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INTERNET MARKETING RESEARCH: OPPORTUNITIES AND PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

The Internet is predicted to have a bright future as one of the preferred tools for marketing researchers. creates a typology of Internet marketing survey designs that demonstrates the presence of eight alternative approaches that advertisers might take. However, there are a number of issues with this new instrument that researchers who intend to conduct research using the Internet need to be aware of. In particular, we demonstrate how various sampling issues are brought on by the nature of the Internet. A seven-step process that follows the steps of the sampling process is suggested to discover these issues. Then, a number of real-world issues are examined.

Keywords: *Internet, Market Research, Surveys, Sampling.*

Introduction

Marketing researchers must learn how to use the Internet effectively because it is a relatively new instrument for marketing research. In this essay, we create a framework to aid researchers in recognizing potential opportunities and issues associated with using the Internet for marketing research. We structure our discussion around three key issues that every researcher must consider: survey design, sample, and field work. We first create a typology of Internet marketing survey designs based on the many pairings of the survey's goals, the chosen sample unit, and the planned data gathering technique. We discuss eight possible designs as a result of this combination. After that, we create a seven-step technique to identify potential issues with to sample and talk about specific issues because the Internet is always evolving. Finally, fieldwork issues are discussed, with an emphasis on the questionnaire structure, using search engines to find a frame, and issues with the sampling units.

A Classification of Internet Marketing Survey Formats

A marketer who intends to use the Internet for research should start by asking themselves, "What do I want to do?" What is the purpose of the study? The Internet and its resources can be used to conduct a wide variety of research projects. Three factors can be used to categories Internet marketing research designs: (1) the survey's goals; (2) the sampling units used; and (3) the method used to collect the data. The three dimensions and their content are discussed in the following sentences. Then, based on the combination of these three aspects, we provide eight various research designs.

Goals for the Survey

Three main types of study objectives can be met by marketing researchers by using the Internet:

- They can investigate how the Internet is utilized as a marketing tool,
- use it as a substitute for conventional questionnaire surveys, or
- use it to investigate Internet consumer behaviours.

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The use of the Internet relates to research on how businesses use the web as a marketing tool. Pitts et al. (1996) observed that websites have been utilised to accomplish the goals of a variety of marketing methods, for instance to: generate qualified leads for salespeople; handle customer complaints, queries, and suggestions; act as an electronic couponing device: gain access to previously unknown or inaccessible buying influences: project a positive corporate image: provide product information: foster and encourage consumer involvement with the product range.

The Effectiveness of these uses of the Internet can be Researched through Internet Marketing

Traditional questionnaire surveys could be conducted online as well. There aren't any significant distinctions between Internet questionnaires and conventional mail or phone questionnaires, other from technological details. The Internet has the advantage of being able to provide a richer level of support for the questionnaire and of allowing data to be automatically captured, which is a very important advantage. Any traditional marketing research subject, from business marketing strategy and policies to customer behaviour, could be investigated using internet questionnaire surveys.

The study of Internet consumer behaviours, such as comprehending how and why people shop online, is the third sort of marketing aim that can be attained by an Internet marketing survey. Internet usage consists of: shopping, which involves both browsing and purposeful information search; the selection and purchase of particular items, services, and information (Goldsmith and Bridges, 2001): passive information collection through exposure to advertising. These polls focus on consumer behaviour online, including how they shop, navigate, and use the Internet. The similar method might be used to research customer satisfaction with regard to websites.

Unit Sampling

An Internet marketing survey could employ one of three main sampling units: web pages, websites, or internet users. The design, the content, the amount of advertising space, the amount of time these pages remain unmodified, the number of visitors (or "hits") a page receives, and the amount of time visitors spend on a certain page may all be studied by taking a sample of Web pages. To gather information about business Internet communication and marketing tactics, site architecture, etc., a sample of websites could be chosen. To research Internet users' overall Internet behaviour or their behaviour towards a specific Web page or site, a sample of them could be chosen. Another option is to select a sample of online users and ask them to complete an online survey or send them an email with a survey attached. These inquiries could related, but not necessarily, to their Internet usage.

Data Gathering Techniques

The data collection techniques make up the third pillar of our typology of Internet marketing survey designs. There are three possible approaches: Direct observation, a survey, or an experiment are the first three options. Either the researchers or a sample of consumers could directly observe the content of a website or page. This technique can be used to gather information that is either objective, like the quantity of adverts on a page, the presence of frames, or the number of links on a certain page, or subjective, such user happiness or their response to the information or design of a Web page.

