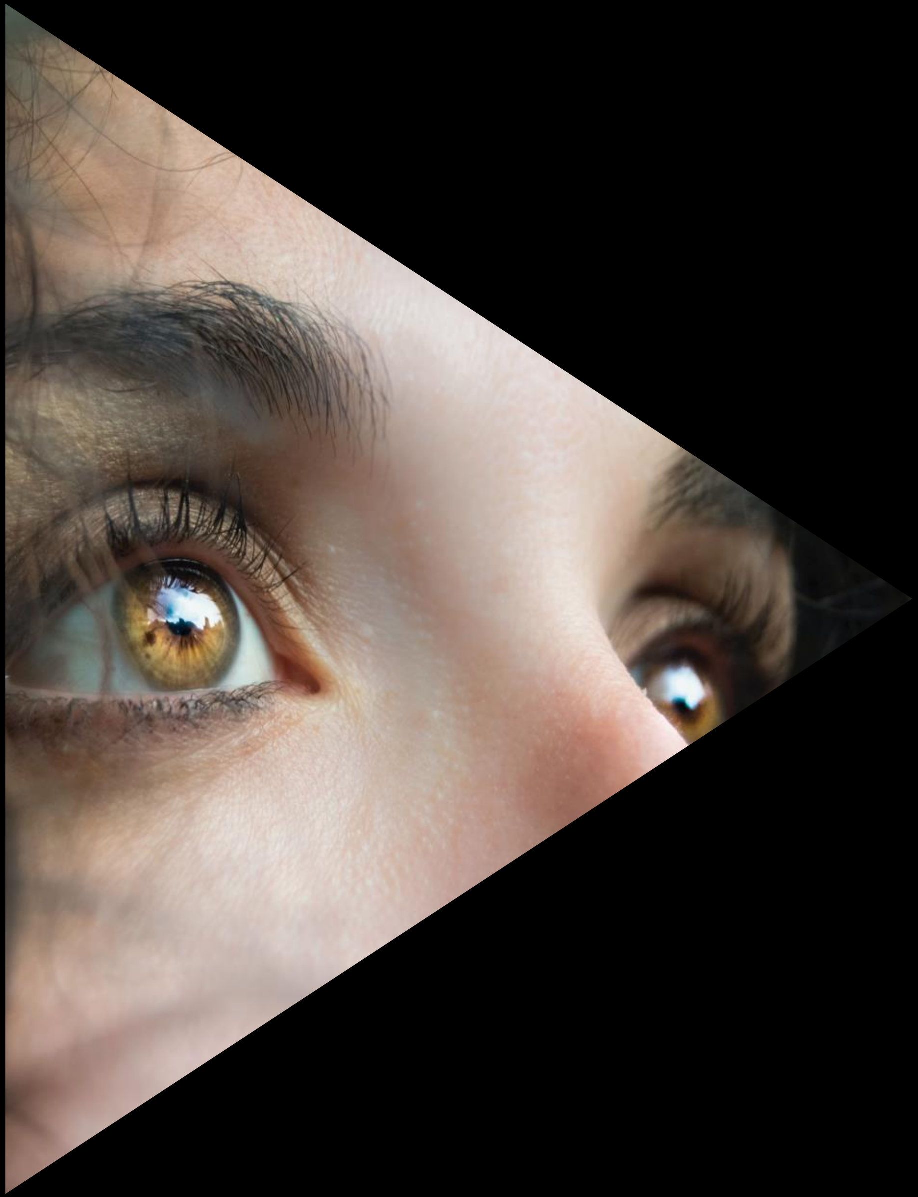


THE POWER OF 3: A JOURNEY THROUGH BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE AND MARKET RESEARCH...

...IN 6 SHORT ARTICLES

A BRIEF WORD

This compendium consists of six short articles recently published by Activate Research.

It demonstrates – in order – how behavioural science can add significant value **across all stages** of a research project…

...from 'three reasons to favour recruiting females over males for qualitative research' – to 'three reasons why clients don't take actions following research debriefs'.

As well as drawing on fields such as behavioural economics and personality psychology, it has a strong **practical focus**, based on real-life challenges and observations from 15 years in research…

…for example, how do we combat under-reporting of 'bad' behaviours in quantitative surveys?

How can we avoid delivering (or worse, sitting through) yet another debrief where the word 'unsurprisingly' crops up regularly?

