Communicating the Results

10

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should understand:

– Why communicating the results is a crucial element of every market research study.
– The elements that should be included in a written research report and how to structure these elements.
– How to communicate the findings in an oral presentation.
– The ethical issues concerning communicating the report findings to the client.

10.1   Introduction

Communicating results is key in any market research project. This includes giving clear answers to the investigated research questions and recommending a course of action, where appropriate. The importance of communicating marketing research results should not be underestimated. Even if the research has been carefully conducted, the recipients will find it difficult to understand the implications of the results and to appreciate the study's quality if you spend too little time and energy on communicating these. Clear communication may also set the stage for follow-up research. If you communicate the findings effectively, the clients, who may know little about market research and may even be unfamiliar with the specific market

research project, will understand them. Hence, the communication must be relevant for the addressed audience and provide a clear picture of the project.

Market researchers usually present their findings in the form of an oral presentation and written report. This report is the written evidence of the research effort and includes the details. Identifying the addressed audience is critical for both these points, as this determines how you can best communicate the findings. In this chapter, we discuss guidelines on how to effectively communicate research findings orally and in writing. We first discuss written reports before listing the basics of oral presentations. We also provide hints on how to acquire research follow-up. At the end of the chapter, we briefly review the ethical issues related to market research.

10.2   Identify the Audience

When providing reports (and presentations), you should keep the audience's characteristics and needs in mind and should tailor the report to their objectives. Imagine you are dealing with the marketing department of a company planning to launch a new product and needing to learn more about the potential customers' buying behavior. The knowledge and level of interest in the study might differ greatly within the department. While the managers, who commissioned the study, are generally familiar with its objective and design, others, who might be unaware of the background (e.g., the marketing director or the sales staff), must be informed about the research to allow them to understand the research findings. When preparing the report, you should consider the following questions:

– Who will read the report?
– Why will they read the report?
– Which parts of the report are of specific interest to them?
– What do they already know about the study?
– What information will be new to them?
– What is the most important point for them to know after they have read the report?
– What can be done with the research findings?

These questions help you determine the level of detail that should be included in your report. Furthermore, they reveal information that requires specific focus during the project. Remember, a successful report meets its audience's needs! However, not everything that you consider appropriate for your audience is appropriate. Nothing is worse than suggesting an idea that the audience finds unpalatable (e.g., saying that a specific senior management behavior or attitude is a major obstacle to success), or proposing a course of action that has been attempted before. Informal talks with the client are therefore vital before you present the results—never present findings formally without discussing them with the client first!

Further, you need to ask clients about their expectations and the recommendations they think will be made early in the project. Why would clients

spend $100,000 if you merely give them the answers they expect to get? Such discussions may help exceed clients' expectations in a way that is useful to them.

10.3   Guidelines for Written Reports

You should always keep the people addressed in written report in mind. Decision makers are generally unfamiliar with statistical details, but would like to know how the findings can help them make decisions. You should therefore avoid research jargon and state the key insights clearly without omitting important facts. There are several major rules to consider when writing a report (Armstrong 2010; Churchill and Iacobucci 2009):

1. The report must be *complete*; that is, it must contain all information that the reader needs in order to understand the research. Technical or ambiguous terms, as well as abbreviations and symbols, should be clearly defined and illustrated. Although you know what terms like heteroscedasticity or eigenvalue mean, the report reader probably won't! In addition, the report must provide enough detail to enable the reader to verify and replicate the findings if necessary. Bear in mind that the staff turnover in many organizations is high and that reports should therefore be stand-alone to allow those with little knowledge of the background to read and understand them.

2. The report must be *accurate*. The readers will base their assessment of the entire research project's quality on the presented report. Consequently, the report must be well written. For example, grammar and spelling must be correct, no slang should be used, tables must be labeled correctly, and page numbers should be included. If there are small errors, the reader may believe they are due to your lack of care and generalize about your analysis! Therefore, proofread (a proofreader should preferably do this) to eliminate obvious errors. Lastly, objectivity is an important attribute of any report. This means that any subjective conclusions should be clearly stated as such.

3. The report must be *clear* and language simple and concise:
   - Use short sentences.
   - Use simple and unambiguous words.
   - Use concrete examples to illustrate aspects of the research (e.g., unexpected findings). These can also be helpful if the audience has strong beliefs that are not consistent with your recommendation, which are often not implemented, because the client does not believe them.
   - Use the active voice to make the report easy to read and to help understanding.
   - Avoid negative words.
   - Use business language.
   - Avoid exclamation marks and do not use caps unnecessarily. Avoid the use of bold or italics for more than just a few words.

4. Follow the **KISS principle**: Keep it short and simple! This principle requires the report to be *concise*. And since it needs to be action-driven, the reader must immediately understand its purpose and the results, so start off with these. You should present the results clearly and simply. Important details can be shown in the appendix or appendices of the report, which should also not be overloaded with irrelevant material. In addition, keep in mind that each section's first sentences are the most important ones: They should summarize the main idea you want to convey in this section.

5. The report must be *structured* logically. This applies to the general structure of the report (see Table 10.1) and to the line of argumentation in each section. Make sure you avoid style elements that may distract the reader:

   - Avoid cross-references. Having to search elsewhere for important results is disruptive. For example, do not put important tables in the appendix.
   - Use footnotes instead of endnotes and as few as possible.
   - The structure should not be too detailed. As a rule of thumb, you should avoid using more than four levels.
   - A new level must include at least two sections. For example, if there is a Sect. 3.1.1, there must also be a Sect. 3.1.2.

