



**Online**  
**Participant Sourcing**  
**Ecosystem**



## Introduction



- Online sample has evolved over the years from the initial days of building proprietary research panels to the growth of sample exchanges and other ways of monetising online traffic.
- In recent years, there has been a drive to bring participant costs down which has led to more automation and efficiency in the process. This may be not be fully clear and understood by the researcher / client
- The overall research process has become more fragmented with companies focusing on different stages
- - This has probably made it easier for fraud to enter the participant ecosystem
- From feedback, today's process can generate good data but there are many examples of poor / impacted results
- It is clear from available evidence that today's online sourcing is complex and researchers want more transparency to be able to understand and adapt to today's realities
- This document attempts to provide an overview of today's main online participant sources. It is not exhaustive and will adapt over time

**Key topic points  
covered in this  
document**



- Types of online sources available today
- How online sources are managed / accessed
- Illustration of the participant eco-system
  - With an illustration of a real-life example
- Considerations

# Common sample sources available online

(More detail of each in the appendix) (Based on CASE definitions 2017)



Source Type	Comment
Research Panel	A branded research community panel that is proprietary (owned and actively managed by the sample provider) for sole purpose of taking surveys and associated work. Most are built through “convenience” non-statistical methods (typically known as “access” panels). E.g. Bilendi, Netquest.
Loyalty/Rewards Community	A community where members complete various tasks in exchange for rewards. Members join the community with the expectation of a continued relationship with the community brand. The key difference in this source-type versus traditional research panels is that these members engage in activities beyond just market or survey research E.g. Prodege
Individual Affiliates/Publishers	An affiliate/publisher is an individual website owner, app owner, or business entity who earns commissions for referring traffic (monetizing traffic) to surveys by placing affiliate marketing advertisements such as links, banners, & intercept opportunities on their websites or app user workflows. This method is also used by mobile apps to monetise their traffic.
Affiliate/Publisher Networks	Affiliate networks aggregates individual affiliates and publishers in partnership relationships where survey participant’s membership is with the community they come from, not with a research panel. With affiliate network sampling, sample companies integrate their systems into web or mobile app communities outside their own platforms to monetise traffic.
Traditional River (or intercept)	This approach was used early in online research and is not prevalent today. Potential participants (“traffic”) are intercepted from pop-ups or related site-based advertising typically by the placement of impressions on these agreed sites and are invited to participate in a survey.
Databases/Targeted Lists	A list of potential market research participants who have provided their consent for market research.

## Accessing & Managing sources

The following are common ways that suppliers can provide online participants



Access	Comments
Direct	<p>Buyer interacts directly with proprietary sample owners. Sample can be delivered through manual processes, automated means or via DIY portal. It is expected that the supplier will only provide participants from their own assets and provide confirmation that will not outsource.</p>
Marketplace / Sample Exchange	<p>Online sample marketplace (or exchange) is a platform allowing a single buyer to interact with multiple suppliers in one place and vice versa. Marketplaces are comprised of a supplier network connected to the platform to enable automated delivery of participants to surveys.</p> <p>Buyers typically have an option to interact with the platform via automated means or via DIY portal. The sample exchanges usually do not own the participants and tasks like incentivisation are managed by the source. Marketplaces can provide panel platforms for sub-sources to utilise.</p> <p>The sources available in a sample exchange are of various types e.g. proprietary panel, loyalty panels, affiliate networks, single publishers. Examples of sample exchanges are Cint, Pure Spectrum.</p>
Managed Network	<p>This is typically where an owner of a research panel has a network of outsourced suppliers (some suppliers integrated / some not) which they use to fulfil sample requirements. The network could include named Sample Exchanges.</p> <p>Different from Sample Exchanges which don't own their own participants, the management of the network will try to optimise respondent traffic towards their own assets e.g. proprietary research panel. Some suppliers will integrate other sources into their network to work seamlessly as one, so it may be less apparent that sample does not actually originate from the supplier you buy from.</p> <p>Typically, the quality checks and sampling process applied to their proprietary research panel are different to those applied to the outsourced suppliers e.g. PII available to be used in the quality process. Examples are Dynata, Toluna, Kantar Profiles.</p>
Source Agency	<p>Like a managed network but the supplier manages all sample source / sub-source tasks through manual process. That is there is not an automated process for feasibility, costing and sample ordering for non-owned assets.</p>



