Paul Hudson,
Founder and CEO — FlexMR

Qual becomes "more human": As people push the benefits of AI and automation, I predict that we will see a real shift back towards "human qual." Small sample sizes are refreshingly human, and the moderation is what makes qual, qual. The recent focus has been all about 'scaling' qual, but that entirely misses the point of qual: moderation. Talk to people, to have a conversation; prompting and probing get to the 'why' behind the what. It's NOT just about an open-ended question. So many Big Data sets will help decision makers truly connect with customers. QRCA's 2020 conference title, "Keep Qual Human," is right on the money!

"Lean" research to come of age: The real benefit behind Agile methodologies is the need to be "lean" and more nimble. It is not just about automating things for pure speed; it is about being smarter too. During 2020, Lean and Agile methodologies will come of age that will understand that:

1) Lean puts customer insight into decisions earlier so smarter decisions are made sooner.

2) Lean cuts out the fat; simply put, this is why we see a move towards self-serve techniques within brands and across stakeholders. Creating hybrid styles of relationship with agencies will gain traction in 2020.

3) Lean is about "test-learn-test" – this is the point about "failing fast." Projects need to be split into phases. Not just automated surveys, it applies to phased qual insights.

Anand Janefalkar,
Founder and CEO — UJET

Messaging Will Surpass Voice: While voice will always remain an important channel for support, especially for urgent issues, in 2020, we will see messaging (SMS and chat) overtake voice as the most critical support channel. Messaging will most surely equal the success or demise of the overall customer experience (CX).

Data Will Break Down Silos Between Customer Support and Other Teams: In 2020, the "digital transformation" conversation common across IT will extend into the customer service center. We will begin to see the impact and value of support data being shared across the enterprise. Customer feedback, sentiment, profile data and more will be securely shared across organizations – helping marketing, sales and product development to make more strategic decisions. Customer support will be elevated as a whole.

Agent Specialization Will Be A Key Focus: In 2020, as the presence of technologies such as AI and Machine Learning within the contact center continues to grow and more customers are directed towards bots and self-service options, support agents will become hyper-specialized. Agent specialization will be geared towards channels and centered around specific issues, situations and the urgency of incoming support interactions.

AI Will Improve the Customer Support Employee Experience (EX), as well as the Customer Experience (CX): AI will dramatically improve the employee experience. The ability to automatically and instantly collect data from across multiple channels, analyze that data and provide actionable insight will enable support agents to quickly, easily and accurately address customer inquiries and achieve issue resolution.

Jon Last,
President — Sports and Leisure Research Group

I wonder whether the "flavor of the week" appeal of social media influencers as drivers of insights isn't in part a result of sample quality degradation that continues to challenge both quantitative and qualitative research in niche sectors, like ours. We've responded by building in multiple screen, knowledge checks and other "proof points" *before* we accept a respondent.

We're also relying more on house files to serve as alternatives to traditional panel sources. For those who care about quality – and particularly those with stringent, condition-specific requirements – this level of scrutiny is going to be critical. Third-party sample sources who rise to this challenge and agree to accountability for those they bring to a study, will enjoy significant competitive advantage.

Kevin Lonnie,
President — KL Communications

In 2020, our biggest challenge will be doing more with the same budget. Overall corporate spend for the MR industry has been flat for years.

At the same time, there are several innovative as well as compelling software services for researchers to add to their toolkit. Of course, flat or declining budgets make it hard for researchers to try something different.

For that reason, I believe we'll see more corporate researchers making use of their MROC to bring these new tools into their corporation. It will be the job of the MROC provider to become familiar with the latest tools and then allow their clients to cherry pick the ones of best interest.

In that context, the MROC will act as a cost-effective big box store (e.g. Costco, Sam's Club) – exactly what research departments need. Corporate researchers would like to try new innovative services, but who has