10.4   Structure the Written Report

When preparing a written report, a clear structure helps readers navigate it to quickly and easily find those elements that interest them. Although all reports differ, we include a suggested structure for a research report in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 Suggested structure for a written research report

Title Page
Executive Summary
Table of Contents
1. Introduction
1.1 Problem definition
1.2 Research objectives
1.3 Research questions and/or hypotheses[a]
2. Methodology
2.1 Population, sampling method, and sample description
2.2 Quantitative and qualitative methods used for data analysis
3. Results
4. Conclusions and Recommendations
5. Limitations
6. Appendix

[a]In practice, the word hypotheses may be replaced by research question(s) or proposition(s)

10.4.1 Title Page

The title page should state the title of the report, the name of the client who commissioned the report, the organization or researcher submitting it, and the date of release. The heading should clearly state the nature and scope of the report. It may simply describe the research (e.g., "Survey of Mobile Phone Usage") or may outline the objectives of the study in the form of an action title (e.g., "How to Increase the Adoption of Wearable Technologies").

10.4.2 Executive Summary

The executive summary should appear first and is essential, because it is often the only section that executives read. This summary helps set the expectations of those who read more. Hence, this section must be short to allow busy executives to read it and should give them the essence (findings and recommendations) of the research. As a rule of thumb, the executive summary should not exceed 150 words. It should contain key findings and recommendations, and help the reader understand the full study. The executive summary also requires more structure. A common way of giving structure is to tell a story. Begin with a description of the problem, thereafter introducing the issues that make this difficult or complicated and describing how these give rise to a number of questions. Finally, lead the reader through your line of reasoning to the answer:

– *Situation*: Background information.
– *Difficulty or complication*: A short window of opportunity; a change from the previously stable situation; lack of performance due to unknown causes (i.e., the reason for your research study).
– *Question*: The scope and goal of your research study.
– *Answer*: Your findings and conclusions (and if the client requires this, also your recommendations).

10.4.3 Table of Contents

The table of contents helps the reader locate specific aspects of the report. The table of contents should correspond to the main report headings. It should also include lists of tables and figures with page references.

10.4.4 Introduction

This section should explain the project context to the reader. Questions to be answered include:

– Why was the study undertaken?
– What were the objectives and which key questions are answered?
– Is the study related to other studies and, if so, which findings did they produce?
– How is the report structured?

Besides introducing the background and purpose of the research, the introduction should briefly explain how the objectives and key questions are addressed. You should briefly mention the hypotheses or propositions tested during the research and how the research was approached (e.g., cluster analysis). You should ensure that Critical terms are defined. For example, aviation terms such as CASM (cost per available seat mile) require explanation. As a rule, the following three questions on the research should be answered in the introduction, but should be neither too detailed nor too technical:

– What was done?
– How was it done?
– Why was it done?

Keep in mind that the introduction should set the stage for the body of the report and the presentation of the results, but no more than this. You should only provide a detailed description of how you collected and analyzed the data in the next section of the report. Lastly, you should provide a brief summary of how the report is organized at the end of the introduction.

10.4.5 Methodology

In this section, you should describe the research procedure and the different (statistical) methods used to analyze the data. These must be presented precisely and coherently, allowing the reader to understand the analyses' process and basic principles. Always keep your audience in mind! If the audience is familiar with research methodology, you can describe the procedures in detail and skip the basics. If the client has little knowledge of research methodology, you should introduce these briefly. If you have an audience of whom some have a little and others more knowledge, you might want to move the basics to an appendix.

If not already stated in the previous section, you should define whether the study is exploratory, descriptive, or causal by nature and whether the results are based on primary or secondary data. If primary data are used, their source should be specified (e.g., observation or questionnaire). If a questionnaire was used, you should state whether it was administered by means of face-to-face interviews, telephone

interviews, or through web or mail surveys. Also explain why you chose this specific method.

The reader should also know the demographic or other relevant characteristics of the targeted survey population. This includes the geographical area, age group, and gender. While it is usually sufficient to describe the population in a few sentences, the sampling method needs more explanation: How was the sample selected? Which sampling frames were chosen (e.g., random, systematic, stratified)? In addition, information on the sample size, response rate, and sample characteristics is essential, as this indicates the results' reliability and validity.

You should include a copy of the actual instruments used, such as the questionnaire or the interview guide, the data collection protocol, and the detailed statistical analyses of the results, in the appendix, or present them separately. Although these are important to fully understand the characteristics of the research project, including them in the main text would make reading the report more difficult.

10.4.6   Results

In this section, you need to present the findings and describe how they relate to a possible solution to the research problem and how they influence the recommendations. There are several ways of presenting the results logically. You could, for instance, use the different research objectives as a guideline to structure this section and then analyze them one by one.

Another way is to first summarize the overall findings and then analyze them in relevant subgroups, such as the type of customer or geographical regions. Alternatively, you can classify the findings according to the data type or the research method if several were used. For example, you could first present the conclusions of the secondary data collection and then those derived from an analysis of the questionnaire.

Use tables and graphs when presenting statistical data, as they make the report and the data more interesting. Tables and graphs also structure information, thus facilitating understanding. Graphs often allow the researcher to visually present complex data, which might not be possible when only using tables. However, graphs can also be misleading, as they may be adjusted to favor a specific viewpoint (see the next section for examples).

> Results are often presented in Excel or Word format. Fortunately, Stata has built-in capabilities to export its results to Excel by means of export `excel` and `putexcel`. You can also output results to Word, using a package called `outreg2`, which is a Stata add-on. The following videos offer step-by-step

introductions to exporting results to Excel (first mobile tag) and Word
(second mobile tag):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUQ3E8hIQZE


