

# **Indigenous Research Methods to Build an Uncontested Space for Marketing Insight**

## **Abstract**

Many countries have culturally diverse populations and marketing practitioners need to consider these diversities when undertaking market research, particularly when exploring sensitive topics. In Australia, Indigenous Australians make up 3.3% of the population and are a commonly researched audience to gauge attitudes and ensure cultural offense does not occur due to unintended consequences of marketing activity. However, obtaining information from structurally marginalised people using quantitative-based surveys is often confusing, inappropriate or insensitive. This paper introduces to Euro-western market researchers the concepts of flipping and yarning as a market research approach that has been used by Indigenous Australians for thousands of years. This circular market research approach demonstrates that ensuring a cultural understanding of the community can provide a foundation for a research approach that is culturally responsive.

## **Keywords**

Yarning, flipping, indigenous methodologies, marketing research, cultural foundations, uncontested space, knowledge sharing

## **Introduction**

Is the marketing profession doing all that it can to contribute to Australia's social trend for the consideration of the needs of First Nations peoples? The Australian Marketing Institute, "the requisite organisation for professional marketers and the authoritative voice of Marketing in Australia" (AMI, 2022) and The Research Society, "Australia's leading research association" (The Research Society, 2022), have no mention of First Nations Australians on their websites. Conversely, some professionals, such as Australian Psychological Association demonstrate a clear response to Indigenous Australians. Why has the marketing profession, and in this paper the marketing research profession, missed the recent social justice movements for First Australians?

Our interest is in the value of concepts generally associated with Indigenous Australians and the extent to which these can inform and energise "new" kinds of market research (that is, "new" in the sense that they are novel for the Western marketing profession). Moreover, this research works on the premise that positive change in industry practice must obviously go beyond cosmetic tweaks or public-facing statements. The social movements of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo were invariably powered by a recognition that inequality, injustice, discrimination, and prejudice are supported by systems and structures rooted in Euro-centric assumptions and biases – and have normalised these to the exclusion of alternative approaches. Not surprisingly, this has effectively locked out principles and practices that belong to historically marginalised peoples and thus ensures that a given distribution of power (cultural, political, and communicative) remains intact. Our focus on Indigenous Australians thus rests on a realisation that this is one of the most structurally marginalised groups in Australia and has been routinely subjected to research methodologies that abjectly fail to show any cultural sensitivity, insight, or understanding (e.g., Humphery, 2001). Not only that, but these traditional methodologies also persist in the implicit assumption of some unquestioned superiority. Our contribution also supports the potential to recruit into the profession a more diverse workforce into the profession as it (slowly) becomes apparent that the industry can shape-shift to better serve and reflect more diverse viewpoints in the community.

## **Background**

For numerous government and non-profit organisations, much work (and attendant services) is dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable members of society. To this end, research

projects are designed to both glean and understand the attitudes, ideals, and behaviour of people within these communities in order to respond to their needs. One important community for many countries is their Indigenous, or First Nations, people. According to Amnesty International, globally, there are 370 million Indigenous people across more than 90 countries, approximately 5% of the world's population. While they are culturally different, they often face similar problems, such as "*eviction from their ancestral lands, being denied the opportunity to express their culture, physical attacks and treatment as second-class citizens*" (Amnesty International, 2022).

In Australia, as in other comparable countries, attempts to research Indigenous communities have historically worked through Euro-Western methodologies. This includes critical frameworks fashioned by and for academic traditions that are far removed from these communities. Unfortunately, this is a problematic tension: not only are such methodologies likely to reproduce asymmetries of power and privilege; but also, they will invariably only ever elicit findings that sit within a given range of knowledge and sense-making. Ultimately, they discount the input and value of other conceptual scaffolds – including those that would resonate with the vulnerable people central to the research.

For this reason, and at least in Australia over the last few years, there are growing efforts to include Indigenous research methodologies in areas including community health; to connect these communities with life-improving health outcomes, this was a necessary and logical shift in health research and health communication. To date though, market researchers in Australia have mostly failed to adopt a similar approach, largely for lack of direction, experience, and advice. This paper is a modest step towards remedying that by not only starting a belated conversation in this space but pointing to a few foundational notions that can drive improvement in how market researchers liaise with Indigenous Australians (at least as a starting point).