## Comments on accessing sources



### Sources are not always unique to any network / sample exchange

- Individual sources will feed into different networks and exchanges
- A Sample Exchanges can feed into other Sample Exchanges
- A Managed network can feed into other Managed networks
- Sample exchanges can feed into Managed networks and vice versa

### Sources and suppliers have different quality checks performed across the ecosystem

### Participants can belong to multiple sources

- Can be 10+ in the case of US

### It is possible for a company / individual to set up and sell participants from managed database / community / publisher

- The on boarding process, sanity checks before use, incubation period will vary across sources and suppliers and therefore the associated risk of fraud could vary

### % Proprietary Research panel for a survey from Managed Network can vary from 0% to 100%

**These previous points  
highlight why it is  
important to  
understand the sample  
ecosystem for your  
surveys**



- Clients / agencies work mainly with one or two participant suppliers to support a study
- However, the participant suppliers can work with multiple sources and potential sub-sources (if we consider for example sample exchanges)
- As an illustration of the participant supplier and source / sub-source relationship, the MRS carried out an audit on a survey which had significant issues.
  - It is probably a more extreme case but clearly demonstrates the importance of understanding the sample ecosystem



## An example from MRS audit

**There was a review of a survey with a high percentage of quality issues.**

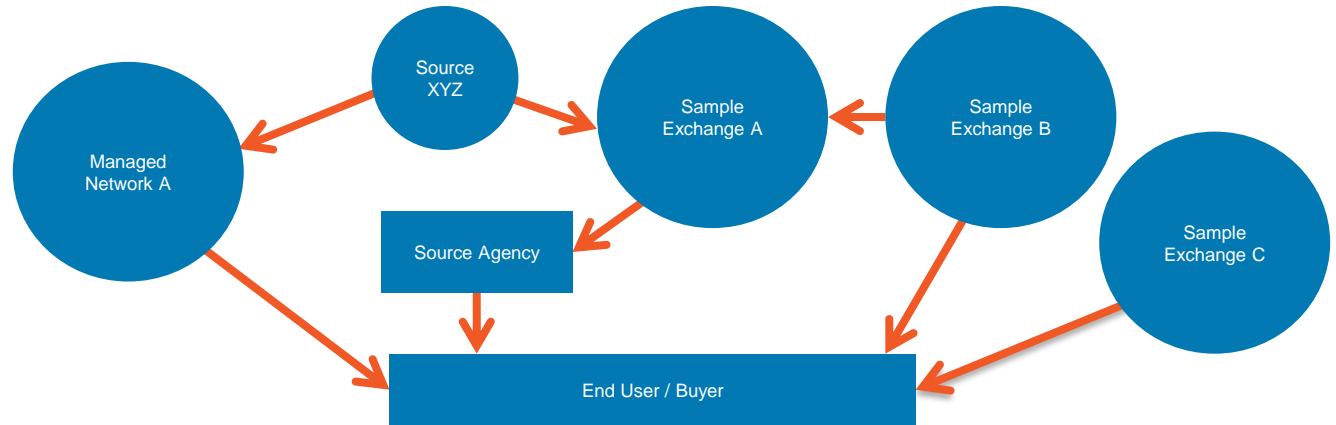
The end user buyer was not aware or provided information from any of the 4 suppliers on what sources / sub-sources were being used.

- There were fraud related quality issues with all 4 suppliers.

The source agency did not inform the buyer that they had outsourced all the sample to a Sample Exchange.

