beginning to blur the boundaries between qual and quant research and it's going to extend much further into gathering unstructured data at scale, changing the way that surveys are delivered and extending what people are describing as 'qual at scale.'"

Mike Stevens, Founder, Insight Platforms

“I’m really excited about how AI can transform the analysis phase of qualitative research. A big part of qualitative work involves quantifying insights so you can actually work with them. AI can handle the heavy lifting of coding and organizing data quickly and accurately (as long as you guide it correctly).”

Hannah Shamji, Customer Researcher, Hannah Shamji Research Inc.

“AI innovations have largely centered around qualitative research. I am excited (and cautious!) to see how AI will support quantitative analysis in the future.”

Karine Pepin, Co-Founder, The Research Heads

“The next stage will be enabling easier analysis of quantitative survey data, ideally melded with other data sources. However, survey data is notoriously ‘messy’, often with inconsistent labelling and complicated routing. So firms need to make sure they’re gathering and annotating the data correctly in the first instance to unlock future value.”

Henry Piney, Host of the FutureView podcast and Chief Research Advisor at MX8 Labs

I'm genuinely excited about the potential of synthetic data and personas to revolutionise market research. These AI-generated profiles go beyond averages and stereotypes, simulating real behaviours, preferences, and decision-making processes. They offer a powerful way to uncover deep insights without risking customer relationships or privacy."

Graeme Ford, MRX Innovation Consultant, PunkMRX

I'm most excited about the application of AI in the front-end and middle stages of project execution. Naturally, our industry raced to leverage AI first to assist with back-end data analysis—primarily unstructured data—but moving forward, I'm interested to see its applications move upstream in the process."

Jonathan Dore, EVP & Founding Partner, Reach3 Insights

Trend #2: Human in the Loop

We can't talk about AI in the industry without talking about balancing it with the human touch. After all, we're in the business of studying humans, right?

Researchers are learning how to strike the right balance—using AI to handle repetitive tasks while they focus on what they do best: interpreting the “why” behind the data.

“We need real humans to manage all the AI tools they are trying to implement... Businesses will realize they need humans to interpret and manage AI-driven insights effectively.”

Open-end survey responses, Rival Technologies' Market Research Trends Survey 2024

This is especially true as AI becomes better at generating synthetic personas, conversational surveys, and quick-turn insights. In our survey, the majority of respondents were “not excited” (39%) or “meh” (31%) about synthetic data, showing that at least this aspect of AI intelligence has a little way to go before widespread adoption.

The challenge for 2025? Using AI to complement human creativity without losing the nuance and empathy that make research meaningful.

In this year's [All Things Insights' Future of Insights Report](#), many of the

interviewees agreed that it's not the time to let AI run wild in the industry. There can still be major challenges with things such as contextual accuracy, data authenticity and more. Anu Sundaram, Vice President, Business Analytics, Rue Gilt Groupe, said in the report, "Humans with the eye for detail and experience can help balance this challenge, for example a seasoned market researcher or business lead can discern what is truly being generated from real customers."

How researchers feel about common AI-related tools today

76.7%

are excited about AI
summarizer tools

54.3%

are excited about
AI assistants

20.7%

are excited about
synthetic data

Trend #3:

Qual at Scale, Driven by AI

Qualitative research is having a big moment, and (you guessed it) AI is leading the charge. What used to take weeks—like analyzing open-ended responses or video transcripts—can now happen in a click. It's no surprise that 78% of our survey respondents were excited about these AI capabilities.

Qual data has never been more accessible or scalable. Tools like automated transcription, sentiment analysis, and real-time translation are helping researchers collect rich insights from diverse, global audiences. Even cooler, video feedback and virtual reality are turning traditional qualitative research into immersive, interactive experiences. Over 66% of our participants were excited about these advancements.

“2025 should lead to a renaissance of ethnographic research. If executives truly want to know what consumers think, why and how they use products and services, and critical context around timing and circumstance, eyes-wide-open qualitative work should always be on the menu.”