## **Research Context**

The need for more mindful ways of engaging Indigenous communities in market research is urgent and pervasive. Globally and historically, Indigenous communities have been drawn into research projects that show little consideration of cultural insight and pay little regard to Indigenous research paradigms (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Smith, 1998; Walker et al., 2014). This is a timely opportunity then for market researchers to consider how Indigenous knowledge

can be folded into high-quality, ethical practice. This has been amply demonstrated by health researchers, many of whom have embraced these guiding principles:

*“respect and understanding for Indigenous values, knowledge and worldviews; awareness of the history and relationship between the Indigenous world and the world of the research; Developing, conducting, reporting and using research in ways that lead to practical outcomes and ... equity for Indigenous people; More indigenous people and communities controlling what, why, how and when research is done, and how it is us”d.”* (Laycock et al., 2011, p. 2)

In a similar vein, this paper makes a discursive intervention into the field of Euro-centric market research. By introducing the concepts of flipping and yarning, it suggests that research practices used by Indigenous Australians for thousands of years can imbue the field with more nuanced and culturally appropriate means by which market researchers can approach, understand and respect Indigenous communities. The aim is to start a conversation on the development of a marketing research model to assist practitioners.

Our focus is on how a shift in collaborating with Indigenous communities can both expand and improve market research practices. As such, we contend that in some key respects, traditional market research is insufficiently equipped to meet Indigenous communities on terms that many would appreciate or embrace. Over time, this disconnect has had a profound and adverse effect on interactions between market researchers and Indigenous communities based on a misalignment of cultural values and epistemic precepts. To probe this further, we canvas a few Indigenous values and discuss their application (insofar as these interact with market research activities). Finally, we introduce an approach for market research that positions Indigenous communities as partners in the research process. The goal is to help lay a foundation for more respectful market research practices and ensure that the sector continues to grow and evolve in ways fit for future-focused research methodologies that are insightful, dialogic, and culturally considered. We posit a research approach that is conducive to this outcome.

The impetus for this paper was the authors' concern about the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity across Australia's marketing, media, and public relations (PR) agencies. Whilst the literature is growing regarding DEI for the last ten years or so, the agency sector (e.g., Media Federation of Australia) has both acknowledged this lack and pledged various levels of commitment to correcting it. Its motivation is mostly two-fold: (1) a human-rights-based desire for a broader and more authentic representation of the population; and (2) the

realisation that a more diverse talent pool would more likely produce content that is fit for diverse audiences and stakeholders. Embedded in these drives is a push for more Indigenous Australians to be employed in the agency sector (Philbert, 2021). In Australia, at least, this works towards 'closing the gap' (COAG, 2009), that is, narrowing the distance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in all quality-of-life areas. Some of the nation's marketing, media, and PR agencies have thus adopted KPIs in relation to diverse recruitment in general and Indigenous Australian hires in particular. Given that less than one percent of the current agency workforce self-identified as Indigenous Australian (MFA,2022), it was obvious that the industry was not appealing as a career prospect for Indigenous Australians, had failed to put in place mechanisms or adjustments to better attract Indigenous Australians, or a combination of both these factors.

Whilst undertaking to understand this “gap”, (performed under ethics approval ETH21-6208), the authors identified a need to talk to Indigenous Australians regarding their perceptions and views of a career in these industries. What arose from this investigation was a need to incorporate an Indigenous approach into market research practice. More specifically, identifying a marketing research framework that is relational in practice to both the researched and the researcher and enables respect and mutual learning (Martin, 2008; Wain et al., 2016).

For researchers, it is important to understand our positionality in the research context. This relationship is particularly important in undertaking marketing research with Indigenous peoples, based on the researcher and the relationship with the research topic and with the greater environment (Wilson, 2008), and this can highlight any biases through conscious and unconscious choices in the study design (Hayward et al., 2021; Jaworsky, 2019). Whilst Euro-western research assumes a neutral or objective position, Indigenous approaches are embedded with relationality as one's perspective influences how the world is perceived (Archibald, 2019). Therefore, our position is a "*contextual reflection (positionality), inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in respectful and reciprocal ways, and prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing*" (Hayward et al., 2021 p. 15). The outcome of this paper is that marketing researchers can appreciate the way to embed Indigenous knowledge into their practice, thus increasing the cultural awareness and respectfulness of research with Indigenous communities and possibly beyond.