Whether you specialise in **qualitative** or **quantitative** research, work agency or client side, this short compendium will contain something for you.

Chris Harvey
Founder of Activate Research

THE ARTICLES

1. **Three** reasons to favour recruiting females over males for qualitative research
2. **Three** key questions to include in concept testing research
3. **Three** ways to combat under-reporting of ‘bad’ behaviours
4. **Three** ways to increase confidence in online quantitative research findings
5. **Three** ways to avoid the dreaded ‘unsurprisingly’ in research debriefs
6. **Three** reasons why clients don’t take actions following research debriefs

THREE REASONS TO FAVOUR RECRUITING FEMALES OVER MALES FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Introduction

Are women really the 'fairer' sex? According to studies in personality psychology, females are indeed both more **trustworthy**[1] and more **compassionate**[2] than males.

Not only this, but recent research based on a survey with over 300,000 people in the UK[3] reveals **three other** specific traits which suggest females may overall be better qualitative research participants than males.

Below I explain why the more typically female traits of **emotionality**, **modesty**, and **anxiety** may be conducive to better qualitative research outcomes:

1. EMOTIONALITY

In a recent study, the self-reported difference for emotionality – the degree to which an individual experiences and expresses emotions – between females and males was the **highest of all 30 traits measured**. Females scored significantly higher on average[3]. In a number of research topics, a greater overall likelihood to express emotions to researchers will be valuable. In addition, a greater likelihood to experience emotions makes females better equipped for **certain types of research**, such as for example helping to create persuasive communications.

1. Dollar, D., Fisman, R., & Gatti, R. (2001). Are woman really the "fairer" sex? Corruption and women in government. Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 46, 423-429.
2. Article from The Times: retrieved from https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fair-ladies-why-women-are-the-more-objective-sex-wkm5hl6wz
3. Kajonius, P.J., & Johnson, J. (2018). Sex differences in 30 facets of the five factor model of personality in the large public (N = 320, 108). Personality & Individual Differences, 129, 126-130.

2. MODESTY

Less convincingly but still highly statistically significant, females were also found to be more likely than males to be **modest**[1]. In practice this means overall, females are less likely to boast about themselves (particularly useful for maintaining harmony in a group scenario) and more likely to provide **humble**, **grounded**, **unpretentious** research responses.

3. ANXIETY

Finally, females were found, on average, to be more anxious than males[1] – with again, the difference being statistically significant. Anxiety correlates highly with **compliance**[2], suggesting that females may be more likely than males to fully **engage** and participate in qualitative research – and more likely to show up in the first place.

And finally…

Personality insights can also provide very useful context in the **analysis** and **interpretation** of qualitative (and quantitative) research findings.

For example, females may be perceived to be more emotionally engaged than males with a particular concept being tested in qualitative research.

However, this 'insight' may in fact turn out to be less to do with specific aspects of the concept – and more to down to simple trait differences.

1. Kajonius, P.J., & Johnson, J. (2018). Sex differences in 30 facets of the five factor model of personality in the large public (N = 320, 108). Personality & Individual Differences, 129, 126-130.
2. Gudjonsson, G.H., Sigurdsson, J.F., & Brynjolfsdottir, B. (2002). The relationship of compliance with anxiety, self-esteem, paranoid thinking and anger. Psychology Crime and Law, 8.

THREE KEY QUESTIONS TO INCLUDE IN CONCEPT TESTING RESEARCH

Introduction

A key objective for any new concept is clearly to achieve some form of **differentiation**, and to stand out from the crowd.