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UemL7uYM6Lc

10.4.6.1 Window Dressing with Graphs

While graphs have the advantage that they can present complex information in a
way that is easily understandable, they can be used to mislead the reader. Experi-
ence with generating and interpreting graphs will help you spot this. In this section,
we show examples of how graphs can mislead. By shortening the x-axis in Fig. 10.1
(i.e., removing the years 2003–2007), it suggests a growth in the units sold
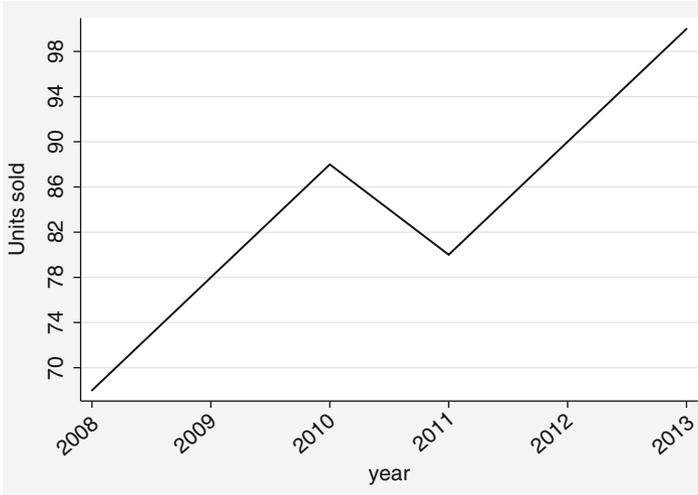(Fig. 10.2).
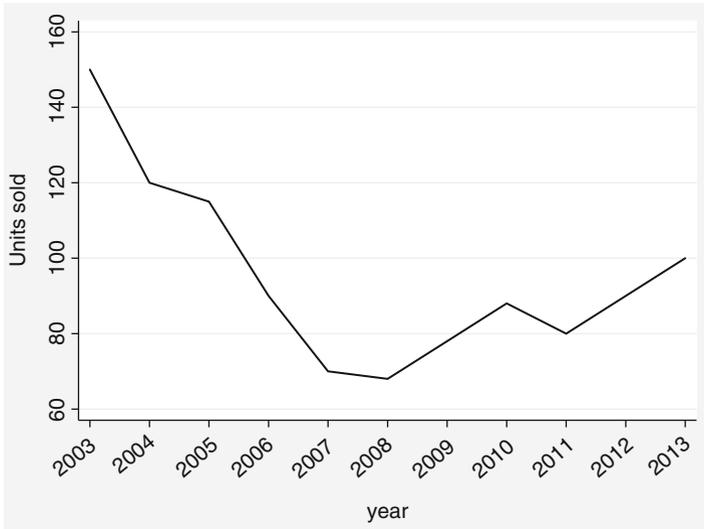
**Fig. 10.1**   What year does the curve start? (I)
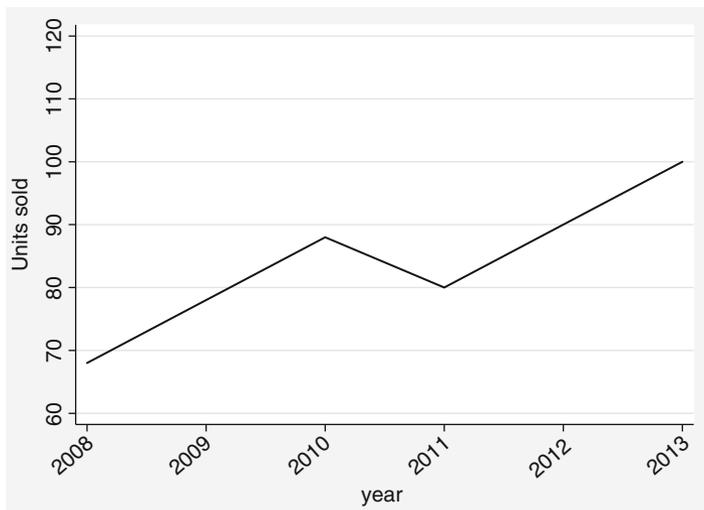
Fig. 10.2   What year does the curve start? (II)

Likewise, we can modify the scale range (Fig. 10.2 vs. Fig. 10.3). Specifically, reducing the y-axis to a range from 68 to 100 units with 4 unit increments, suggests faster growth (Fig. 10.3). Another example is the "floating" y-axis (Fig. 10.4 vs. Fig. 10.5), which increases the scale range along the y-axis from 0 to 190 with 30-unit increments, thus making the drop in the number of units sold over the period 2005 to 2008 less visually pronounced.

Fig. 10.3 Shortening the *y*-axis
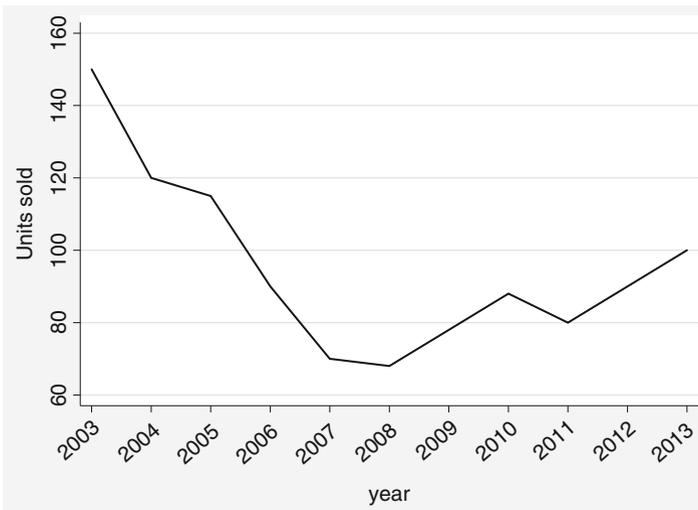
Fig. 10.4 The "floating" *y*-axis (I)

Data are often presented by means of three-dimensional figures, such as in Fig. 10.6. While these can be visually appealing, they are also subject to window-dressing. In this example, the lengths of all the edges were doubled to correspond to the 100% increase in turnover.