- The source agency – and therefore the end user - was also not aware that sample exchange B was feeding into Sample Exchange A.
- The end buyer was using Sample Exchange B directly.

The end user was not clear that the managed network was outsourcing some of the participants and thought they were using a proprietary panel for the all sample.



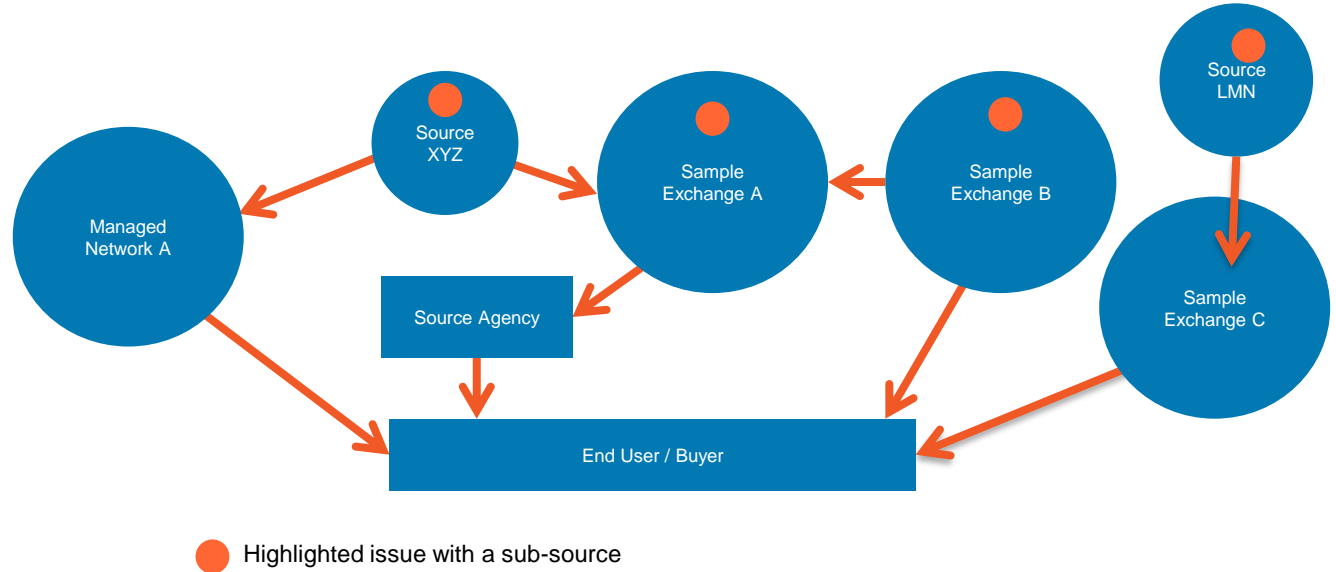




## MRS audit outcome

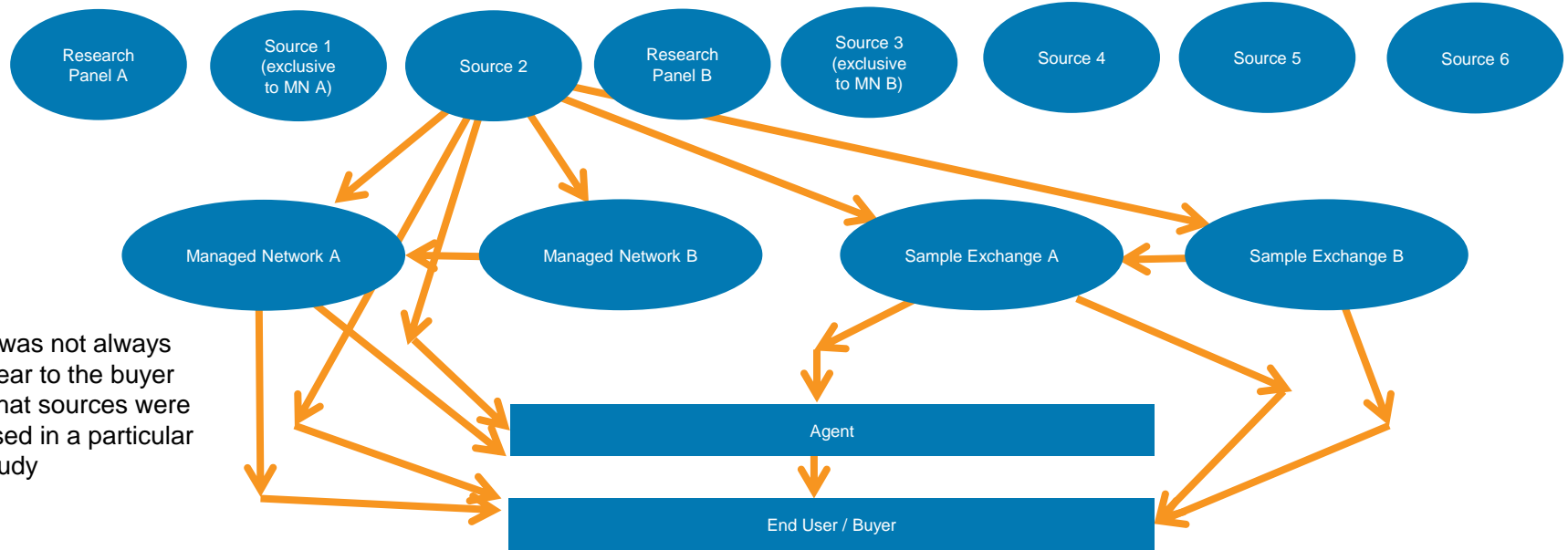
It became more clear when source was added to the data that there were certain drivers of the issues and that it was only specific sub-sources that were the main drivers

- One problematic "Source XYZ" appeared in two suppliers.
- Issues with Sample Exchange C primarily came from one sub-source.
- The key sub source with issues in Sample Exchange B directly, were also coming through the same sub-source from Sample Exchange B through Sample Exchange A.
- It should be noted that a high number of "Fraud" participants came from "Sample Exchange B" through "Sample Exchange A" through the source agency to the buyer with each having different quality checks and process in place!





For illustrative purposes “Source 2” has a number of routes it could take to access this survey based on its potential relationships with suppliers and agencies

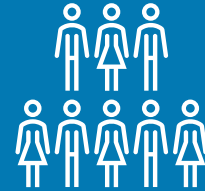


It was not always clear to the buyer what sources were used in a particular study

MN = Managed Network



## Comments on accessing sources



Details on sources used may not be transparent to the buyer (or along the sample purchase chain)

Overall, there are no standards (e.g. ISO) on checks made on the new sources before or after going live that could impact

- Data quality
- Data representivity, e.g. bias and coverage

E.g. Incubation periods i.e. what is the risk to the buyer if new sources are used (and how is that known through the sample purchase chain)

Some industry standards on quality checks before the participant / data gets to buyer / user

- The current ISO 20252 does have some data quality requirements in Annex A, however the problem is that the requirements need to reflect the wide variety of sample sources and the diversity of the sample ecosystem.
- No third-party measure on effectiveness of checks

It should be noted that given the levels of participants on multiple sources that deduplication needs to be managed by the final sample processor

- Deduplication techniques are challenging given known flaws and therefore not 100% guaranteed and therefore some level of deduplication can be expected



## Considerations



Transparency of sources used in survey research is important

- It can help to highlight areas of fraud
- It also helps highlight false positives e.g. if unusual pattern seen across multiple sources then it is more likely to be content driven and stop the over removal of “good” participants
- It can also help highlight any underlying bias in the sub-source and therefore possible impact on data
- When buying from multiple suppliers, the buyer should understand from the suppliers what sources each plan to use to reduce the risk of overlap

Overview of quality checks is needed

- What is happening, how and when and any measure of effectiveness across all sources used?
- How are deduplication checks being handled, and who is managing this process and how effective are they?