For Internet questionnaire surveys, there are four different formats that can be used:

- Questionnaires on websites;
- Questionnaires delivered via email;
- Text-formatted forms sent via email as an attachment; or
- A text-formatted form that may be downloaded and downloaded at a designated ftp and returned by mail or fax.

There aren't any significant differences between these questionnaire types and the conventional questions by mail or phone, except from minor technological concerns. By developing an experimental Web page and tracking user responses to manipulated site modifications, an experiment can be carried out. To determine their impact on customer behaviours, the content, design, and/or navigation flow may be changed.

Eight Distinct Patterns

Combining these three dimensions could lead to eight alternative research strategies:

- After the researchers have examined the content of the pages chosen, the first and simplest design is to draw a sample of Web pages. This design may be used to investigate how the Internet is utilised as a marketing tool, particularly how an advertisement or image is presented on a page.

- A second strategy is to use a two-stage sampling to select a sample of Web pages. procedure. The first stage involves selecting a sample of websites, and the second stage involves selecting a sample of pages from the websites that were chosen. With this layout, the researchers are able to regulate how representative the sample is of the various site kinds. With this layout, non-commercial websites, for instance, could be conveniently left out of the sample. It is also possible to investigate how people utilise the Internet as a marketing tool through observation.
- A sample of websites may also be chosen in order to observe, but at a level higher than the Web page, how the Internet is used as a marketing tool. This design enables the researcher to examine a site's structure as opposed to the earlier one. A similar concept is used by Mottner et al. (2001) to create a typology of online shops.
- In the first two designs, the researchers served as the observers, but a sample of users would be a better choice to study some subjective aspects of Web sites. Two samples must be taken in this situation: first, a sample of customers, and then a second. a selection of web pages or sites. This design may also be utilised to research how the Internet is used as a promotional tool. For instance, Griffith and Krampf (1998) examined the effect of the retail marketing mix on consumer perceptions using such a strategy.
- To get the addresses of businesses (mailing, email, phone, or fax) and/or the names of managers, a sample of websites might also be compiled. Then these businesses or managers could receive a questionnaire. This design is particularly intriguing for two main reasons: first, some characteristics of the firms to be sampled could be checked before sending a questionnaire to ensure that these firms effectively belong to the population to be studied; and second, Web sites can provide researchers with information that is not listed anywhere else, such as an e-mail address. This design was utilised by Fontenot and Vlosky (1998) for their exploratory research of connections between Internet buyers and sellers.
- Instead of selecting a random group of websites, you may choose a sample of Internet users and email them a survey or direct them to a website with a survey. Comley (1996) investigated the use of the Internet as a data collection method using a similar concept. However, this approach might also be applied to numerous other questionnaire studies, whether or not they involve the Internet.
- It is also possible to take a sample of Internet users and Web sites. Internet users are requested to visit particular Web sites and respond to a questionnaire on their experiences with those particular Web sites. In contrast to the concept where just people are sampled, this strategy enables the researchers to manage which websites Internet users visit.
- An Internet marketing survey might also employ an experimental methodology. A sample of Internet users may be selected, and they could be asked to visit an experimental Web site that has been created. Their actions could be observed once the site's features, such as its content, visual aesthetic, or navigational layout, have been altered. Mosley-Matchett (1998) utilised such a strategy to investigate the impacts of presentation.

Issues with Survey Sampling

Before addressing the practical issues with such surveys and after reviewing the many survey designs that can be used for Internet marketing research surveys, we must talk about the issues with sampling. These issues are some of the most challenging when it comes to online surveys, and some of them are still open for discussion. The majority of issues with choosing a probabilistic sample are caused by the Internet's dynamic nature. We provided these issues in Table I after the seven steps of a traditional sampling method to aid marketing researchers in recognizing these issues (Kish, 1965). The issues that are most crucial for Internet marketing research are then covered in more depth.

Dynamic Universe

The fact that the Internet is a constantly changing environment is one of the trickier sample issues associated with Internet surveys. The entire universe is the subject of study and the sum of all the measurements. It must be specified in such a way that it is obvious which unit belongs to it (Kish, 1965). However, the Internet is evolving and rapidly expanding; every day, several new websites appear while others go offline. As a result, the sampling universe is constantly changing, making it impossible to determine the probability of selection associated with each potential sample. Even if at some point this likelihood might be determined, it might not be for some time. This results in a few

generalization issues. The results of a poll conducted at one point in time could only be applied to the present. Additionally, issues are crucial for surveys that last for a while (a month or a year). The only way to deal with these issues in a shifting universe is to survey at various points in time and swap out static signs with dynamic ones.