However, the resulting area is not twice but four times as large as the original image, thus presenting a false picture of the increase. These are just some common examples; Huff's (1993) classical text offers more on this topic.
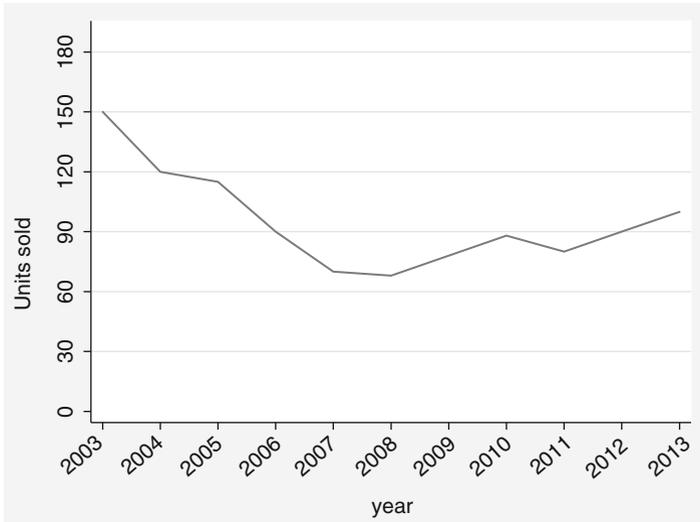
Fig. 10.5   The "floating" *y*-axis (II)

Fig. 10.6   Doubling the edge
length quadruples the area

Tables are generally less susceptible to manipulation, as they contain data in numbers, which the reader can check and understand. As a rule of thumb, each table or graph in the report should be numbered sequentially and have a meaningful title so that it can be understood without reading the text. This is called a **self-contained table** or **self-contained figure**. Some rules of thumb:

– Put data to be compared in columns, not rows.
– Round data off to whole percentages, thousands or millions for sales, and two or three digits for academic purposes.
– Highlight data to reinforce conclusions (e.g., making the key numbers bold).
– Clearly state the units of measurement.

10.4.6.2 Presenting Statistical Data

In this section, we describe various ideas that you can use to convey statistical results in a reader-friendly manner. In the results section it is common to start presenting the descriptive statistics first. This comprises text that is visually supported by graphs, to offer information and context to those readers with the required background. Graphs offer two major advantages: first, they organize and simplify complex and dense information, which is especially useful with large data samples (Tufte 2001); second, graphs can summarize dense information efficiently. There are, of course, many kinds of graphs and each type has its advantages and disadvantages. The sample size and the nature of your data may constrain the choice of graphs. Sometimes your client may even have specific requirements. Here are some tips to help you with the presentation of your data:

Summarize your results efficiently
Graphs, like bar charts and especially dot charts, offer a useful way of summarizing descriptive data most efficiently; that is, by using less space (Cox 2008). Bar charts are generally useful where the objective is to depict how the outcome variable varies across two or more grouping variables. Figure 10.7 uses the *Oddjob.dta* dataset to illustrate this point by plotting the average overall satisfaction level with the price of the airline over the (1) respondents' gender, (2) flight frequency, and (3) country of residence. Note that, in a complete presentation, it is important to include a title and subtitle, to label the *y*-axis and the *x*-axis, and to list the source of the data below the figure. Details of the syntax used are shown in the ↓ Web Appendix (→ Downloads).

Combine several plots
Stata offers many more graphical options, many of which we discussed in Chap. 5. This chapter will therefore not review the many graphical options in Stata. However, it is worth mentioning `coefplot`, a practical user-written program for plotting model estimates with Stata (Jann 2014). To install the program, type `help coefplot` in the command window and follow the instructions. The `coefplot` program offers many useful options for plotting statistical results innovatively. These options range from plotting descriptive data to more complex statistical outputs. It can also combine coefficients from different models by saving each estimated model separately before matching the coefficients and equations in a combined plot. Figure 10.8 offers an example and depicts the proportion of male and female travelers with different levels of disagreement or agreement with Oddjob Airways' price along the seven different points of the overall satisfaction scale. The inclusion of confidence intervals in the graph—indicated by the vertical lines at the end of each bar—show that the proportion of differences between males and females are not statistically significant. This is because the vertical lines of each of the seven pairs of bars overlap. This matter could be unclear if the confidence intervals are not included and may lead to misinterpretation by knowledgeable readers, who assume that such differences are statistically significant. Details of the syntax used are included in the ↓ Web Appendix (→ Downloads).
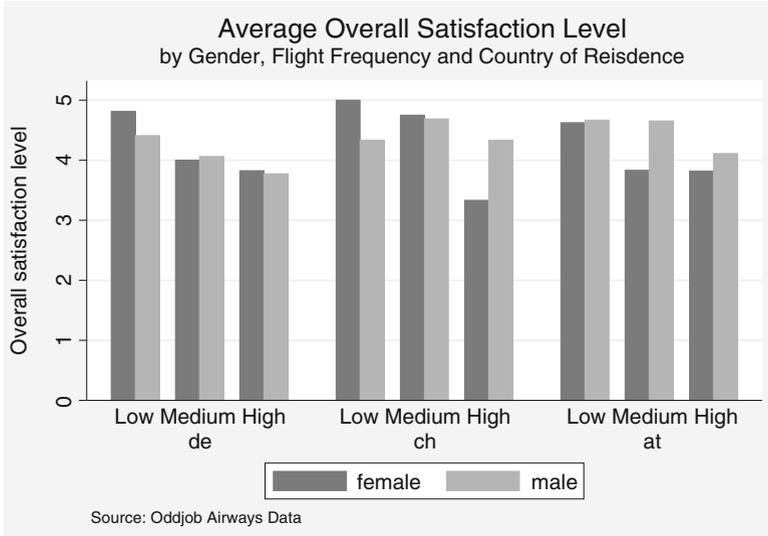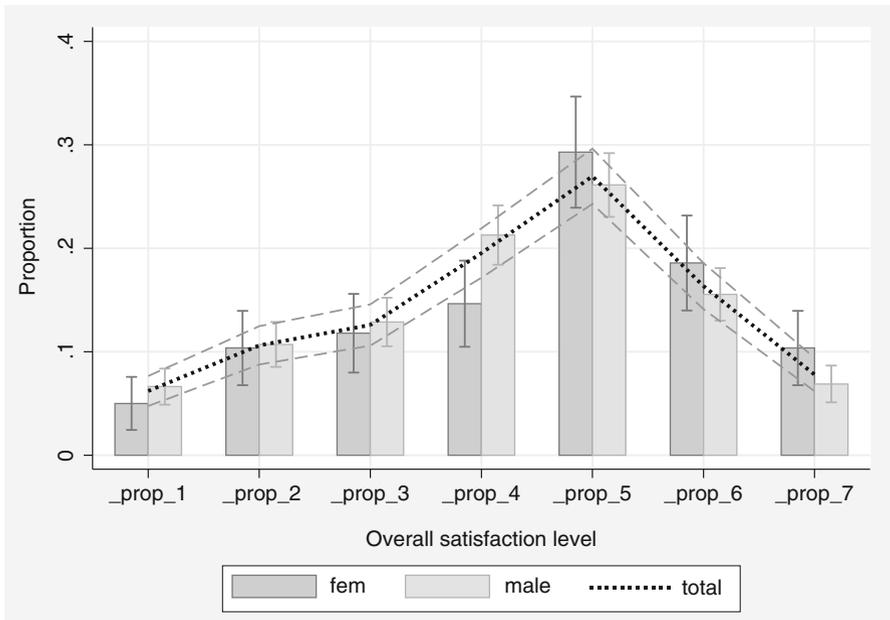
Fig. 10.7 Bar chart presentation