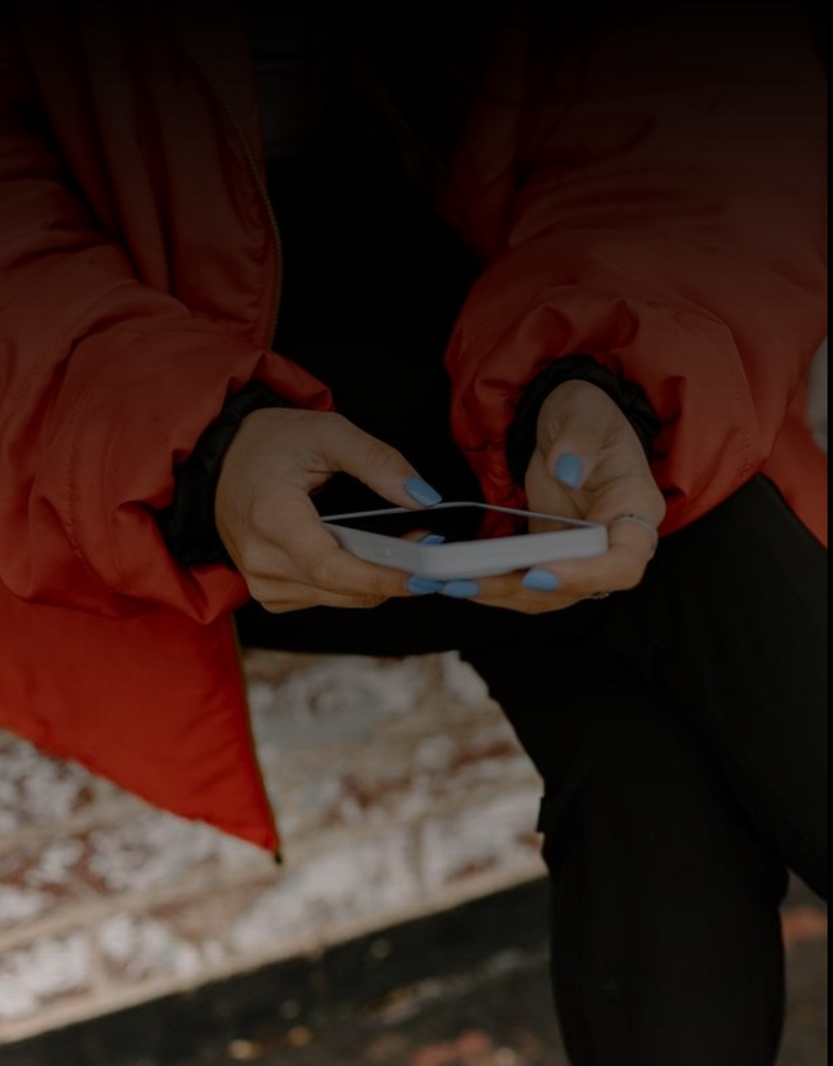
However, much research in behavioural science attests to the key role **past experiences** play in shaping human judgment and decision-making.

The importance of feelings such as **familiarity** and **comfort** should therefore not be under-estimated in concept testing research – with people having a deep need for present experiences to be consistent with those from the past.

Below are three key questions to include in concept testing research. All are aimed at ensuring new concepts fit inconspicuously into target customer expectations:

1. DOES THE NEW CONCEPT LOOK, SOUND, OR TASTE LIKE A <BRAND X> PRODUCT 'SHOULD'?

Whether through direct experience, advertising or any other means, target customers will likely have some **preconceptions about your (client's) brand**. If the new concept is judged to be too different from what people expect of the brand (which, by the way, may well be quite different to how it is seen internally) there could be a problem.



2. DOES THE NEW CONCEPT LOOK, SOUND, OR TASTE LIKE THE PRODUCT TYPE 'SHOULD'?

Similarly, target customers are highly likely to have expectations as to how a particular **product type** should look, sound, or taste. This isn't to say that the new concept won't be successful if it is judged to be vastly different – however, it had better have some very redeeming features if it's to be given proper consideration.

3. DOES THE NEW CONCEPT PROVIDE THE KEY, OBVIOUS BENEFITS THE PRODUCT TYPE 'SHOULD'?

Lastly, the majority of buyers will likely have expectations as to what they can **achieve** from using products like the one you (or your client) is proposing. While your new concept could (or should) have some new benefit, this must be **in addition to** what people have already come to expect from existing products.

And finally…

The above questions are not to diminish the importance of **uniqueness** and **differentiation,** nor can they be expected to produce definitive conclusions on their own.

However, through inclusion in concept testing research, they can play an important part in helping to avoid creating the next 'new Coke'.

Activate Research

THREE WAYS TO COMBAT UNDER-REPORTING OF ‘BAD’ BEHAVIOURS

Introduction

Particularly in quantitative research, respondents are often asked to report the frequency with which they perform certain behaviours.

Depending on the research topic, **social desirability bias**[1] can have an unintended, yet significant, distorting impact on respondent reporting.