**Appendix (CASE Definitions)**  
**"Coalition for Advancing  
Sampling Excellence"**



## Research Panel

- A branded research community panel that is proprietary (owned and actively managed by the sample provider).
- A research panel has the following characteristics:
  - People opt-in to join the panel for the sole purpose of participating in market research on multiple occasions over time. They have a direct (first-party) relationship with the panel, rather than with a third party.
  - Panellists participate in an incentive program that is managed by the sample provider; points are accrued over time to be redeemed through a library or catalogue of items (or cash) once a redemption threshold is met.
  - Personally identifiable information (PII) is collected enabling identity validation.
  - Provides active management of panellist activity and ability to recontact.
  - Additional profiling intelligence are collected and maintained by the sample provider.
- Can be built by “convenience” methods (as per majority of today’s panels) or through “statistical” means (as per some social based research panels).





## Loyalty/Rewards Community

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- A community where members complete various tasks in exchange for rewards. Members join the community with the expectation of a continued relationship with the community brand. The key difference in this source-type versus traditional research panels is that these members engage in activities beyond just market or survey research.
- A loyalty/rewards community has the following characteristics:
  - The tasks cover a range of activities which may include watching videos or ads, signing up for services, or completing surveys.
  - Members typically earn relevant points, miles, coupons, or gift-cards which are associated with the rewards program they originally signed up for (i.e. airline miles for completing a survey).
  - Personally identifiable information (PII) is collected enabling identity validation and ability to recontact.
  - Additional profiling intelligence are collected and maintained by the community manager.







## Individual Affiliates/Publishers

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An affiliate/publisher is an individual website owner, app owner, or business entity who earns commissions for referring traffic (monetising traffic) to surveys by placing affiliate marketing advertisements such as links, banners, & intercept opportunities on their websites or app user workflows.

This method is also used by mobile apps to monetise their traffic.

- Affiliates have the following characteristics:
  - The survey participant's membership is with the affiliate's website or app.
  - Members can choose to participate in a variety of activities to earn currency provided by the affiliate/publisher -- Activities can include reading articles, playing games, watching videos, taking surveys, shopping, etc.
  - Participants are incentivised through proprietary loyalty programs/currency associated with the affiliate.







## Affiliate/Publisher Networks

Affiliate networks aggregates individual affiliates and publishers in partnership relationships where survey participant's membership is with the community they come from, not with a research panel. With affiliate network sampling, sample companies integrate their systems into web or mobile app communities outside their own platforms to monetize traffic.

### Sample companies...

- Send technical calls (survey requests) to communities to invite members to take surveys for incentives related to the community they belong to.
- Usually have a member account recorded on the affiliate partner database (demo, geo, other targeting) & can recontact them via an ID.
- Do not have the personally identifiable information (PII) or a direct member relationship with them.





## Traditional River (or intercept)

This approach was used early in online research and is not prevalent today. Potential participants (“traffic”) are intercepted from pop-ups or related site-based advertising typically by the placement of impressions on these agreed sites and are invited to participate in a survey.

- The rate of impressions can normally be controlled (e.g. every 1 in 5000 visitors).
- There is no long-term expectation of a relationship between the participant and any involved parties (origin-source, sample provider, research owner).
- There is no access to personally identifiable information (PII) for recontact and there is no profiling detail available.





## Databases/Targeted Lists

A list of potential market research participants who have provided their consent for market research. There may be restrictions in specific jurisdictions.

- Examples include, but are not limited to, client customer lists, healthcare provider lists, B2B professional lists Database/targeted lists will typically include:
  - Profiling or targeting information including demographic, behavioural or information related to a participant's professional life or activities.
  - Contact information such as email address or an identifier that can be used to link to contact information.





Thank you