Fig. 10.8 Combination of different estimations and charts using `coefplot`

Consider plotting regression coefficients

It can be useful to plot the estimated regression coefficients, rather than show them in a table. This is not a substitute for presenting your careful data analysis in tables, but an aid and a complement. A graphical presentation of the regression coefficient estimates can be an efficient way of depicting both the significance and direction of the predicted effects.

In Stata, regression coefficient estimates are plotted in three steps. First, a regression model is estimated. Then the regression coefficients are predicted in a second step. Third, the estimated coefficients with their corresponding confidence intervals are plotted in a profile plot. Figure 10.9 shows the result of these steps using the *Oddjob.dta* dataset. The figure depicts how *commitment* to fly with the airline relates to *nflightsx* (flight frequency), *age*, and the travelers' *gender*. In the ↓ Web Appendix (→ Downloads), you find details on how to plot regression coefficients yourself.

Figure 10.9 shows that coefficients and their corresponding confidence intervals do not cross the **0** line on the *x*-axis (the vertical line on the right-hand side). This means that each coefficient has a statistically significant association (at $p < 0.05$) with *commitment*. The figure also shows the direction of the predicted effects, with negative effects left of the **0** line and positive effects right of the line. This means that *nflightsx* and *gender* are negatively related to customers' commitment, while *age* is positively related.
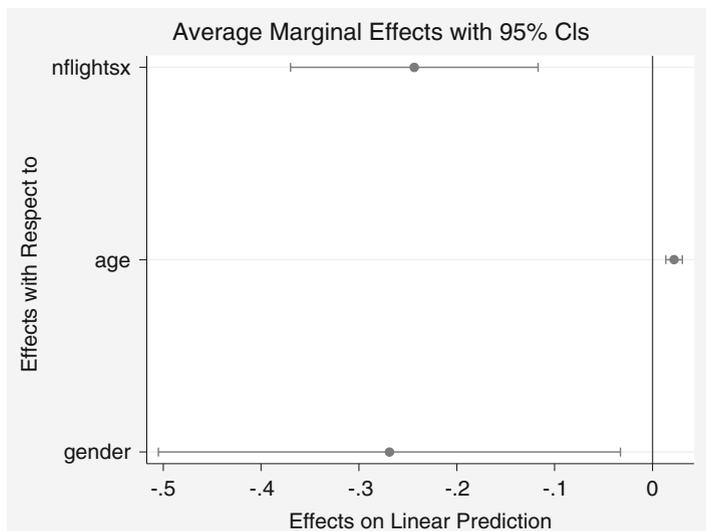
Fig. 10.9 Graphical presentation of regression coefficient estimates

Finally, `coefplot` is not limited to regression, but can be extended to any other estimation method, varying from logistic regression models, in which the outcome variable is binary by nature, to multinomial and poisson regression models with categorical and count type outcome variables. See Jann (2014) for further details on the program.

Make concise and clear (regression) tables with Stata
Research projects often require running several analyses on the same set of data by using slightly different settings in the data analysis technique. For example, researchers generally run a regression analysis on multiple models, which differ with regard to the number of independent variables or the type of dependent variable. Typing the output tables for such multiple analyses by hand is time-consuming and often leads to errors. Fortunately, Stata offers different ways of creating tables that avoid such mistakes. Before showing how Stata can be helpful in this respect, it is important to understand what the different rows and columns of a table mean. When multiple models are estimated, these are usually presented in adjacent columns to make comparisons easier. In regression tables, each column represents the results of one regression analysis. The rows indicate each independent variable's influence on the dependent variable by means of the (standardized or unstandardized) regression coefficient estimates. To create a clear table, include the:

1. *Model Title*: A first step in any table is to label each model that you are presenting. The label should be self-explanatory ("Commitment to Oddjob Airlines"). For academic purposes, a model number (e.g., Model 1, Model 2, etc.) or a title that best represents the model (e.g., Baseline model; Extended model, etc.) is sometimes used. This is particularly useful when writing up the results as you can then refer to and compare the estimates of the different models in the text. The choice of model name depends on the audience and the formatting guidelines.
2. *Independent variables*: In a (regression) table, the rows refer to the independent variables in the model. Give the variables a straightforward name to make it easier for the reader to understand. Make sure that these variable names are identical to those used in other tables and graphs (if any).
3. *Coefficient estimates*: Depending on your audience, the (regression) table needs to specify whether standardized or unstandardized coefficient estimates are being presented. This can be included as a subtitle and explained above the table. In Table 10.2, the type of coefficient estimates is indicated as **b/se.** Sometimes this is listed directly below the table.
4. *Significance level*: Putting asterisks (*****) behind the estimated regression coefficients is a common way of presenting the coefficients' significance levels. Usually, one asterisk indicates a significance level of 0.10, two asterisks a significance level of 0.05, and three asterisks a significance level of 0.01. Depending on the audience, researchers sometimes present only effects with a

