

Guideline Concerning Recording and Observation of Group Discussions and Qualitative Interviews

This guideline is issued by the ADM Arbeitskreis Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforschungsinstitute e.V., the ASI Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Institute e.V., the BVM Berufsverband Deutscher Markt- und Sozialforscher e.V. and the D.G.O.F. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Online-Forschung e.V.

1. Introduction

Group discussions and qualitative interviews are observed and recorded for the purpose of their scientific analysis. In terms of their purpose, the methods used correspondent to answers being written down in questionnaires that do not bear the respondents' names, or to data being stored in a non-personalised form in the case of computer-aided interviews.

Since in the case of audio recording the original sound and in the case of video recording the original sound and image is stored, it is necessary to obtain permission of the participants in a discussion or the respondents in an interview for the recording to be made – over and above their readiness to take part. This permission only has legal effect in connection with the statements that must be made in this context towards the persons concerned, in particular with the assurance that results will only be presented in an anonymised form and that data will not be transmitted to third parties in such a way as to allow individuals to be identified.

In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in a group discussion even during the discussion (and hence also on the recording) the participants should **not introduce themselves by their own names** and also shall **not be addressed by their names**.

For the treatment of the addresses of participants in group discussions and qualitative interviews the rules apply as laid down in the "Guideline on the Treatment of Addresses in Market and Social Research".

2. Participation of the client

If the client commissioning a group discussion wishes to get an idea of the course of such a discussion on his own – beyond the report submitted by the agency conducting the research – this request may be granted subject to the following conditions:

1. A client representative **observes the course** of the group discussion or a single interview via a video recording **in the premises of the research agency** either at the same time (via a monitor in a neighbouring room) or by watching the video at a later time. This procedure is acceptable if the participants have been **informed** previously and have expressed their **consent**.

2. A client representative **takes part in the group discussion** after having been **introduced** to all participants **in his capacity as a client**. There are no legal reasons against this procedure, however – depending on the topic – methodological ones may exist.

3. A client representative **takes part in the group discussion** but **does not make himself** known as such. This procedure requires that his participation is necessary for achieving the research goal and that compelling methodological reasons exist that prevent his capacity as a client from being made known.

4. The client **receives the video tape(s) for research purposes**. In this case it is necessary that

– the client signs the **undertaking** appended to this guideline (as a specimen) and hands it over to the research agency before receiving the recording and

– all participants have been **informed** drawing their attention to the undertaking and have expressed their **consent**.

5. The client's participation in the group discussion in form of a video link-up **at the same time** is equivalent to handing over the video tapes **subsequently**. It is therefore subject to the same restrictions.

6. Condition for **all** listed versions is that one can reasonably assume that the participant(s) is/are **not known** to the client (including the client's staff and external consultants) because of the selection criteria.

3. Observations of behaviour

The observation of a group discussion by means of a **one-way-mirror** is a procedure which is to be treated as equivalent to observing the discussion at the same time via a monitor. It is therefore acceptable subject to the same requirements as those for a monitor.

Observations of the behaviour of **single individuals** carried out in the (own or rented) **premises of the research agency** about which the persons in question cannot be told in advance for methodological reasons (e.g. studying the reading behaviour while leafing through a magazine) must not take place in a situation where the observed person is completely alone in a room and may thus assume himself/herself **to be unobserved**.

Instead of informing the person beforehand he/she shall be informed afterwards and asked to allow the recording or the observation result obtained in another way to be used for the purpose of the study. General information given before the observation was made (e.g. asking the individual to come into a studio and take part in a test there) does not replace the subsequent consent to using the observation.

4. Sound recordings

The legal classification of a **sound-only recording** depends on whether the names of the persons in question are also recorded or whether the recorded voices alone (e.g. in the case of prominent or other known figures) could already lead to the identification of the individual. If this is the case it is **not permissible to pass on** a sound-only recording **to third parties**.

5. Final provisions and disclaimer of liability

This guideline form part **of the professional rules** that govern German market and social research, resulting as they do from the **law** and the **methodological standards**, but also from **common practice**. It always applies when recordings and observations of group discussions and qualitative interviews are carried out in Germany or from Germany. It therefore also applies when they are carried out from abroad in order to conduct scientific research in Germany.

The principles and procedures described in this guideline represent, inter alia, the result of weighing up the **personal rights of the data subjects** on the one hand, and the **right to conduct research**, together with the resulting methodological requirements, as well as the **right to obtain information** on the other. However, the issuers cannot guarantee indemnity. If the situation is weighed up at a later time or by other authorities, it cannot be ruled out that different or stricter standards may result regarding the permissibility and use of recordings and observations of group discussions and qualitative interviews.

Undertaking

The institution described below as the Client is to receive the video recordings of the group discussion(s) on the subject of

from the research agency conducting the study, to be used **for research purposes**.

The number of video tape(s) is_____.

Before the video tapes can be handed over, it is necessary that all persons involved have been **informed** beforehand and have given their **consent**. This consent is documented by the research agency.

The Client hereby undertakes the following:

1. The recordings will only be used for research purposes and only to pursue the aims of the study.
2. The recordings will neither be passed on (incl. in the form of a copy) nor shown to third parties.
3. All persons to whom the recordings are legitimately shown will be informed as to the content of this undertaking and are bound by it in the same way.
4. Any attempt at reversing the anonymisation will be refrained from and prevented.
5. The recordings will be deleted at the latest three months after receipt.

This undertaking is part of the "Guideline Concerning Recording and Observation of Group Discussions and Qualitative Interviews" and thus belongs to the professional rules governing German market and social research.

Client (Name, Address):

Research Agency:
conducting the study

The following is authorised to make this declaration:

(Name)

(Place)

(Position in company)

(Date)