

# ESOMAR Guidelines on Tape and Video-recording and Client Observation of Interviews and Group Discussions

## Introduction

### Recommendations

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Tape and video recording of interviews are now commonly used in research and widely accepted by respondents. Two issues arise under the ICC/ESOMAR International Code of Marketing and Social Research Practice:

- 1.What form of permission should be obtained from respondents when such techniques are used?
- 2.How far, and under what safeguards, may tape or video recordings be played or supplied to people outside the research organisation carrying out the research?

Video-recording presents the most obvious problems. First, it is far more likely that a respondent may be identified from a video than from a tape recording. Second, it is also more likely that requests will be made by clients, advertising agencies etc to see a video recording, and/or to have a copy of this, than in the case of a tape recording.

If a copy of a video recording passes out of the hands of the research organisation it becomes even more important, although more difficult, to ensure its proper use and to protect respondents' anonymity. This problem is most acute in the case of business-to-business, medical and other research among special sub-groups of the population where there is much higher probability that some of the respondents may be identifiable by people who subsequently see the recording; but in principle it applies to all types of surveys.

Public interest in data protection and with avoiding unnecessary intrusions on privacy means that researchers must therefore ensure that tape and video recording is used with great care and with appropriate safeguards for the rights of respondents. This is provided for by Rule 7 of the International Code. The present Guideline sets out in more detail the ways in which this Rule should be applied in practice.

Similar considerations arise where an interview or group discussion is to be observed by a client or his representatives (including advertising agency staff, etc.), whether for quality control purposes or to gain a better understanding of the findings of the research. This is especially the case where the fact of being observed is not easily apparent to respondents, for example where the observation is in a separate viewing room via closed circuit television. The final recommendation in this Guideline therefore deals with client observation of interviews.

## Recommendations

### **Respondents' agreement to the use of recording**

Respondents must be told - normally at the beginning of the interview or group discussion - that tape or video recording is to be used. Such recording must not be used where any

respondent objects to it. (The same procedure must also be followed where closed circuit television is to be used.)

The only exceptions where notification in advance is not essential are:

- (i) where a recording is made exclusively for supervisory, control or analysis purposes and where it will be seen or heard only by the interviewer, moderator, supervisor or researcher working on the survey.
- (ii) In a situation where the respondents' awareness that a recording is being made might lead to atypical behaviour. Examples could be studies of how people handle a product or package or carry out a particular task. (However, experience shows that in most interview or discussion situations prior knowledge that a recording is being made does not - when correctly handled - distort respondents' responses.)

In such cases respondents must still be told about the recording at the end of the interview, and be given the opportunity to hear or see the relevant parts of the recording and to have these destroyed if they so wish.

### **Client rights to copies of the original data**

Under Rule 22 of the International Code the client is entitled to be supplied, at cost, with duplicate copies of the original survey information obtained from respondents provided that this has been anonymised. Where this information is held in the form of audio or video recordings, rather than on questionnaires, there is usually no problem if it is supplied to the client in the form of anonymised transcripts or anonymous audio recordings (although in both cases care may be needed to remove identifying comments or other clues from the material). In the case of video recordings the danger of respondent identification is much greater; and in this and other cases where the anonymity Rule might be at risk the following recommendations must be followed.

### **Safeguards on the release of recordings**

Recordings must not be allowed out of the hands of the researcher or research organisation carrying out the study unless explicit permission has previously been obtained from all the respondents included in the recording.

Where such permission is to be obtained the researcher must ensure that respondents are given as much relevant information as possible about the future use of the recording, in particular:

- To whom the recording is to be given
- To whom it is likely to be shown
- For what purposes it is likely to be used

In particularly sensitive cases, the possibility (where technically feasible) of blurring or obscuring the identifying characteristics of respondents should be considered when a video recording is to be released outside the research organisation. In certain cases it may be sufficient to release the soundtrack only.

When a recording is released in conformity with these recommendations it should be labelled with the appropriate restrictions on the purposes for which it may be used. The researcher must also ensure, under Rule 29 of the International Cole, that the recipient of the recording is aware of the requirements of the Code and the need to abide by these (the restrictions on the use of recordings should be made known at the start of the project where there is any possibility that the client might later ask to see copies of these). The recipient should be told that permission must be obtained from the researcher (and where appropriate the respondents) before the recording is used for any other purpose not previously agreed; and that under no circumstances may the recording be used for non-research purposes such as promotion or direct sales activities.

If any part of a recording is to be played (but not handed over) by the researcher to anyone other than authorised research personnel within his own organisation, the researcher must ensure that the requirements of Rule 4 of the International Code are fully met. No reference may be made to the identity of any of the respondents involved without their prior permission.

### **Client Observation of Interviews**

In certain cases clients and their representatives may be allowed under the International Code to observe an interview or group discussion at the time it is carried out (with or without the simultaneous use of recording equipment). Wherever this happens the researcher must ensure that all such observers are fully aware of the requirements of the International Code and agree to abide by these.

The researcher must also try to ensure that such observers do not include people who are likely to know, or have any direct dealings with, any of the individual respondents being interviewed (for example client sales staff in the case of a survey among business managers or doctors). If there is any danger that this requirement will not be met, or that the respondents' rights to anonymity might be otherwise breached, respondents should be told in advance about the presence of the observer(s) and their consent obtained to this. The actual identity of the client need not be revealed unless asked for by the respondents. It is in any case good practice always to inform respondents, where this is not already obvious to them, that the interview or discussion is being observed by other persons.

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