



CHAPTER 7

Online Marketing Research—The Growth of Mobile and Social Media Research

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.	Examine the online world as it applies to marketing research.
2.	Use the Internet to gather secondary data for marketing research.
3.	Understand the nature of online focus groups, online individual depth interviews, and marketing research online communities.
4.	Appreciate online survey research and ways to conduct it.
5.	Learn the importance of online panel management in maintaining data quality.
6.	Appraise the growing use of surveys on smart devices and the importance of social media marketing research.

Chapter 7 explores the ever-increasing role of the Internet in secondary data searches, qualitative research, and survey research, all fostered by digital devices and social media. Online observation research, another form of research growing at a sizzling pace, is covered in Chapter 8.

The Online World

The world's Internet population will total almost 3 billion users by the time you read this paragraph. In the United States and Canada, over 80 percent of the population is online, spanning every ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational divide. Around the globe, a little over a third of the world's population now has Internet access. The United States has the highest Internet penetration, followed by Oceania/Australia (68%); Europe (61%); Latin America/Caribbean (40%); Middle East (36%), Asia (26%), and Africa (14%).¹

The popularity of online research continues to grow, with the vast majority of America's marketing research companies conducting some form of online research. Today, online survey research has replaced computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) as the most popular mode of data collection. Internet data collection is also rated as having the greatest potential for further growth.

Using the Internet for Secondary Data

Recall from Chapter 4 that secondary data can play a key role early in the marketing research process. It can clarify the problem, perhaps suggest a methodology for approaching the problem, and, if you are really lucky, provide a solution so that the time and cost of primary research are avoided.

Sites of Interest to Marketing Researchers

Exhibit 7.1 details a number of different sites where researchers can go to obtain secondary information, including competitive intelligence. You will note that a rich variety of data are available on many different topics. Although a lot of information is free, some, such as that offered by Nielsen Site Reports, must be purchased. To learn about the demographics and psychographics of your zip code, go to <http://www.claritas.com/MyBestSegments/Default.jsp#>. Then select "zip code look-up" and type in your zip code.

Several excellent periodical, newspaper, and book databases are also available to researchers. We have also posted these on our website at www.wiley.com/college/McDaniel. Some can be directly accessed via the Internet and others through your local library's website.

Newsgroups

A primary means of communicating with other professionals and special-interest groups on the Internet is through newsgroups. Newsgroups function much like bulletin boards for a particular topic or interest. Topics cover just about anything. They range from companies, sports, products, services, investing, brands, to animals. Users post messages to a news server, which then sends them to participating servers. Then, other users can access the newsgroup and read the postings. The groups can be moderated, where a person decides which postings will be part of the discussion, or unmoderated, where everything is posted. To participate, a person must subscribe to the group, which is usually free. Nearly all newsgroups are found on Usenet, which is a collection of servers around the world.

