

Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme
Record of Reflection

That Time I Thought I had 203 Survey Responses

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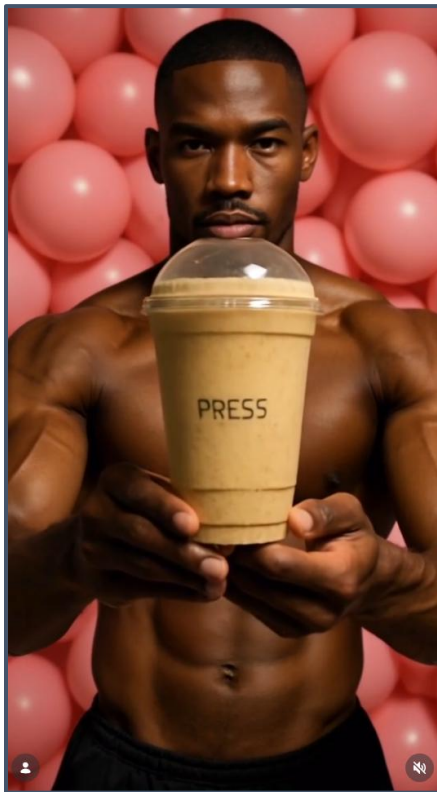
Research Advisor: Romin Tafarodi

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Pilot

After I was [rightfully] rejected from the faculty-led project stream during the Laidlaw Application period, I was a bit hesitant about applying through the self-proposed project stream. I say rightfully rejected because I had an inkling that I would have been. The projects weren't exactly aligned with my interests, but I chose one that was closest and tried to convince the professor and myself that I was a fit. My main drawback with proposing my own project was that I had no idea what a first-year computer science student could meaningfully investigate. After viewing the research reports of past cohorts, this feeling was amplified by the realization that I could barely understand their methodologies. I doubted whether the program was for someone like me who had no real research experience, but I felt it was better to try and struggle through learning it now rather than later. I would also have hated to miss out on all the interesting activities.

During one of my brainstorming sessions, I recalled a question I had asked myself while scrolling on Instagram a few times: why are businesses, especially those in my home country, Jamaica, using AI-generated flyers? The shirtless-man-holding-drink flyer on the Instagram of a popular café in my home country came to mind.



This gave me an idea of a research area that I would be interested in, but the application deadline was a few days away. I reached out to Professor Romin Tafarodi from the Department of Psychology as soon as I got that inspiration. He had taught my first-year foundations class “Rethinking the Human Mind,” which sparked my interest in technology’s impact on cognition. Romin helped me to refine my research topic and expectations. I was genuinely enthusiastic and settled on the topic: artificial intelligence disclosure in Jamaican commercial marketing:

consumer responses and implications for policy development. Because the deadline was swiftly approaching, he couldn't offer as much support with the application itself. Despite this, I did all the research and reading necessary to prepare the proposal using online articles, research papers, and past proposals on the Laidlaw Scholars Network. This required a couple of late nights to complete on time, but I quite enjoyed the process. The difference between my feelings while applying for the faculty and self-proposed streams gave me the first of many major realizations throughout this program: alignment and genuine interest are necessary to produce your best work. While I don't doubt that I would have worked well on a faculty-designed project, the joy and accomplishment I've felt while working to solve a question of my own would not have been replicated. I also learned that as a leader, one unfinished idea is good enough to start. Sometimes I feel the need to perfect things before involving another person, but discussing my initial ideas with Romin really helped me to dig deep and consider things I otherwise wouldn't have.

An Urgent Appeal – REB Approval

My research advisor sent me a sample ethics protocol which proved helpful in creating my draft materials for the research period. A few considerations I made when creating my protocol were whether I would recruit participants through an existing panel, what compensation would be given, and what platform was most appropriate given privacy concerns. I quickly realized that there would be many limitations and considerations based on the population I was investigating. Existing panels in Jamaica were hard to find. Those I found were not suited to my project goals, or I was unable to confirm how reputable and trustworthy they were. I decided to snowball recruit on my own and provide compensation using gift card draws instead of making payments to each person. This helped me to avoid collecting sensitive banking information from the participants, since there are no other widely accepted methods of digital money transfer in Jamaica. I decided on the number of participants I would need for my study by comparing methods and power analyses used in similar studies. I needed approximately 150 participants for my between-subjects design.