We come to this project as non-First Nations researchers and educators, although all have had experience teaching students in specialised Indigenous-focused programs. We acknowledge that we have not lived in the Indigenous communities but view our status as

outsiders who wish to listen and learn as a major strength of this paper. As marketing and communication researchers, we are offering this article following a call for research to create both a culturally safe environment to perform market research with "a solid foundation from which to open one's self up to listen and give" (Walker, 2014, p.1219). As outsiders, we are advocating for repositioning Indigenous people in the entire research process, recognising that First Nations people are knowers rather than informants in market research.

While we propose in this paper an approach marketing researchers can utilise in their practice; we firstly introduce to the readers some background information to better inform and hopefully lead to a greater understanding of their positionality and the need to reflect on the impact of this in their research. It is important to note that while significant guidelines and frameworks have occurred in health and medical research with Indigenous Australians (e.g., the work of Lowitja Institute; AH&MRC, etc), as marketing and communication educators, traditional approaches of market research continue to be taught in HEI. This proposed framework and discussion are proposed as a starting point.

### **Decolonising research**

It is imperative that marketing research incorporates "*diverse cultural positions and approaches... [in] all fields of research scholarship because it assists in expanding the current knowledge base from problematising and othering cultural minorities to seeing and understanding complex problems from the position of the cultural other*" (Shay, 2021, p. 62). The key issue that is addressed in researching an appropriate methodology is the differences in epistemological framework between Euro-western and Indigenous paradigms. This difference demonstrates the need to 'decolonise' our methodology as it can create a power imbalance in undertaking marketing research. Further, the cultural foundations of the land on which marketing research is being undertaken need to be understood and respected by the researcher. Decolonising research is aimed at centring the approach of removing the historical processes that have lacked respect for the Indigenous people (Hayward et al., 2021). Building research from the perspective of the "colonised other" can provide "*space to communicate from their frames of reference*" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 14) which is focused on their "concerns and worldviews" (Chilisa, 2012, p.13). This paper discusses a marketing research approach which is suggested in environments that are predominantly using Western research doctrines (e.g., Fredericks et

al., 2011; Walker et al., 2013). The proposed approach is centred on Indigenous knowledge systems, which will be discussed further in the next section.

### **Indigenous research paradigm**

Euro-Western centric research paradigms are based on knowledge and power and are directional, with the research considered a data source. Typically, in marketing research, we identify who we are and what we are looking for from the research, which can be perceived as a "way of maintaining privilege" (e.g., Wilson, 2001). Othering "permeates dominant ideologies in the Australian research/education space (Weuffen & Pickford, 2021, p.73).

Market researchers are encouraged to build their knowledge on indigenous research paradigms. Indigenous research principles have been well documented in other resources, such as AIATSIS' *Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research* (2020), NHMRC's *Keeping Research on Track II* (2018), [The AH & MRC's *Ethical Guidelines: Key Principles* (2020) has an informative table that highlights their Ethical Guidelines and their link to Values (p. 14); other resources also included: *The Lowitja Institute's Researching Indigenous Health: a practical guide for researchers* (pp. 31-42)]. The differences highlighted between the NHMRC and AIATSIS highlight the cultural diversity of First Nations peoples. Research values covered in these resources are summarised in Table 1.

*Insert Table 1 approximately here.*

While not dismissing marketing research best practices, a greater understanding of the 'culture' of the lands where the marketing research is being undertaken can enhance our approach and understanding of these communities. It is essential to highlight that Country is deeply important to First Nations Australians and goes beyond the physical, land and waters, to a "deeply symbolic and spiritual place" (Dudgeon et al., 2014)). More specifically, a typical marketing research approach is based on the researcher being ostensibly (or nominally) neutral and objective. However, an Indigenous approach requires the acknowledgement of the researcher's positionality as this standpoint may influence perceptions and interpretation (Behrendt, 2019). Marketing researchers need to create a "*safe environment, and a solid foundation from which to open one's self up to listen and give*" (Walker, 2013, p.1219).