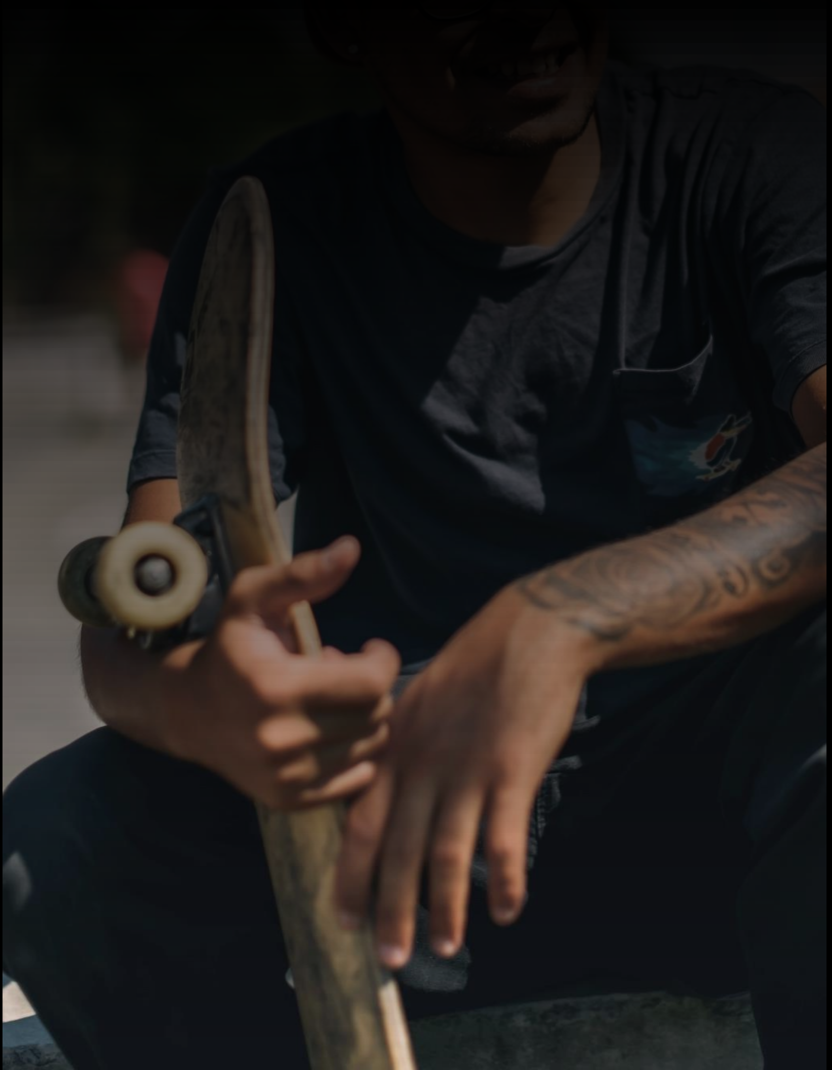
This either takes the form of under-reporting of ‘bad’, or unreasonable behaviour – or over-reporting of ‘good’ behaviour.

Below are three ways researchers can successfully combat the first of these – under-reporting of ‘bad’ behaviour:

1. MAKE THE BEHAVIOUR MORE ACCEPTABLE

If, for example, we want to understand average alcohol units consumed per week, we may well be concerned some respondents might **under-report** their behaviour. By ensuring higher levels (e.g. 30 units / week) appear more towards the **middle** of answer group options presented to respondents (rather than towards the upper end), we help to **normalise** this level of consumption, making it seen as more natural and accepted.

1. Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: a literature review. Quality & Quantity, 47, 2025–2047.



2. ASK ABOUT OTHERS

An alternative approach, which draws on social psychology, doesn't attempt to counter social desirability bias as regards a respondent's own responses. Instead, by asking respondents to report on, for example, the alcohol consumption habits of **other people** like them, we are able to get more accurate and honest answers.

3. DISGUISE THE QUESTION

Finally, an advanced quantitative method called the **unmatched count technique** has recently been used successfully for this same purpose[1]. This involves asking respondents to admit – at a **total level** – to how many, of a number of different behaviours (one of which is the behaviour of interest), they have performed. While this approach does not allow us to find out which **individual** respondents are under-reporting 'bad' behaviour, critically it helps us deduce a more accurate incidence level for this behaviour at the total sample level.

And finally…

By using one – or preferably more than one – of the above methods, we can make sure we get a much clearer picture when it comes to understanding true incidences of 'bad' behaviours.