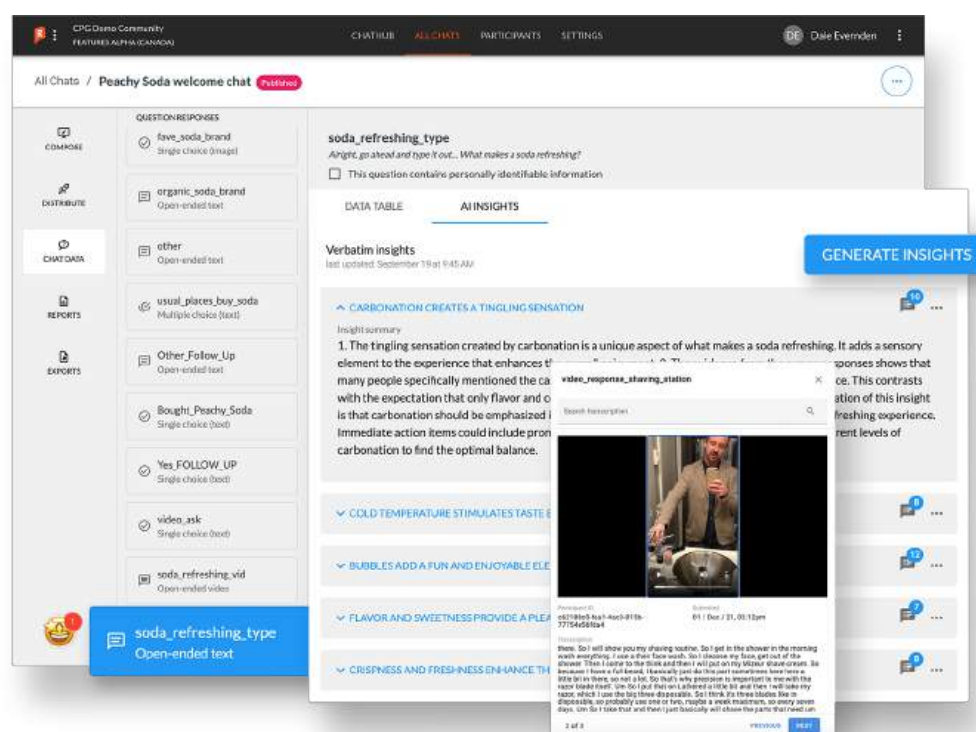
Michael Wehrman, Senior Manager, Growth Insights, Comcast

This new efficiency is fueling the rise of hybrid research. Blending quant's precision with qual's depth is giving researchers a more holistic view of consumer behavior. While quant still dominates the market (70%, per ESOMAR's 2024 GMR), qual is growing fast at 14%. Researchers are finding

TREND 3: QUAL AT SCALE, DRIVEN BY AI

new ways to combine the two for deeper, more actionable insights. AI isn't just helping researchers do more qual—it's helping them do it better. As Maxell Iskiev, Senior Market Research Analyst at Hubspot, puts it, "AI tools can moderate qualitative interviews at scale and assist with analysis, making me hopeful I'll be able to do more qual projects in the future." With smarter tools and fewer barriers, 2025 is shaping up to be the year that qualitative research truly hits its stride.

With better tools and fewer barriers, 2025 is shaping up to be the year qualitative research hits its stride.



New tools like [Rival's AI Summarizer](#) makes it easier and faster to analyze open-ends and video feedback.

I'm most excited about the ability to field qualitative studies at the speed and scale of quant research. With AI, research professionals have a unique opportunity to apply insights best practices in exciting new ways and emphasize the value of the especially human side of insights: intuition, curiosity, relevance, and quality control."

Brian Fowler, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Insights Career Network, and Business Strategy Consultant at Brain Flower Services

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Insight Communities Reimagined, Powered by Conversation.

Increase engagement and get closer to your customers using an agile, conversational research platform.

reach3insights.com/community-2.0

rivaltech.com/community



Trend #4: DIY Unleashed

Research software has been the engine driving growth across the industry, with the most action happening in the self-serve or DIY segment. These platforms are making it easier than ever for businesses to take charge of their own research—whether it’s running a quick survey or managing a full-scale global study.