EXHIBIT 7.1**Secondary Data Available Online for Marketing Researchers**

Organization	URL	Description
American Marketing Association	www.marketingpower.com	Enables users to search all of the AMA's publications by using keywords.
American Fact Finder	www.factfinder.census.gov	Provides ongoing data collected by the Census Bureau.
BLS Consumer Expenditure Surveys	www.bls.gov/cex	Provides information on the buying habits of consumers, including data on their expenditures, income, and credit ratings.
Bureau of Economic Analysis	www.bea.gov	Offers a wide range of economic statistics.
Bureau of Transportation Statistics	www.bts.gov	Serves as a comprehensive source for a wide range of statistics on transportation.
American City Business Journals	www.bizjournals.com	Offers a wealth of articles, reports, news, and data on everything from ratings of America's best small cities to statistics on men's and women's salaries. Current articles and reports, as well as an extensive archive dating back to 1994, provide insight and analysis of key business and economic trends.
Center for International Earth Science Network	www.ciesin.org	Serves as an excellent source of demographic information concerning the United States.
Centers for Disease Control/National Center for Health Statistics	www.cdc.gov/nchs	Maintains data on vital events, health status, lifestyle, exposure to unhealthy influences, onset and diagnosis of illness and disability, and use of health-care, through the National Center for Health Statistics. The NCHS, a subdivision of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is the federal government's principal agency for vital and health statistics.
Clickz.com	www.clickz.com	Provides statistics on Internet research: weekly usage statistics, online populations, browser statistics and more.
The Dismal Scientist	www.dismal.com	Provides timely economic information, with comprehensive data and analyses at the metro, state, and national levels. This authoritative site also has data and analyses of global issues, including situations facing Asia, South America, and Europe. Visitors can rank states and metro areas on more than 100 economic, socioeconomic, and demographic categories.
Easy Analytic Software, Inc./The Right Site	www.easidemographics.com	Offers demographic site reports, or three-ring studies, including current estimates for population and households. Each three-ring study has census estimates for race, ethnicity, age distribution, and income distribution, as well as weather data.
EconData.net	www.econdata.net	Enables users to access a tremendous number of links to government, private, and academic data sources. Check out the list of top 10 data sources at this premier site for researchers interested in economics and demographics.
FreeDemographics	www.freedemographics.com	Offers free demographic market analysis reports.
Harris InfoSource	www.harrisinfo.com	Provides business-to-business data on American manufacturers and key decision makers.
Hoovers	www.hoovers.com	Gives company descriptions and industry information.
Internet Public Library	www.ipl.org/div/aon	Offers a collection of over 1,100 Internet sites providing information about a wide variety of professional and trade associations.
Marketing Research Association	www.mra-net.org	Offers causes and solutions of "declining respondent cooperation" and links to research suppliers.
Mediamark Research/Top-Line Reports	www.mediamark.com/mri/docs/toplinereports.html	Allows marketers and researchers to access demographic data on magazines, cable TV, and 53 different product or service categories. Top-Line Reports breaks down cable TV networks' viewers according to age, sex, and income. Magazines are listed by total audience, circulation, readers per copy, median age, and income.

(continued)

EXHIBIT 7.1		(Continued)
Organization	URL	Description
Opinion Research (ORC International)	www.opinionresearch.com	Offers consulting and research services. Its website claims expertise in a broad range of industries, including information technology and telecommunications, healthcare, financial services, public services, energy and utilities market research, and more.
Population Reference Bureau	www.prb.org	Source of demographic information on population issues.
Quirks	www.quirks.com	Magazine for market researchers.
Service Intelligence	www.serviceintelligence.com	Has an area devoted to customer stories of unpleasant experiences with airlines, banks, restaurants, and other service businesses. However, “hero” stories are also included.
Social Security Administration	www.socialsecurity.gov/policy	Provides a range of government statistics about social security beneficiaries.
U.S. Census Bureau	www.census.gov	Serves as the source for all federal census data.
U.S. Department of Agriculture/Economic Research Service	www.ers.usda.gov	Offers a wide range of agricultural statistics.
USADATA	www.usadata.com	Provides access to consumer lifestyle data on a local, regional, and national basis.
U.S. Government	www.fedstats.gov	Serves as a source for statistics and reports for more than 100 government agencies. Also links to other sources of relevant information. Highly recommended site, but you might have to dig a little.
Valuation Resources	www.valuationresources.com	Offers a directory of resources that address subjects such as industry overview, issues, trends, and outlook, industry financial information and financial ratios, and compensation and salary surveys for a wide variety of industries.
Wikipedia	www.wikipedia.org	Functions as the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.
World Fact Book	www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook	Provides detailed information about countries of the world, including political and economic aspects.
WorldOpinion	www.worldopinion.com	Offers thousands of marketing research reports. This is perhaps the premier site for the marketing research industry.

With over 200,000 newsgroups currently in existence and more being added every day, there is a newsgroup for nearly every hobby, profession, and lifestyle. Most browsers come with newsgroup readers. If you do not already have a newsgroup reader, you can go to one of the search engines and search for a freeware or shareware newsgroup reader. These newsgroup readers function much like e-mail programs. To find a particular newsgroup, follow these steps:

1. Connect to the Internet in your usual way.
2. Open your newsreader program.
3. Search for the topic of interest. Most newsreaders allow you to search the names of the newsgroups for key words or topics. Some newsreaders, like Microsoft Internet Explorer, also allow you to search the brief descriptions that accompany most newsgroups.
4. Select the newsgroup of interest.
5. Begin scanning messages. The title of each message generally indicates its subject matter.

