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AI Best Practices for Researchers

Insights from the Fusion Hill research team

AI Best Practices

THE TOPIC OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) HAS BEEN SEEMINGLY UNESCAPABLE LATELY, impacting everything from education and entertainment to health care and finances. Within market research, some professionals have been thrilled with an opportunity to streamline tasks, using AI to summarize and analyze data, translate interviews, generate content, and complete other everyday tasks. Others have been leery after experiencing or hearing about pitfalls, including:

- Biased outputs, such as skewed data
- Fabricated, inaccurate information
- Lack of ethical standards
- Security and privacy risk
- Inability to predict emotional reactions
- Incompatibility with current processes

With the significant pros and cons of AI, our qualitative research team hears frequent questions about how we're using it - and what we recommend for our clients. Here's a quick overview of what we've learned and how we've honed our own approach.

Recommended Reads

- Quirk's Media warns of [AI's threat to B2B research integrity](#)
- Quirk's Media examines [ethical risks of AI in research](#)
- Quirk's Media uncovers [participant fraud in qualitative research](#)
- Quirk's Media on the [challenges of synthetic survey participants](#)

A Time-Saving Tool for Manual Tasks and Ideation

WE'VE FOUND AI TO BE MOST HELPFUL - AND TRUSTWORTHY - IN FOUR WAYS.



Taking on manual tasks. AI has completed straightforward tasks well, like constructing field schedules and translating them into alternate time zones - freeing our researchers up to focus on more strategic work.



Articulating ideas. On occasions when we're stuck on the best way to articulate an insight, AI can serve as a brainstorming partner with prompts such as "I'm thinking that there's some sort of insight around x, y and z. What are some ways I could express this idea?"



Creating building blocks. AI tools have been useful in generating ideas and frameworks as we set up research methodologies, providing options for discussion guide outlines, expanding on screener questions and ideating workshop activities.



Organizing information. If given lists of details, AI tools can organize them into themes - again, allowing our team to devote more time to analyzing results and creating effective deliverables.

Recommended Reads

- Quantilope highlights [AI tools for market research](#)

A Carefully Watched (or Avoided) Sidekick

AI CAPABILITIES ARE CONSTANTLY EVOLVING, SO WE PAY CLOSE ATTENTION to the latest watch-outs and diligently test any capabilities before employing them. When we're wary of AI not being able to provide the accuracy we expect or to adhere to ethical standards, we set clear guidelines or avoid its use completely. Those instances currently include:



Finding quotes. When using AI tools to assist in pulling quotes from transcripts – one of our more labor-intensive tasks – we've had mixed results. Sometimes AI can help efficiently find the proverbial needle in the haystack; other times, it can hallucinate quotes, especially when reviewing a lot of transcripts. This is true even when prompts give direction to select only verbatims. That's why we independently verify every quote if using AI.



Secondary research. Though AI tools can be helpful as a component of secondary research, its inability to distinguish between trustworthy, thoughtful sources and poor-quality online clickbait or filler content means it can't be trusted to operate independently. Even when providing our own inputs, such as a set of articles, we've found it's essential to fact-check all sources and reference points to ensure we eliminate any misinterpretations.



Summarizing interviews. AI-generated summaries – including those baked into our research platforms, like Otter and Discuss.io – are typically weak at identifying and understanding what’s important. For example, they often prominently include our opening interview disclaimers when crafting themes or include unnecessary details. They also can’t deliver the type of nuance we’re looking for in their “sentiment analysis,” which finds just positive versus negative. With these limitations in mind, we use only AI platforms that allow us to make pointed asks about specific topics from a conversation.



Generating initial insights. We’ve found that AI can play a useful role in building out insights, but we’re diligent in employing it only *after* we’ve done our initial human analysis of key ideas and insights. That’s because while AI can generate some helpful ideas, such as top takeaways, it generally lacks significant pieces or key nuances. Although what AI delivers may appear to be polished language, its takeaways may not be the most strategic way to organize information in relation to a project’s objectives.

Recommended Reads

- HBR explores how [AI is being used for market research](#)
- Quirk’s Media illustrates how [research and insight professionals are approaching AI](#)

Looking Ahead – with Excitement and Caution

WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY EMERGING CONSTANTLY, WE'RE CONTINUALLY TESTING THINGS AND TRYING AGAIN -

across multiple platforms with enterprise-grade accounts to ensure protection of confidential data. What hasn't worked well so far may work in the future, and we're open to what's ahead.

We're also excited to be learning with our clients, some of whom have asked us to experiment with available tools. In one project, specifically on the topic of AI, we delivered our own insights side-by-side with an AI-generated list. The results were clear: In the case of generating insights, human minds can't be beat. This was an interesting learning experience for our team and our client.

Other clients have asked us to use AI in specific ways and then report on how it worked. Examples include conducting secondary research to help shape discussion guides for interviews and exploring how AI can contribute to qualitative research.

Four Recommendations for Smart AI Use

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO STREAMLINE PROCESSES, YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

We love efficiencies too. Yet ensuring that our insights are accurate, representative, and full of nuance and emotion will remain our highest aim – and any use of AI at Fusion Hill must align with our high standards. Our research team's experience has led to four best practices you might consider for your own team.

- 1. Eliminate your time wasters.** If you have manual tasks that take away from more strategic ones, such as condensing and grouping information, consider whether AI might be useful.
- 2. Use AI to expand your options.** While there's no replacement for a good old group brainstorm, AI can help generate more ideas, paths or options. But definitely check those ideas against your objectives to ensure they're a good match.
- 3. Treat AI as a gut check, not the first pass.** Relying on AI insights as a first step can easily box you in. Instead, think of it as an assist, adding onto your own human-generated ideas.
- 4. Keep trying.** With AI, things are changing every day. What didn't work yesterday might work today, so it's worth keeping your eyes on the latest AI news and reviews and continuing to test AI tools yourself.

Let's Connect!

Want to learn more about how Fusion Hill can help you explore this topic and others? We'd love to connect!



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