“Starting from a small historical base, self-serve research platforms have now surpassed the USD \$3.5 billion mark after stupendous growth over the years and do not seem to show signs of saturation.” (ESOMAR, 2024 GMR) With AI-powered templates and user-friendly interfaces, these tools are giving teams more flexibility and control, while also shaking up the traditional research landscape.

“The explosion of accessible, user-friendly research technologies is empowering businesses of all sizes to take matters into their own hands.”

Graeme Ford, MRX Innovation Consultant, PunkMRX

But with all this growth comes new opportunities—and some challenges.

- **Team empowerment:** These tools put the power of research into the hands of decision-makers. No need to wait weeks for results; you can quickly gather insights on your own schedule. The catch? Without the right training or strategy, it can be tough to tackle more complex challenges.

Viewership measurement will keep evolving in the coming year, moving away from just focusing on linear viewership and shifting toward a more cross-platform approach. This shift reflects how much more fluid audience behavior has become in recent years. But it's also interesting that streamers are starting to adapt to the traditional linear TV measurement model. As streaming platforms like Netflix and Peacock continue to expand their sports offerings, this approach is likely to become more prevalent."

Michelle Auguste, Vice President of Global Media Insights, NBA

- **Balanced approach:** While DIY tools are great for getting quick answers, more detailed or high-stakes projects may still need a professional touch. The best solutions offer flexibility—meeting clients wherever they are, whether they want to go DIY or work with experts.
- **Accessibility:** Lower-cost options mean that even smaller teams can dive into data-driven decision-making. But with so much accessibility, it's important to ensure data is being used thoughtfully—not just for the sake of collecting it.

Again, we see AI playing a huge role in shaping the future of these tools, but that also means it's getting harder to stand out. Companies will need to think beyond just AI and focus on combining smart technology with tailored, expert support for their clients.

Trend #5:

The Participant Experience, Fixed?

“We need to tackle AI’s unintended consequences. Accuracy, privacy, and security are all important. But we must scrutinize the participant experience too—if we can’t get the basics right, we’ll never unlock AI’s full potential.”

Andrew Reid, CEO and Founder, Rival Technologies

Optimizing experiences for research participants is not a new mantra for the market research industry. It’s really common sense: don’t route them endlessly; don’t present survey offers for which they don’t qualify; reward them fairly for their time; and, for goodness sake, don’t subject them to long, boring, complex surveys.

That said, how we’re addressing these issues has evolved significantly. While participant engagement has always been a challenge, the tools and techniques available today offer new opportunities to create better experiences. And if there’s one area ripe for transformation, it’s the survey itself.

Long, static surveys are becoming a thing of the past as new technologies reshape how we interact with participants. Key trends include:

- **Shorter, dynamic surveys:** AI is making it easier than ever to author surveys that sound more natural and less like a test. Mobile-first is absolutely essential, and our survey showed that more than 50% were excited about this approach.

- **Conversational approaches:** Conversational surveys can now mirror everyday communication styles, using chat-based formats, emojis, selfies, and video responses. AI can keep the conversation going, using AI probing techniques, an approach that excited 64% of our participants.
- **Improved engagement:** Participants feel more comfortable and heard, which reduces fatigue and enhances data reliability.

This shift isn't just about convenience—it's about creating authentic, engaging experiences that lead to better insights. Our industry associations have not been resting on their laurels when it comes to this issue either. ESOMAR's guide for improving participant experience was released last year and the Insights Association's Participant Bill of Rights protects experiences, just to name a couple.

Improving participant experience and engagement has so many advantages, not the least of which is to improve data quality.

“Surveys with dozens of questions are losing favor as consumer attention spans shorten. Respondents often disengage, leading to lower quality data. Agile, mobile-friendly micro-surveys and passive data collection methods are emerging as replacements, delivering quicker, more reliable insights.”