Table 10.2 A regression table made using `estout`

```
-------------------------------------------------------------------
                          Model 1          Model 2          Model 3
                             b/se             b/se             b/se
-------------------------------------------------------------------
nflightsx                -0.316***        -0.271***        -0.243***
                           (0.06)           (0.06)           (0.06)
Age                                         0.022***         0.022***
                                            (0.00)           (0.00)
Gender                                                      -0.269*
                                                             (0.12)
constant                  4.810***         3.614***         4.022***
                           (0.14)           (0.27)           (0.33)
-------------------------------------------------------------------
R-squared                  0.023            0.046            0.051
N                           1065             1065             1065
df_m                      1063.0           1062.0           1061.0
BIC                       4189.6           4170.8           4172.7
-------------------------------------------------------------------
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
```

significance of 0.05. Whatever strategy you choose, make sure you add a note below your table indicating the level of significance that the asterisks represent.

5. *Standard error* or *t-values:* In addition to the significance levels, you need to present the corresponding *t*-value or standard error of the coefficient estimate, which is usually placed in brackets below the coefficient estimates. Both presentation methods are accepted and the choice depends on your audience and the formatting criteria.

6. *Sample size and degrees of freedom:* For a complete presentation, you should also include the sample size and the models' degrees of freedom after the model estimation. These statistics are respectively indicated as **N** and **df_m** in Table 10.2. Reporting these statistics can reveal differences in the sample sizes of the different estimated models, which can be due to missing values in specific independent variables. If this happens, a comparison of the different models may make little sense, given that the models are based on different sample sizes with different characteristics. It is therefore important to understand what causes the large sample size differences between the models before taking any further action or drawing conclusions.

7. *Model fit*: Finally, depending on the type of estimated model, statistics indicating the model significance, such as the R^2 or η^2 (eta-squared), and the relative model fit, such as the AIC or BIC statistics, should be part of the table. In Table 10.2 we have included the **R-squared** and **BIC** to indicate the model fit.

You can produce tables with Stata by using the user-written package `estout`. As with any user-written program, you can install this Stata package immediately by typing `help estout` in the command window and then following the instructions. Table 10.2 shows an example of a regression table produced by using the `estout` command. It comprises three models that add several variables,

at a time, containing some of the key elements of the Table that we mentioned earlier. These are: the model title, indicated as **Model 1**, **Model 2** and **Model 3**, with a caption indicating that the (unstandardized) type of coefficient estimates and their pertaining standard errors **b/se** are presented. Next, the independent variables, with the corresponding coefficients, standard errors (in brackets), and significance level are listed in the first column. For example, in **Model 1**, the first row presents the unstandardized coefficient for *nfligtsx* (−**0.316**), together with the pertaining standard errors (e.g., (**0.06**)), and significance level (*******) for which a caption is included at the bottom of the table. Next, the sample size (**N**) and the models' degrees of freedom (**df_m**) in terms of each estimated model are shown in Table 10.2. Finally, both the **R-squared** and the **BIC** values of each estimated model are included to indicate the model fit.

Further information that enables you to produce similar tables yourself can be found in the ↓ Web Appendix (→ Downloads).

10.4.7 Conclusion and Recommendations

Having presented the findings, the next step is to summarize the most relevant points and interpret them in the light of the research objectives. You should write the conclusions in such a way that they present information that is relevant for managerial decision-making. Keep in mind that, for the client, the quality of the marketing research depends heavily on how well decision makers can use the information! The research must provide the client with clear benefits, which could lead to further research assignments.

Researchers are increasingly asked to go beyond stating facts and to provide recommendations or to advise. Whereas conclusions based solely on the research should be unbiased and impersonal, specific recommendations are based on a personal and (at least partially) subjective opinion on how the results can be most favorably used in the client's interest. You should therefore make sure that recommendations are recognizable as such. During the negotiations prior to the start of a project, the client needs to determine the extent to which the research report should include recommendations. This will also depend on the researcher's expertise in the area. Researchers may provide logical recommendations based up the their findings, but these might be unrealistic or impossible for the client to implement due to issues such as insufficient budgets, predetermined methods, or specific policies, regulations, and politics. Make sure that you or another member of your research team is familiar with the overall context, including the regulatory and legal issues, to avoid such issues. Furthermore, before making recommendations, review them with the client to determine whether these are acceptable and action-able (see Box 10.1 for an example).

Box 10.1 Bad Recommendations
A candy company wishes to know how it can increase its sales and has commissioned a research organization to gain insights into its different customer segments. The researchers find that teenagers are the most important target for the given brand and suggest that vending machines in schools would increase the company's revenue. Although this might boost sales, the recommendation does not help the company if vending machines are not allowed in schools. And even if they were allowed, they might lead to negative media reports.

10.4.8 Limitations

Finally, you should explain the extent to which the findings can be generalized. All research studies have limitations due to time, budget, and other constraints. Furthermore, errors might have occurred during the data collection. Not mentioning potential weaknesses (e.g., the use of a convenience sample, or a small sample size) for whatever reason reduces the research's credibility. Not disclosing important facts also violates common codes of industry conduct, such as those drafted by ESOMAR. Taking all these factors into regard, the research results should always be discussed objectively and in a balanced way. You should neither overly belittle the importance and validity of the research, nor try to conceal sources of errors and, hence, potentially mislead managers. Finally, some modesty is in order as, in hindsight, many reports have been proved inaccurate or even wrong. Few, for example, predicted the global financial crisis, the Trump presidency, or Brexit.