Table 1: Summary of Indigenous values, principles and responsibilities

NHMRC Core Values	AIATSIS Framework principles with core ethical value of integrity and acting in the right spirit	
Spirit and Integrity Respect Equity Cultural continuity Responsibility Reciprocity	<i>Principles</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
	Indigenous self-determination	Recognition and respect Engagement and collaboration Informed Consent Cultural capability and learning
	Indigenous Leadership	Indigenous-led research Indigenous perspectives and participation Indigenous knowledge and data
	Impact and Value	Benefit and reciprocity Impact and risk
Sustainability and accountability	Ongoing Indigenous governance Reporting and compliance Indigenous lands and waters	

### From contested to uncontested – creating space

Research on methodology for market research activities on Indigenous respondents, which usually requires the researchers to reflect on the transition from typical paradigms and epistemes of Western society, requires bringing the knowledge systems and worldviews together in a common meeting place. The contested backgrounds need to be understood to create an uncontested space. This paper presents one way to create space; however other Indigenist research approaches have created space through weaving knowledge (e.g., Whyte, 2015), a herringbone (e.g., Andrews, 2021) or two-eyed (e.g., Wright et al, 2019) approaches.



Marketing researchers need to be "*open to different ways of knowing and finding out, so that new knowledge can be developed*" (Laycock et al., 2011, p. 55). Creating an uncontested space for marketing research can be achieved through changing our approach, data and evidence collection, dissemination, and even where we start with our research question (research ethics are discussed in more detail in a later section). Additionally, researchers need to be actively open to doing things differently to create knowledge that is respectful in both approach and the development of co-created meaning.

According to Laycock et al. (2011):

"When researching in the contested space, the rules of engagement, evidence and validation need to be negotiated. It may be that Western academics and Indigenous researchers never completely agree. They may have different agendas and different criteria for truth and effectiveness, but may still collaborate on the methodology or the knowledge exchange. They may never entirely agree upon the outcomes, and yet be satisfied by the process (Christie, 2006, p. 81–2). This messiness can still be productive as Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge traditions are brought together to do research that the university sees as academic, and the Indigenous world sees as respectful, respectable and useful." (Laycock et al., 2011, p. 56)

Whilst this paper focuses on the Indigenous Australian research approach, there are many Indigenous cultures that feature storytelling and oral traditions, and from which the recommended approach can be adopted. Examples of these are "talking circles", "peacemaking circles", and "healing circles, which have all played important roles in communication, rituals, and ceremony (e.g., Geia et al., 2013). The importance of relationships with Indigenous cultures around the world has been highlighted in previous research (e.g., Shay, 2021; Smith, 2012), so this discussion is relevant beyond the Australian Indigenous context of this paper. That said, extending this framework to other Indigenous Peoples needs to consider the "diversity in knowledge systems, histories, beliefs, languages, protocols or customs, and identities" (Hayward et al., 2021, p. 100899). To presume some homogeneity would constitute (more) symbolic violence.

McIvor (2010) even argued that self-determination and decolonisation serve as the connection amongst all Indigenous research methods. Broadly, Indigenous methods should include methods that are culturally relevant and can serve beyond data collection

to create relationships and support autonomy (Cueva et al., 2012; Lavallée, 2009)" (Drawson et al., 2017).

This paradigm recognises that an Indigenous epistemology (knowing) and ontology (being) is based upon relationships, and axiology (doing) is based on relational accountability (Wilson, 2008)." (Atkinson et al., 2021 p.192).

The recognition of our cultural diversity and how it can be incorporated into a market research approach is presented below. The concept of this approach is to commence a dialogue on how Australian market researchers can be more respectful and understanding of First Nations peoples. It is not our intent to impose this approach but a start to incorporating this knowledge into our teaching and, hopefully industry practice. Typically, teaching and practice follow the one-direction downward approach; however, the previous discussion highlights that this approach needs to be amended.

