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# How to beat the bots

An open letter on data fraud to the insights industry

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## abstract

As bot technology grows more sophisticated, the insights industry is experiencing a data quality crisis that threatens to eventually replace human-generated responses with synthetic data. Forward-thinking researchers are proposing comprehensive solutions that eliminate fraudsters' ability to game the system through innovative technological and structural approaches.

The consumer insights industry should thrive in this digital age, where connecting with consumers has never been easier. Instead, we're facing a data fraud crisis, initiated by years of neglect toward the respondent experience. This crisis is undermining trust and threatening our future. Despite advances in fraud detection, bot attacks are escalating. We must shift from defensive measures to proactive, structural change to move forward.

Kantar's report, *The State of Online Research Panels*, reveals that "researchers are discarding on average up to 38% of the data they collect due to quality concerns and panel fraud...with one prospect citing they had to return 70% of data provided by a leading panel provider." And this report is not an outlier. A study by Greenbook found that up to 30% of online survey responses are fraudulent and a LinkedIn Pulse article pegged the number at 40%. Data fraud is a subset of data quality but it's the focus of this letter because it represents the biggest single threat to our industry. Fraud alone has been estimated at 15%-30% of responses, costing the industry billions annually, financially and reputationally (Fast Company, 2022).

The secret's now out and our industry's data fraud issues are getting public attention. The rise in survey bots and the resulting data quality crisis is no longer under wraps and media coverage is making clients – and their leadership – fully aware of it. With budgets and jobs at stake, clients are taking this more seriously than ever. Every day we delay in solving this problem brings us closer to a major data fraud scandal that will shake the industry.

## Years of mistreatment

So, how did we get here? Price pressure from the commodification of sample responses has resulted in years of respondent mistreatment, driving away high-quality participants. Meanwhile, sample providers' business models require constant respondent recruitment, often by any means, just to maintain sample pool size. So they resort to open-source recruiting, where shields at the