Newsgroup messages look like e-mail messages. They contain a subject title, author, and message body. Unlike normal e-mail messages, however, newsgroup messages are

threaded discussions. This means that any reply to a previous message will appear linked to that message. Therefore, you can follow a discussion between two or more people by starting at the original message and following the links (or threads) to each successive reply. Images, sound files, and video clips can be attached to messages for anyone to download and examine.

Blogs

The traditional definition of a blog, or weblog, was a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and web links. Now companies are also using blogs to communicate directly with customers and other businesses. More recently, market researchers have used blogs to monitor brands, track trends, profile customers, and identify unmet needs. Blogs are growing to be an important tool in the exploratory research stage of many formal survey projects.⁷

Companies also use blogs to talk to customers and to other businesses. Blogging gained popularity with the introduction of automated published systems, most notably at *blogger-atblogger.com*. Marketing researchers are finding blogs to be an important source of information on just about any topic imaginable. Researchers have used them to recruit respondents for surveys. Although blogs can be found on most search engines, several engines such as *blogsearchengine.com* are dedicated to blog searches.

Blogs can also be used as a form of individual depth interviews (IDI). For a study of women's handbags, 150 women from 17 cities around the globe such as Rome, Istanbul, Shanghai and San Francisco were recruited to talk about what was in their bags, their relationships to their bags, and the different roles that bags played in their lives. All participants were "handbag enthusiasts," but none had prior blogging experience.

Researchers posted topics for women to cover in three parts, giving respondents two days to reply to each part. It was reasoned that this would give women time to think over each series of questions, allowing them to reply in more depth and detail than they might in a more traditional interview process. Importantly, it also gave them the opportunity to take and post photos to illustrate their bags and their contents.²

These blogs opened up a rich and insightful world. What struck the researchers most was the confessional nature of the blogs, the ease and pleasure women took in revealing the detailed contents of their bags, the stories behind certain objects and the rich, often complicated relationships they had with individual bags. A few sample comments were:

Remembering that first bag

"My very first really incredible special important purse I ever had was my red leather Betsy Johnson purse. My boyfriend gave it to me as a gift for my nineteenth birthday. It reminded me of my grandma's Louis Vuitton purses. As a little girl, of course I had no idea what a Louis was, but I knew somehow that they were very important. Excuse my French, but I thought they were a bit ugly. I knew they were important because when it rained, my grandma would hide them so daintily under her coat or umbrella and make the maddest dash to a car I had ever seen."

On my relationships to my bags

"Wow, I never really thought about our relationship. Hmm. Well, I guess you could say the Balenciaga is 'my Sherpa bitch.' She (yes, she is a girl) is always holding my 'shit' for me."

"This bag knows me to the fullest extent. We have been caught up in many different pickles together and have made it out just fine! This bag would have many great things to say about me, if another bag asked. It would describe us as a team and tell that other purse how much I have taught it and shown it off."

"I suppose I would think of this bag as being an escort and definitely a he. I feel it is support under my arm and feel confident with it going about my day-to-day business,

whatever that entails. Whereas the embroidered one and the little creamy grosgrain one are like girlfriends that go out with me in the evenings and make me feel feminine and girly.”³

Online Qualitative Research

A popular form of online qualitative research is focus groups. Traditional online groups are what the name implies. The goal is to get 8 to 10 participants online at the same time, for a moderator to send questions to the participants, and the participants to provide their comments. These online bulletin board focus groups had a number of disadvantages. Since the moderator is typing a question and the focus group participants are typing replies, all non-verbal communication was lost. Both inflection in voice tone and body language are keys to fully understanding what a person means. Also, it is invariable that some respondents type faster than others, creating a suboptimal interview flow. As one moderator notes, “Often-times I was in the middle of the second sections of my guide when some people were just answering questions from the first section.”⁴

Unlike in traditional qualitative groups, online participants don’t wait for others to respond before offering their answers to a question; everyone responds at (or around) the same time. As such, moderators are challenged to read a burst of responses and respond with meaningful probes to each individual participant. This actually limits the ability to probe, thereby eliminating one key characteristic of qualitative research.⁵

Webcam Online Focus Groups

The many disadvantages of bulletin board focus groups have been eliminated by the use of webcams and webcam focus group software. Webcams connect participants and a moderator. Voice data often goes over a phone line to reduce demands on bandwidth, making the videoconference experience much more fluid.