### **Marketing Research Process**

While not dismissing the Euro-Western marketing research best practice, engaging an Indigenous approach provides a greater understanding of 'culture', which can enhance the research approach and understanding of these communities. The proposed Circular Indigenous Marketing Research (CIMR)<sup>1</sup> approach shifts from the traditionally linear style of enquiry to a circular one. Figure 1 encapsulates research in the CIMR nature.

*Insert Figure 1 approximately here*

The CIMR approach is important from an Indigenous perspective. Circles play an important role in the broader Indigenous communication tapestry (e.g., Wroth, n.d). Circles represent that "there is a starting point, no end and reflect continuous cycles which underpin the premise of relationality" (Shay, 2021, p. 67). Furthermore, circles demonstrate interrelatedness, how "each blends into the next" and that the "whole paradigm is greater than the sum of parts" (Wilson, 2008). Conveying the methodological approach through a circle highlights the importance of knowingness (Smith, 2012). In addition, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Quality*

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this nomenclature.

*Appraisal Tool (QAT)* (Harfield, et al., 2020) provides a great overview of the additional steps that market researchers need to consider.

### **Step 1: Flipping the research question**

Typically, market researchers work with the client to clearly define the research question and the appropriate methodology to collect data to answer said question. However, given the Indigenous values such as “reciprocity (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010), respect (Bessarab, 2012), ethical interactions (Gower, 2012), participatory interactions (Kendall et al., 2011), and emancipatory designs (Zavala, 2013)” (Doyle et al., p. 1293), as well as self-determination, market researchers should approach this stage in collaboration with the community of interest. In this way, the development of the research question is flipped, and instead of being directive and controlled by the researcher, it is defined and built consultatively with the researched. This is a shift from the traditional approach, which is centrally determined, with a 'top-down' focus, to a flipped approach, which is a peripheral, consultative, 'bottom-up' model. This facilitated development approach enables Indigenous people to control "what is researched and how the research is done" (Laycock et al., 2011, p.57), which enables a collective understanding of the problems or issues and their impact on the research.

In addition, the flipped approach ensures that researchers are focusing on research that is needed and initiates the process of building knowledge together (Rigney, 1999). This creates a 'cultural interface', “where western and Indigenous knowledge systems meet and interact” (Janke, 2021, p.271).

"Indigenous control over research allows for questions to be framed differently; priorities to be ranked differently; problems to be defined differently; and people to participate on different terms (p. 25) ... [the] non-Indigenous researcher[s] can come to the research relationship with a practice guided by an understanding of the need to find new, culturally appropriate research 'spaces'... [where] the focus changes from empathetic understanding to the flexible engagement in an interface that attempts to challenge dominant discourses (Minniecon et al., 2007, p. 28)." (Weuffen et al., 2019)

The best approach to incorporate this vital step in larger research studies, where population-based representative samples are required, is noted as a future extension of this study.

## Step 2: Research design

Research projects that are informed by Indigenous input make room for Indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions to emerge and are developed in partnership with community members (e.g., Cooper et al., 2021; Dawson et al., 2017). Collaboration is core to the research design. The proposed CIMR framework is not entirely dissimilar to dialogic theory and narrative approaches. The dialogic approach has parallels to yarning through the five principles that help to create dialogic engagement amongst partners: mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). A yarning approach seeks mutuality characterised by inclusion or collaborative orientation as well as a spirit of mutual equality. Dialogic propinquity means that audiences or publics are consulted in matters that influence them. For audiences or targets of communication, it means that they are willing and able to articulate their demands to groups, organisations, or sectors. Yarning requires empathy which, in turn, rests on care and concern. Supportiveness, communal orientation, and confirmation are the three key features of empathy. Risk means parties who engage in yarning take relational risks. Vulnerability, unanticipated consequences, and recognition of strange otherness are characterised as the feature of risk. Finally, yarning, like dialogue, involves genuineness and authenticity. There needs to be a "commitment to the conversation," and a "commitment to interpretation" (Kent & Taylor, 2002, pp. 25-29) for the yarning/dialogue to be empowering to all parties. It is important to note that Indigenous researchers should be responsible for performing yarning in the community(ies) of interest.