10.4.9 Appendix

All material not directly required for an understanding of the project, but still related to the study, should be included in the appendix or appendices. This includes questionnaires, interview guides, detailed data analyses, and other types of data or material.

10.5   Guidelines for Oral Presentations

Most clients want an oral presentation to accompany the written report. One could deliver such a presentation in the form of an interim report during the research, or at the end to explain the findings to the management and other staff. Members of the client staff often present the research findings to the management and do not ask the market research company to do so. Satisfaction with the delivered report may increase if a member of the client staff, such as an internal market researcher or

business analyst, delivers the presentation, because the client feels they know and accept the content.

If asked to deliver an oral presentation, you should keep the principles of a written report in mind. It is especially important to identify and understand your audience, and to prepare the presentation thoroughly. A professional and interesting presentation might increase interest in the written report! Furthermore, since the oral presentation allows for interaction, interesting points can be highlighted and discussed in more detail. However, if you are not well prepared for the presentation, nor understand your audience's expectations, needs, and wants, you could face an unpleasant situation. You should always keep the following golden rule in mind: *Never deliver a presentation you wouldn't want to sit through*!

10.6   Visual Aids in Oral Presentations

It is useful to provide the audience with a written summary or a handout so that they do not have to take notes, but can focus on the presentation. If focus group interviews were conducted, for example, you could show excerpts from the recordings to provide concrete examples in support of a finding. The saying "a picture says more than a thousand words" is also true of the oral presentation. **Visual aids**, such as overhead transparencies, flip charts, or computer slide shows (e.g., PowerPoint or Prezi at http://www.prezi.com) not only help emphasize important points, but also facilitate the communication of difficult ideas. In the following, we summarize some suggestions (Armstrong 2010).

Use of Visual Aids:
– Use a simple master slide and avoid fancy animations.
– Use a sufficiently large font size (as a rule of thumb, 16pt. or higher and never less than 12pt.) so that everyone attending the presentation can read the slides.
– Use high contrasts for text. Use black and white. Do not write on illustrations or wallpapers.
– Use contrasting colors to emphasize specific points, but not too many.
– Use simple graphs, diagrams or short sentences rather than tables.

Arranging Visual Aids:
– Do not have too much information on one slide (generally, one key issue per slide). Never put a block of text on a page.
– Organize the material so that the different modes reinforce one another. For example, you do not want people running ahead of you, so either explain each point as you discuss it on a slide, or use many simple slides.
– Use a small number of slides compared to the time available for the presentation. The focus should be on the presenter and not on the slides. Having more slides than minutes available is not a good idea. Good presenters often use between 3 and 5 min to discuss a slide.
– Prepare (color) handouts for all members of the audience.

– If you intend to use media elements in your presentation, make sure that the equipment supports them (e.g., that the sound equipment is working, or that your video formats are supported).
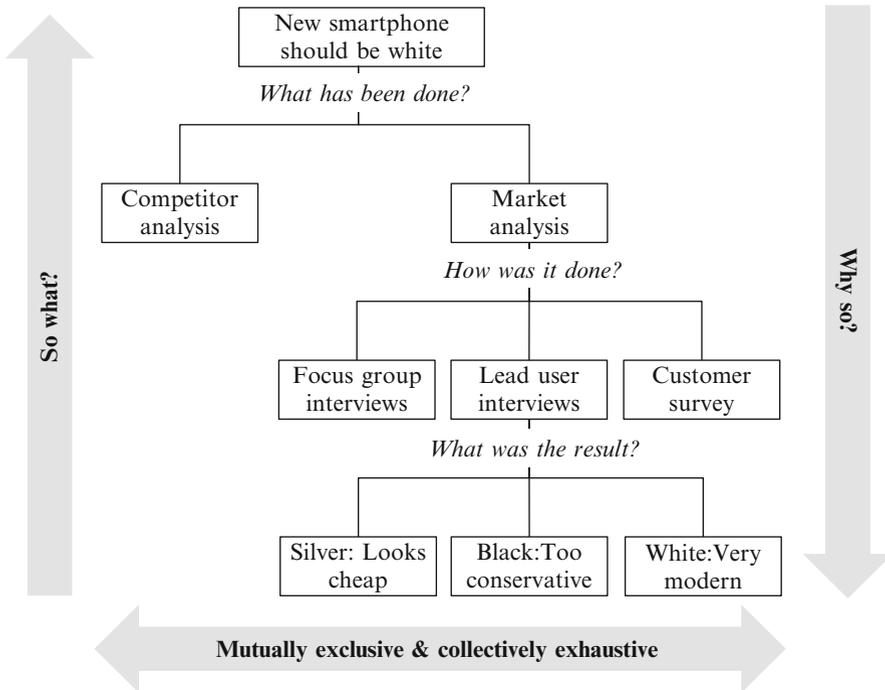
10.7 Structure the Oral Presentation

Be aware that an oral presentation cannot cover the same amount of information as a written report. You must be selective and structure the presentation content clearly and logically. There are two ways of creating a presentation:

1. A common way of starting your presentation is by structuring the introduction in the classic narrative pattern of story-telling (situation → difficulty or complication → question → answer) introduced earlier in the context of written reports. Limit the introduction to what the audience can accept. Nothing could be worse than triggering resistance of what you are presenting right from the start of your oral presentation. Next, move on to the main part of your presentation. Based on a brief description of your major findings, capture the audience's attention by presenting answers to the logical questions that arise from the project, such as: "How were these results achieved?" or "How did we reach this conclusion?"
2. An alternative is to follow the **Minto principle,** according to which presentations have a **pyramid structure**, starting with the conclusion. This raises question in the audience's mind that has to be subsequently answered. Figure 10.10 illustrates this concept by using the example of a mobile phone study, which found that a novel smartphone should be introduced in white.