Jorge Calvachi, Director of Insights, La-Z-Boy Incorporated

Trend #6:

Data Quality: The Comeback Tour

Data quality serves as the bedrock upon which the edifice of meaningful analysis and informed decision-making stands tall.”

Melanie Courtright, Insights Association (in [Research Live](#))

Like a long-running Las Vegas act, the challenge surrounding data quality refuses to leave center stage. While the topic has dominated the spotlight for years (decades!?), little progress has been made even as the industry faces increasingly sophisticated fraud (driven by—you guessed it—AI), technological shifts, and evolving data collection methods.

However, there's reason for optimism. The relatively recent formation of the Global Data Quality Initiative marked a major step forward. This cross-functional coalition, led by some of the world's top industry associations, is tackling both persistent and emerging risks to data quality in market research, consumer insights, and analytics. By pooling global expertise, the initiative aims to strengthen trust, share resources, and develop actionable frameworks to improve data integrity.

Data quality isn't an isolated issue. It is inextricably linked to something we already covered: participant experience. A poor participant experience, marked by overly long or irrelevant surveys, leads to disengaged respondents, straight-lining, or worse, dropouts. Conversely, creating surveys that are engaging, conversational, and respectful of participants' time isn't just a win for them—it's a win for data quality.

Emerging technologies are also making it easier to capture clean, accurate data. Tools that screen for fraudulent responses in real-time, adaptive

surveys that minimize participant fatigue, and conversational approaches that invite richer feedback are helping the industry get closer to its goal. By focusing on both the experience and the integrity of the process, researchers can create environments that foster honest, thoughtful responses.

“In-survey behavior tracking is the future of data quality. By monitoring participant behavior during the survey, we can identify and mitigate issues like inattention and fraud. While the technology could involve AI, it’s not strictly necessary.”

Karine Pepin, Co-Founder, The Research Heads

Embracing a new era of insights

The future of market research isn't about discarding the old or fully embracing the new—it's about finding balance. As we look toward 2025 and beyond, the industry stands at an exciting crossroads, where AI-driven innovation and human expertise converge to create richer, more actionable insights.

This is a call to curiosity and collaboration. By staying adaptable, fostering participant-centric practices, and using technology thoughtfully, we have an opportunity to redefine what great research looks like. Let's engage in this conversation, share ideas, and work together to build a more dynamic, inclusive, and forward-thinking industry. The road ahead is complex, but it's also filled with promise. Let's embrace it.

Community 2.0

Insight Communities Reimagined,
Powered by Conversation and AI



ENGAGEMENT

87%

Completion
rate

DEPTH

7x

Words with
video responses

SPEED

40%

Completes in
under an hour

RESULTS



Business
outcomes

Increase engagement and get closer to your customers
using an agile, conversational research platform

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About Rival Tech

Rival Technologies is a pioneer of conversational market research technology and the leading authority on insight communities globally. Our platform transforms conventional surveys into personalized research experiences that emulate the way people communicate today. Built by a team with over 30 years of deep research experience, our platform brings both the voice of the customer and market into the boardroom to answer essential business questions. Rival's suite of conversational research solutions is amplified by the power of AI to drive higher response rates, boost engagement, and accelerate time-to-insights. Our customers get faster, richer and more authentic insights with less time and effort. Rival Tech is used by some of the most innovative research teams in the world, including Coca-Cola, Kimberly-Clark, Dell Technologies, and Warner Bros. Discovery. For more information, please visit rivaltech.com



Reach3

About Reach3

Reach3 Insights is a full-service research consultancy that develops scalable, conversational insight solutions for today's modern, agile enterprise. Led by CEO Matt Kleinschmit, the company uses immersive, in-the-moment research designs and dynamic digital storytelling to deliver deep experiential insights that inspire action. Reach3 is part of the Rival Group and a sister company to Rival Technologies, a tech company developing chat, voice and video solutions that integrate into messaging platforms and technologies that people actively use on a daily basis. For more information, visit reach3insights.com



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