A further component of the research design is ethical considerations. In Australia, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) publishes a *Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research* (AIATSIS, 2020). This code ensures research "follows a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and the individuals and/or communities involved in the research." Furthermore, ethical leadership in market research is key (see Segal and Giacobbe, 2007) and we encourage the Research Society to be more explicit about the AIATSIS Code of Ethics in their member *Code of Professional Practice*. It is important as market researchers that we not just comply with appropriate ethical codes. The position of this paper is that we should also seek to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical nuances that can be important in undertaking marketing research. Furthermore, we call on country-based market research societies (e.g., The Research Society in Australia, and the Market Research Society in the UK) to be more explicit in their Codes of Conduct regarding this.

### **Step 3: Data collection**

In Euro-Western approaches, data collection is highly standardised (Drawson et al., 2017). Data are collected through surveys or structured interviews. However, alignment with Indigenous values requires a less standardised approach due to historical challenges to the data collection, storage, use, and ownership. A decolonised approach is comprehensive in nature and needs to "prioritize Indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions, while employing data collection approaches that are in line with Indigenous values (e.g., Wilson, 2008)." Appropriate data sovereignty can manage the identity and cultural rights of data (e.g., Trudgett et al, 2022). The data are not the property of the marketing firm; the data belong to the community engaged.

#### *Data collection: From KIIs to yarning*

In conventional marketing research, qualitative studies include semi-structured or unstructured interviews and discussions with key informants (KIIs). Yarning, however, is a conversational approach, which is an exchange and sharing of stories through which relationality is established and the participants go on a journey together. Whilst yarning has differences from KIIs, they both yield rich data (Geia et al., 2013; Kovach, 2019).

Yarning is a popular Indigenist research methodology in Australia (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Geia et al., 2013; Kovach, 2019; Walker et al., 2014) which enables the inclusion of Indigenous voices through a conversation (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). It has been used across a wide range of disciplines, including health, education, and criminology. Yarning builds on oral traditions (e.g., Shay et al., 2021) and is an edifying enabler of information exchange, as it facilitates the telling of stories and the communication of lived experience (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Walker et al., 2014). There are many different forms of yarning, and there is an opportunity for marketing researchers to incorporate a few key forms when undertaking projects. Yarning can be social, collaborative, research, therapeutic, family, and cross-cultural (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010), as well as research yarning and clinical yarning (Lin et al., 2016). The model proposed is marketing yarning. Marketing yarning should be performed by Indigenous yarning experts from the local community in which the research is being conducted. It is key to highlight the potential challenge in this undertaking when representative samples are taken across the population.

Given the previous discussion on the differences between Euro-Western and Indigenous paradigms and the historical impact of colonisation, yarning provides many benefits to undertaking marketing research with Indigenous audiences. Benefits includes:

- the creation of a collaborative space where all participants' voices are important (Atkinson et al., 2021)
- the provision of those being researched with some level of control (Dean, 2010; Shay, 2021) as it fosters an exchange of knowledge in a familiar format.
- the creation of openness and honesty due to the familiarity with the conversational storytelling format (Fredericks et al., 2011).
- The creation of a "culturally safe" environment (Geia et al., 2013; Kovach, 2019) that can be seen to enhance the data validity (Fredericks et al., 2011; Ro et al., 2012).
- The building of relationality through the sharing of knowledge (Shay, 2021) and accountability between people (Martin, 2008), as relatedness is core to the yarning process., a component that is oft overlooked in Euro-Western research (Walker et al., 2014).
- connection provides both depth and sense-making (Geia, 2013), which may “yield findings that are not possible via traditional data collection, formal interview” (Osmond & Phillips, 2019, p. 1273).
- Reciprocity governs the process of yarning (Hughes & Barlo, 2021).

Whilst there are many benefits of the yarning process as a mode of data collection, the following potential challenges should be noted. It requires a relationship based on genuine trust (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) and the time to develop this dynamic (Dean, 2010). Further, the researcher requires the skills to both listen actively and deeply (Carlson & Frazer, 2018; Terrare & Rawsthorne, 2019) whilst being comfortable with conversational pauses (Mushin & Gardner, 2009) to incorporate both the "sound and [the] silence" (Terrare & Rawsthorne, 2019). All of which is to state that culturally sensitive research is predicated on a level of literacy and deep learning – the researcher must do their own research and are encouraged to review the Milner framework (Milner, 2007)<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Step 4: Data analysis and interpretation**

An Indigenous paradigm "centres the understanding of study results within the contexts of the experiences and positionality of Indigenous peoples (Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2008)." (Cooper & Driedger, 2021). Comparatively, typical marketing research analysis is performed by the researcher in isolation; however, the circular approach engages the data source (community) as part of the interpretation process. Analysis of yarning is not a one-time event. Joint interpretation with the community may require additional yarning as the story continues to evolve.