You begin by introducing the result of the study (i.e., the smartphone should be introduced in white) and then work your way down. Begin by explaining that a comprehensive market analysis was carried out, after which you discuss the elements of the analysis (i.e., focus group interviews, lead user interviews, and a customer survey). Finally, present the results of each element of the analysis (e.g., that lead users perceived black as too conservative, silver as too cheap, while white was perceived as modern). Once at the bottom of the pyramid, it is time to pause and to provide a summary, before moving from the first key line, which you have just presented, to the next key line, and so on. This process forces you to only provide the information relevant to the question under consideration. Moving from top to bottom and then bottom to top, helps you answer the questions: "Why so?" and "So what?," while being both exhaustive and mutually exclusive regarding the results and the concepts you have presented. Ensure you never provide findings that do not lead to specific conclusions and do not offer conclusions not based on findings. Ultimately, this pyramid approach helps the audience grasp the line of reasoning better. This technique is also frequently called the Minto principle or Minto pyramid after its creator Barbara Minto (2009).

New smartphone
should be white

What has been done?

Competitor
analysis

Market
analysis

How was it done?

Focus group
interviews

Lead user
interviews

Customer
survey

What was the result?

Silver: Looks
cheap

Black:Too
conservative

White:Very
modern

So what?

Why so?

Mutually exclusive & collectively exhaustive

Fig. 10.10 Pyramid structure for presentations

10.8 Follow-Up

Having delivered the written report and oral presentation, two tasks remain: First, you may need to help the client implement the findings. This includes answering questions that may arise from the written report and oral presentation, helping select a product, advertising agency, marketing actions, etc., or incorporate information from the report into the firm's marketing information system or decision support system (see Chap. 3). This provides an opportunity to discuss other research projects. For example, you might agree on repeating the study after 1 year to see whether the marketing actions were effective. Second, you need to evaluate the market research project internally and with the client. Only (critical) feedback can disclose potential problems that may have occurred and, thus, provide the necessary grounds for improving your work. Using uniform questionnaires for the evaluation of different projects helps compare the feedback from different projects conducted simultaneously or at different points in time. However, some market research companies do not want to be involved in implementation.

10.9   Ethics in Research Reports

Ethics is an important topic in marketing research, because research interacts with human beings at several stages (e.g., during data collection and the communication of the findings). There are two "problematic" relations that can ultimately lead to ethical dilemmas. First, ethical issues arise when the researcher's interests conflict with those of the participants. For instance, the researcher's interest is to gather as much information as possible from the respondents, but they often require their answers to be treated confidentially and to remain anonymous. Second, in addition to researchers' legal and professional responsibilities towards their respondents, they also have reporting responsibilities.

For example, the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) has established a code which sets minimum standards of ethical conduct to be followed by all researchers (ESOMAR 2007, p. 4):

1. Market researchers shall conform to all relevant national and international laws.
2. Market researchers shall behave ethically and shall not do anything which might damage the reputation of market research.
3. Market researchers shall take special care when carrying out research among children and young people.
4. Respondents' cooperation is voluntary and must be based on adequate, and not misleading, information about the general purpose and nature of the project when their agreement to participate is being obtained and all such statements shall be honoured.
5. The rights of respondents as private individuals shall be respected by market researchers and they shall not be harmed or adversely affected as the direct result of cooperating in a market research project.
6. Market researchers shall never allow personal data they collect in a market research project to be used for any purpose other than market research.
7. Market researchers shall ensure that projects and activities are designed, carried out, reported and documented accurately, transparently and objectively.
8. Market researchers shall conform to the accepted principles of fair competition.

In practice, researchers face an ethical dilemma. They are paid by the client and may feel forced to deliver "good" results. In this sense, they might be tempted to interpret results in a way that fits the client's perspective or the client's presumed interests. For instance, researchers might ignore data because they would reveal an inconvenient truth (e.g., the client's brand has low awareness, or customers do not like the product design).

Remember that researchers should never mislead the audience! For instance, it would be ethically questionable to modify the scales of a graph so that the results look more impressive, as shown in Figs. 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4. Furthermore, researchers have a duty to treat information and research results confidentially, to store data securely, and to only use data for the research purpose agreed upon. Above all, you should keep in mind that marketing research is based on trust. Thus, when writing the report, you should respect the profession's ethical standards in order to maintain this trust.

10.10 Review Questions

1. What are the basic elements of any written research report?
2. Revisit the case study on Oddjob Airlines in Chap. 7 and prepare an outline for a written research report.
3. Consider the following situations. Do you think they confront the market researcher with ethical issues?
   (a) The client asks the researcher for a list of respondents to allow him/her to target selling activities at them.
   (b) The client asks the researcher not to disclose part of the research to his organization.
   (c) The client asks the researcher to present other recommendations.
   (d) The client asks the researcher to re-consider the analysis, because the findings seem implausible to him/her.
   (e) The client wishes to know the name of a particular customer who was very negative about the quality of service provided.

10.11 Further Readings

Huff D. (1993). *How to lie with statistics*. New York: Norton & Company.

First published in 1954, this book remains relevant as a wake-up call for people unaccustomed to the slippery world of means, correlations, and graphs. Although many of the examples used in the book are dated, the conclusions are timeless.

Durate N. (2008). *Slideology. The art and science of crafting great presentations*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media.

In this book, the author presents a rich source for effective visual expression in presentations. It is full of practical approaches to visual story development that can be used to connect with your audience. The text provides good hints to fulfill the golden rule to never deliver a presentation you wouldn't want to sit through.

Market Research Society at http://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/guidelines.htm

Under this link you find the (ethical) guidelines of the Market Research Society. The guidelines discuss, for example, the ethical issues surrounding research using children or the elderly as participants.

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