The video-based online focus group marries the benefits of traditional qualitative research and the promised benefits of online focus groups:

- Moderators can see and hear participants, meaning that there is greater context to a participant’s responses and probing is not compromised.
- Participants can log in from any part of the country (or the world, for that matter), thus eliminating the need for the moderator or clients to travel to a limited number of markets.
- Built-in collaboration tools enable the moderator to show multiple forms of stimuli (concepts, advertisements, storyboards) to the group.⁶

Webcam groups require more screening than a traditional offline focus group. Additional questions include: one to evaluate a recruit’s comfort level participating in a webcam-based interview (strong comfort required); a question about broadband access on the computer they will use for the interview (broadband access required); a question about personal comfort using a computer and the Internet; and a question about webcam ownership.⁷ Some research companies will send webcams to hard-to-find qualified respondents.⁸

Many companies offer webcam-based software and hosting such as QualMeeting by 20/20 Research.

Improving Virtual Focus Groups with Telepresence

Telepresence was invented by Cisco to simplify virtual business meetings. Cisco and Tata Communications set up a network of public telepresence rooms located in 30 cities

around the world. Each telepresence location features three HD video screens in a semi-circle (to create an identical room on the “other side”); reflective lighting for a more three-dimensional feel; full-duplex audio; directional, voice-activated video and audio; simultaneous sharing of laptop screen; and the ability to conference multiple locations at once. See Exhibit 7.2.

“Compared to traditional videostreaming, the big difference is that this isn’t a remote viewing technology. This is a remote participating technology. You can moderate from another city. It’s not videostreaming over the web to your desktop. It’s everyone sitting around what appears to them to be the same table, engaged in dialogue as if we were physically in the same room,” notes Jonathan Hilland, CEO of Mindwave Research.⁹

Participants arrive at the telepresence facility in their city. The moderator is often in a telepresence room with other participants. The participants in each location sit around a semicircle table facing three television screens. The screens display a live feed from rooms in one city or in several other cities that are set up to look identical; the screens appear to “complete” the room. Up to two participants can be seen on each screen for a total of six persons seen on the screen at one time. Above each television screen is a camera, aimed at the two-person section of the semicircle directly across from it. In front of each two-person section of the semicircle is a microphone. The audio is designed to be directional, so the voice of the person speaking feeds only from behind the screen on which the respondent appears.¹⁰ Although participants may be in six cities around the world, each has the virtual sense of being at the same conference table with the others.

Using Channel M2 to Conduct Online Focus Groups

Channel M2 provides market researchers with user-friendly virtual interview rooms, recruiting, and technical support for conducting virtual qualitative research efficiently and effectively. By using Channel M2, the moderator and client can see and hear every respondent. You can see a demo at www.channelM2.com.



Exhibit 7.2

The Telepresence Facility With the Screens Off

Focus group recruiting at M2 uses a blend of e-mail recruitment (from a global panel with access to over 15 million online consumers) and telephone verification and confirmation. Specifically, e-mails elicit involvement and direct participants to an online qualification questionnaire to ensure that each meets screening criteria. Telephone follow-up confirms that respondents qualify. Prior to the interview, respondents know they must show photo ID on camera so as to verify identity. Specifically, respondents are directed to show their driver's license to their webcam.

Channel M2 focus groups begin by the participants logging onto a web page where everyone sees and hears each other, and communicates in a group setting. Participants are recruited using traditional methods and are then sent a web camera so that both verbal and nonverbal reactions can be recorded. Installation of the webcam is simple, aided by Channel M2 tech support one to two days prior to the interview.

Participants are then provided instructions via e-mail, including a link to the Channel M2 interviewing room and a toll-free teleconference number to call. Upon clicking on the link, participants sign on and see the Channel M2 interview room, complete with live video of the other participants, text chat, screen or slide sharing, and whiteboard.