#### **Step 5: Report preparation and dissemination**

In the last step of a circular marketing research approach, it is important to incorporate Indigenous voices to ensure that relationality and reciprocity are respected in the process of knowledge translation and sharing. The use of collaborative yarning could also be incorporated into this process as the people who participated in the research poured their insights into the report. Through this two-way iterative process, the research loop is closed. Comparatively, typical marketing researchers generate their written report and presentation to the data source who may not receive the outcomes of the study. Within this framework, the report should be prepared collaboratively between the researcher and the research partners.

#### **Discussion**

This paper presents the Circular Indigenous Market Research (CIMR) approach for undertaking market research with Indigenous Australians. The approach is built on Indigenous knowledge and incorporates the "ways of being, knowing and doing" (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) as incorporates the key foundations of respect, relationships, and connections (Janke, 2012) to enable research that is respectful and collaborative. This approach incorporates and respects Indigenous methods and highlights the importance of stories, a non-directive way of collecting data, and the interpretation, understanding, and dissemination is undertaken with the researched community.

We highlight that it is key for individuals in the market research profession to understand their biases and norms. The non-Indigenous market researcher needs to practice reflexivity and build their knowledge and understanding of how the profession has enabled disempowerment,

colonisation and disenfranchisement of First Nations peoples. Through the creation of an uncontested space, and flipping the development of the research question, research can be undertaken through a 'yarning' discourse compared with a more traditional Foucauldian dialogue: "*Yarning is much more than conversation; yarning can be formal or informal discussions that honour and recognise the importance of story in knowledge exchange*" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010).

The paper presents a process moving from linear to a circular approach to "data" collection (Wilson 2008). Adopting these changes will not be quick or easy for practitioners used to conventional, Euro-centric methodologies. This approach means that relationships will need to be cultivated before any data are collected. Research teams will need to be immersed in the Indigenous culture or guided by team members from the culture. There must be recognition of country, land, relationships, and reciprocity. There will be economic costs. Meeting and yarning interviews will be longer, and there will need to be several interactions before, during, and after the data collection. Flipping the research question enables both relationality and reciprocity to be incorporated into the market research, but that is only possible on the back of robust bonds between the researcher and the community.

This paper started as we, as a group of researchers, thought about the culturally appropriate way to seek to understand the relatively low proportion of Indigenous Australians in the media, advertising and PR sector. Our lived experience through this journey has enabled our deepened understanding of a respectful and culturally appropriate approach. While researchers should identify Indigenous peoples to undertake this research, the purpose of this paper is to provide structure to commence a dialogue and to remind market researchers of the important steps in the process that differ from traditionally taught approaches.

Challenges still exist for market researchers. Firstly, a representative sample of the population is often sought in market research, particularly in large studies across the population. Further work is needed to identify a best practice approach to achieve the Indigenous voice in this type of research. Secondly, whereas often in medical research, a specific community is the research partner, in market research, many different perspectives are often sought, and consideration of the best approach to achieving this is a further note for future research.

The authors' lived experience is to teach the traditional marketing research approach. This discussion paper is a result of our journey to understand an appropriate methodological



approach to answer our research question. Whilst the research approaches suggested are not new, they are not currently well embraced within the Australian market research profession. We therefore call on market research practitioners, and academics, to work with Indigenous Australians to commence discussions on how to approach these challenges. Given the current limitation of Indigenous Australians in the marketing area we also acknowledge the challenges of the scarce resource as the profession embarks on this journey to reconciliation and action. For academics and practitioners, the discussion on how to appropriately incorporate yarning sessions into our curriculum and knowledge bases to better enable the utilisation of Indigenous Australians to yarn to address the agreed research question.