1. https://www.thearticle.com/the-truth-about-our-behaviour-in-a-crisis

THREE WAYS TO INCREASE CONFIDENCE IN ONLINE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

A previous research agency client once ran an online quantitative study where nearly three in four respondents produced **clearly contradictory responses** to two agreement scale statements.

The two statements were polar opposites – designed to help identify 'low quality' respondents – and we found 41% agreed with both statements, while 31% disagreed with both. This left **just 28%** producing responses which could be described as consistent…!

Given these findings, how can end users of online quantitative research have confidence in how the average respondent answers **any survey question**?

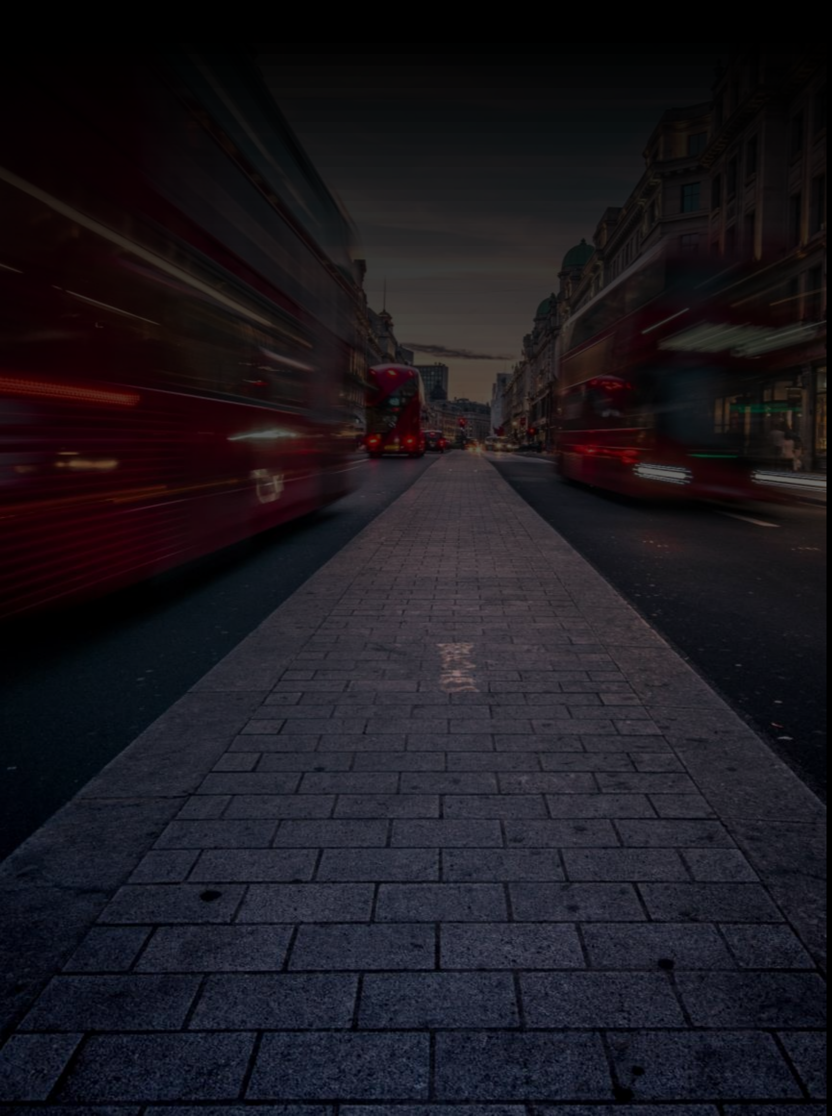
A typical solution is to remove 'low quality' respondents – however, if numbers are large (as above) this is unlikely to be desirable. Further, unlike in the clear-cut example above, this exercise can sometimes be highly subjective as well as time-consuming.

Instead, confidence in online quantitative research findings can be significantly enhanced through the three tips below:

1. LIMIT USAGE OF GRIDS

First, research has found that when compared to individual statements, grids produce greater variability in response[1]. This is consistent with the idea that respondents are more likely to produce random, haphazard responses when answering in grid format.

1. https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/curiosity/putting-matrix-grids-to-the-test/



2. KEEP SURVEYS SHORT

Second, confidence can be increased through not asking too much of respondents. One way to do this is to ensure quantitative surveys are no longer than they really need to be. One recent study suggested the ideal length for an online survey is a median of **10 minutes** – and the maximum survey length should be 20 minutes[1].