During this phase, I was consulting my advisor and making corrections to my ethics protocol, and so finishing it took longer than I expected. However, because my project was low risk, it would have been sent for delegated review which was supposed to be a shorter process than full board review. After completing all the suggested revisions from my supervisor, I submitted my ethics protocol around two weeks before the deadline to receive approval (**do not try this at home**). I was nervous while waiting for REB approval and was worried about potentially having to do revisions. I was thinking of many backup plans during the wait period. Thankfully, I got notified of my approval three days before the deadline, and I did not have to submit revisions. Putting in the work before submitting my protocol proved very effective.

Survey Design

While designing my survey, I realized the questions I was using were bits I randomly took from other papers, discussions with my advisor, and questions I thought would help me to measure the effects I wanted to observe. However, during my literature review, I realized that other studies employed justified scales either formulated by themselves or taken/adapted from previous research. I will honestly say I panicked a lot when I realized that there was an actual method to deciding what questions are asked; I spent extensive time researching (as one does when they are a part of a research program) and found papers and scales that were most

appropriate for my research questions. I modified these scales for my study and the context, which made my survey far more focused. This also increased my trust in my questions' abilities to reliably measure the effects I intended. This part of the research period helped me to practice humility by being willing to change directions as soon as I realized that what I'm doing isn't optimal, even though I had already put a lot of work into doing the incorrect thing.

Speaking of changing directions, I initially intended to host my survey on SurveyMonkey, but I realized that some features I needed required me to purchase a year-long subscription. I didn't see this information when I was comparing survey platforms (*here's what they don't want you to know*). I contacted my research advisor, who gave me access to Qualtrics and connected me with a post-graduate student to revise my survey for errors. I had never used Qualtrics before, but I found it intuitive for the most part, and for whatever I couldn't figure out, I found answers online. My survey was designed to randomly and automatically assign participants to one of my two study conditions, and to display the research stimuli accordingly. It also filtered out participants who did not meet the participant criteria.

The main leadership skill I utilized throughout my survey design process was initiative. My advisor mentioned his appreciation for me being able to work things out on my own even though I hadn't used the platform before.

Data Collection

I thought I did everything right to ensure my survey worked well, but I faced an issue as soon as the link went live. I received feedback from some people stating that my survey only asked one question and then closed. It turns out that when prompted about whether they meet all 3 criteria to participate in the research, some participants who met all the criteria were not accurately indicating this. I had to modify the question to avoid further confusion. Deep Dive sessions really proved helpful during this phase of my research because I was able to connect my experiences to those of my peers and reflect on how to improve my research skills. For example, when I shared about having to reword my survey question with Arushi, we had an interesting discussion about the importance of investigating how participants understand each question instead of assuming that they are viewing it in the way we intended.

By the Wednesday of week 2, I had what seemed like 70 survey responses, but many of these were participants that were screened out. At the end of my research period, Qualtrics reflected 203 survey responses; however, this number dropped to 161 when I accounted for those who had been screened out of the study. Upon further cleaning, when I removed responses with excessive runs and people who failed the manipulation check, I ended up with 93 responses, with most of these being in the control group. While this was disheartening, I learned that situations like these are to be expected when conducting online research.

Disseminating my survey was a challenge because of the lack of familiarity many persons have with this type of research in Jamaica. Some people had never heard of Qualtrics and were not familiar with the term survey. I had to compare it to a type of school project questionnaire that is common for highschoolers to complete in Jamaica. In other cases, people were not very technically savvy and required additional guidance on how to scan the QR code and complete the survey. Others were skeptical about remaining anonymous, and on the other hand, there were people who found it tedious to read the informed consent form on the start page. My main methods of disseminating the survey were by word of mouth, posting online,

posting in my community, and handing out flyers that I made with the survey QR code. Given how much effort and time I put into recruiting participants, I am grateful that I had 206 people who were willing to complete my survey. Though this is my own culture, this experience gave me a lot more awareness about how different groups within my country view research, and the kinds of barriers to access that prevent some people from being included in research.

The Final Chapter

I recently finished writing my research report, and I am proud of the work I've done. Though I lost more responses than I expected, I am motivated to do further investigation into this area. I believe that if the limitations of my study are addressed, the results could be very beneficial to understanding how AI disclosures would function in Jamaica, and whether this type of regulation would be appropriate and beneficial.

I am proud of how much I've grown from this experience, as both a leader and a researcher. I interacted with many interesting people and got to understand the challenges that come with doing research in different contexts. I was also exposed to issues facing businesses and policymakers in Jamaica, making me a more culturally sensitive individual. Additionally, I exercised initiative, prioritization, and project management, and was able to hold myself accountable to meet my deadlines. I did something difficult and did it well, and I'm excited to see where the skills I developed will take me next.