## **Conclusion**

As both educators and industry observers, we acknowledge that good faith practice might be (a) bereft of authentic input from indigenous Australians and (b) addressing this through, for instance, drawing on input from best-placed, First Nations colleagues, inevitably strains their time and energy. This problem is mirrored in many sectors (and regarding all structurally marginalised peoples) and ultimately the onus is on us to get informed, confront our complicity in and/or relationship to the history of marginalisation, and to do better through mindful, purposeful and accountable action. Crucially, this cannot be met with glib or tokenistic measures; it will not suffice to speak through cosmetic concessions. Rather, we aspire for more ambitious and lasting results that both respect and amplify Indigenous voices and knowledge. To that end, organisational support is necessary, lest we continue to tax and tire our First Nations colleagues.

This is already felt in higher education, with First Nations colleagues repeatedly called on for their input and expertise, a purchase on "authenticity" that too often goes unpaid. Yet, as more industries profess commitment to RAPs (for instance), and often fashion promotional content around these, it follows that institutional resourcing should be bookmarked for their success, to augment, substantiate, and strengthen gains in this space. The yarning method proposed in this paper is one step towards listening to Indigenous voices. As non-First Nations scholars, we accept the liminality of both our advocacy and research. As Australia enters a positive new era of dialogue and truth, realised through a referendum on constitutional change, we realise that the marketing profession has been slow on the uptake of affirmative,

inclusionary practices for all marginalised peoples. As university workers though, we are also mindful of the labour required to get these right - and our own culpability in terms of seeing First Nations colleagues as default guarantors. Considering that, this paper doubles as a call for better institutional support to help dismantle centuries of systemic discrimination and elevate our First Nation colleagues' voices and vantage points.

### **Acknowledgements:**

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this title

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### **References**

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Figure 1:

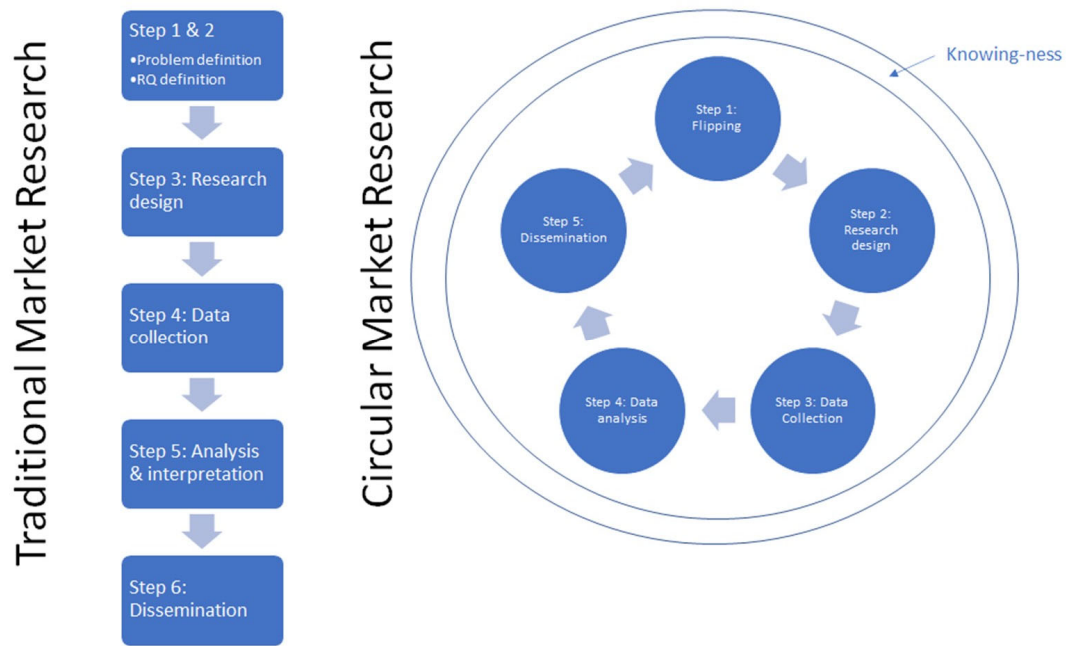


Figure 1: Proposed Circular Indigenous Marketing Research approach