3. VALIDATE USING OTHER SOURCES

Finally, it is often valuable, wherever possible, to **validate** key data points against other, non-survey sources. These could include for example qualitative research findings, expert opinions, transactional (online or otherwise) data, and social media data. The greater the range of **non-survey** sources telling a similar story, the more confidence we can have in our own findings.

And finally…

Of course, in terms of individual questions, we can never completely eradicate the chance of a question being biased in some way – and in this respect the complete 'truth' will always remain elusive.

However, the above offers three simple and practical ways to ensure significantly greater confidence in online quantitative research findings.

1. Revilla, M., & Ochoa, C. (2017). Ideal and Maximum Length for a Web Survey. International Journal of Market Research, 59, 557-565.

THREE WAYS TO AVOID THE DREADED 'UNSURPRISING-LY…' IN RESEARCH DEBRIEFS

Introduction

How many times have you either sat through – or had to deliver – a market research debrief where the phrase **'unsurprisingly'** seemed to crop up rather too often?

Or perhaps the alternative phrases 'as expected' or 'as predicted' were occasionally used in order to provide a bit of variety?

While some projects simply require validation – of, for example a long-standing trend in behaviour in a particular sector – research is, for the most part, commissioned so that clients can discover **new information and insights**.

Below are three ways we can best go about ensuring clients are told something new:

1. THINK BROADLY

First, in the research design stage, researchers must think broadly. For example, in a recent project, in trying to fully understand consumer behaviour, we took the view that attitudes towards the product in question might not be the **only** potential driver of behaviour. In particular, we considered the possibility that inherent **personality traits** might be playing a role. In the research, we discovered they were, with one trait – propensity for regret – being especially influential.

2. BE BRAVE

Second, and also in the design stage, it takes bravery from both researcher and client to think outside the box and **experiment** with new approaches. In the example above, we were fortunate that the client was happy for us to consider an **additional alternative angle** in our research design – and ultimately, they were rewarded with new, enlightening, fresh insights. While it is perhaps easier for agencies to be brave with clients they already know, equally a fresh new approach might be just what a client is looking for.

3. BEWARE CONFIRMATION BIAS

Finally, in both design and analysis stages, researchers need to be very careful they're not simply looking out for **information to confirm what they already know or believe**. This can be especially difficult in qualitative research, where interpretation of research findings to fit existing beliefs or patterns can easily be done without conscious awareness.

And finally…

If you're a researcher, the three tips above can help ensure you don't end up with a debrief littered with the phrases 'unsurprisingly', 'as expected', or 'as predicted'.

For clients wanting to find out new information and insights in research debriefs, also think broadly, be brave – and look for evidence your agency is doing the three things above.