Sites that are not Cited (Non-Coverage Error)

Non-coverage mistake in internet research is another significant issue. The fact that many Web pages are not cited by any search engines or other Web listings may highlight the partial frame problem. The generalization of the survey results is further restricted by this fact. This "non-coverage" issue in phone polls could be resolved by randomly dialing phone numbers. Could the Internet allow for such a thing? That looks more challenging. Three things set a URL apart from a phone number:

- A URL consists of signs (letters, numbers, and special characters), not only numbers;
- The likelihood of each sign being omitted is not equal, in contrast to the likelihood that the various numbers in a phone number will be omitted; and
- A URL has a changeable length.

Respondent

It is also challenging to manage who responds to an online questionnaire survey. It is hard to determine who is accessing the website and completing the questionnaire if it is hosted on one.In some circumstances, it may be able to obtain the respondent's email address, although this address says nothing about the respondent's membership in the sample. A control of the responder could be done more effectively if the questionnaire were provided by email, but getting the respondent's email address is challenging. E-mail addresses, in contrast to most phone numbers, are only partially listed. Additionally, the existing lists of e-mail addresses are not at all comprehensive. when the survey was If a message needs to go to a manager at the company, it is feasible to find their email address by looking through the website. However, this information is frequently limited to the Webmaster's email address. The answer in this situation will rely on how willingly the webmaster will forward the questionnaire to the appropriate respondent.

A World that is Multicultural and Multilingual

The Internet connects people all over the world. A website's nationality, culture, or language cannot always be determined from its URL because any country in the world could have a.com address. When a survey's objectives are geographically or linguistically constrained or when a geographic or linguistic segmentation is required, this obstacle could cause some issues. It is also possible that the respondents' capacity to respond to the questions will be hampered by the language issue. In these circumstances, a search engine's frame, for instance, needs to be cleared of all the addresses that don't belong to the population being researched.

Questionnaire Structures

These questionnaires could be distributed in one of three ways: online via a website, electronically by email, or as an attachment in an email.

The frame's quality

Getting a "representative" frame of the Internet's universe from which we can draw a probabilistic sample is the key challenge in sampling on the Internet. Utilising search engines as a sampling frame is one approach to this issue. However, search engines are not flawless frames, therefore it is necessary to assess their quality. Three factors determine how good a sample frame they are:

- The scope of their index;
- The recentness of the index; and
- The relevance and methodology of the ranking.

The most significant issue with a survey's validity is its "representativity," or the calibre of the frame. To estimate this quality, some tests must be performed. The proportion of various defaults in the frame is controlled during these testing. A partial list of the defaults could include: the percentage of inactive sites, or addresses that don't exist; the percentage of shut-down sites, or addresses that don't respond; the percentage of sites that have changed addresses but keep a link between the old and the new addresses; and the percentage of duplicate sites. The assessment of the significance of the bias that these proportions exhibit must follow the examination of these proportions.

Issues Involving the Sampling Units

The Internet is a worldwide network of websites, pages, linkages between pages within a single website, and links between websites; A page, a site, or a collection of sites could all be used as sampling units. The addresses of one or more pages of sites are provided by the search engines that are typically accessible frames. If the sample unit is the site, redundancy issues arise, and if the sampling unit is the page, the issue is that not all of the pages of a specific site are included in the frame. The sample unit could alternatively be a collection of websites run by the same company, such as a multinational corporation, but with various links connecting them and distinct addresses. The sampling unit's timing It's crucial to clear the frame of all duplicates before drawing a sample at the location. A twostage sampling is preferable when the sampling unit is the page. The first step is to select a sample of websites, and the next is to select a sample of pages from those websites.

Conclusion

The Internet is a powerful resource that provides numerous opportunities for marketing researchers, but it also has a number of drawbacks. In this study, we made an effort to map the challenges facing Internet marketing researchers. First, we created an Internet marketing typology. survey design, which suggests eight distinct designs based on the researchers' goals, the sampling size, and the method used to collect the data. Following the seven steps of the sample procedure, the issues with sampling the Internet were pointed out in the second section of the study. Finally, we discussed some real-world issues with performing online research.

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