THREE REASONS WHY CLIENTS DON'T TAKE ACTIONS FOLLOWING RESEARCH DEBRIEFS

Introduction

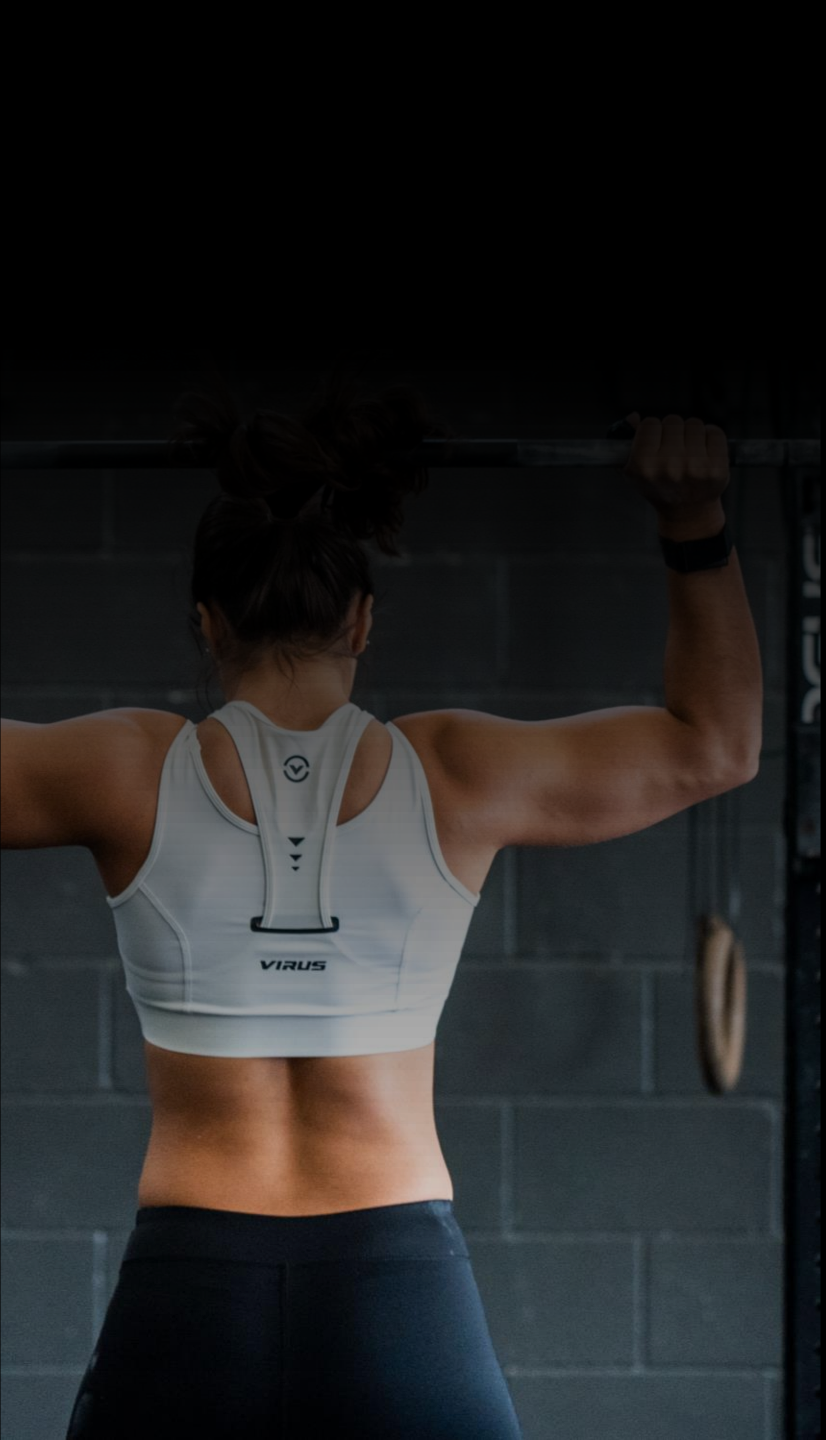
There have been significant efforts by many research agencies to understand how behavioural science can help us to better understand and influence consumers, physicians, and other groups.

However, much less knowledge has been translated regarding how agencies can improve the chances their research findings will be understood – and crucially – **acted on** by clients.

Below are three reasons why clients may not be taking actions off the back of agencies' research:

1. NO NEW INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED

Most simply of all, despite what you think (and what they, politely, say) your agency may not actually have told the client anything **new**. A combination of **risk aversion** and **confirmation bias** (also see article five) – on the part of the client and / or the research agency – may have led to the key findings simply being a validation of the client's existing beliefs.



2. TOO MUCH INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED

However, it's also possible the agency has told the client too much. **Choice overload** occurs as a result of too many choices being available, with a common outcome being **inaction**. Agencies may have thought they were over-delivering, but the client may be left not being able to 'see the wood for the trees'.

3. THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IS TOO DIFFERENT

Finally, and most subtly, agencies' key insights / recommendations may be **too different** from how the client currently, and historically, has thought about the problem. The **backfire effect** occurs when people reject new evidence that 'should' cause them to doubt their beliefs – instead **strengthening** their original stance. If agencies insights and recommendations are 'fresh' – yet deviate too radically from how the client has (often for years or even decades) thought about the problem, there's a strong chance they'll be quickly discarded.

And finally…

By incorporating knowledge from behavioural science into the creation of research insights and recommendations, we can increase the likelihood that findings will be **acted on**.

This will not only help clients' businesses, but also help agencies build stronger and deeper connections with them.

Activate Research helps to inspire change and drive growth through enabling a deeper understanding of how people think and why they behave as they do.

To understand more about our primary research projects and consultancy offers please contact us on **+44 (0) 7816 015772** or **Chris.Harvey@activate-research.com**