Once the focus group is underway, questions and answers occur in “real time” in a lively setting. Participants comment spontaneously, both verbally or via text messaging, yet the moderator can provide direction exactly as they would in a traditional setting.

Recently, Channel M2 has introduced real-time voice analysis. The program details the respondent's: emotional mindset (excitement, stress, fear, embarrassment); cognitive processes (rejection, confusion, uncertainty); and veracity (truth, deceit, conflict). When one of these flags pop up, the moderator can probe more deeply to clarify the situation. Voice analysis can be used later in the focus group analysis to remove the comments of any participant who was determined by the software to be untruthful.¹¹

Using the Web to Find Focus Group Participants

The Internet is proving to be an excellent tool to locate group participants that fit a very specific set of requirements. Researchers are tapping online bulletin boards such as Craigslist, which attracts 60 million visitors each month to its classified advertisements. The site is most useful “when you're trying to find niche users to a small population of users that is hard to find,” says Tim Plowman, an anthropologist who works at Cheskin, a marketing consulting firm.

Point Forward, Inc., a Redwood City, California, marketing research firm, has used Craigslist to find people who fit very specific categories, such as people who travel frequently between the United States and Mexico, says Vice President Michael Barry.

A Craigslist posting by a different marketing research firm offered \$350 to \$900 to New York residents willing to give researchers a tour of their liquor cabinets, take them on a liquor-shopping trip, or make a video-based documentary of a social event they were planning.

Screening questions included: “When you are out for drinks or purchasing alcohol in a store, do people tend to ask for your advice on which brands of liquor to buy? If yes, how often does that happen?”¹²

Online Individual Depth Interviews (IDI)

Individual online depth interviews are typically conducted like a webcam focus group interview except the IDI is longer and with only one person at a time. Bulletin board IDIs aren't efficient because the extensive typing required and there is no nonverbal feedback. Prior to webcam research, some marketing researchers combined an IDI telephone interview and the Internet to show stimuli.¹³ This approach still lacks the ability to view nonverbal cues. Individual depth interviews conducted either on or offline offer richer content and deeper

insights than most focus groups. Online IDIs may be the only way to reach people such as physicians or busy executives.

Marketing Research Online Communities (MROC)

A **marketing research online community (MROC)** is a carefully selected group of consumers who agree to participate in an ongoing dialogue. The information value emerges from the richer, more complex understanding that researchers get from a MROC. All community interaction takes place on a custom-designed website. Membership is by invitation only.¹⁴ During the life of the community—which may last anywhere from a few days to a continuous process—community members respond to questions on a regular basis. These discussions, which typically take the form of qualitative “dialogues,” are augmented by the ability of community members to talk to one another about topics that are of interest to them as well.

The popularity and power of web communities initially came from several key benefits. Web communities

- Engage customers in a space where they are most comfortable, allowing clients to interact with them on a deeper level.
- Uncover “exciters” and “eureka moments,” resulting in customer-derived innovations.
- Establish brand advocates who are emotionally invested in a company’s success.
- Offer real-time results, enabling clients to explore ideas that normal time constraints prohibit.
- Create a forum in which natural dialogue allows customers to initiate topics important to them.¹⁵

In addition, web communities help companies create a customer-centered organization by putting employees into direct contact with consumers from the comfort of their own desks.

Since communities provide advantages in speed, flexibility, and 24/7 access to consumers, they let the organization be agile in its research decision making and prudent in its spending.

By adding a research focus to the web community environment, this holistic perspective deepens as the community becomes a way to

- Map the psyche of consumer segments.
- Brainstorm new ideas.
- Co-create and test new products.
- Observe natural consumer behavior.
- Rally the company around a customer-centered perspective.¹⁶

Beyond that, communities provide even greater value when the insights gained can be quickly shifted from the community space to the traditional market research space. This tight integration with more mainstream research approaches ensures that the community is both feeding new research initiatives and being fueled by insights gained from traditional research projects.

This type of cross-pollination takes another step toward a new research paradigm, one that integrates web communities and traditional research. This new paradigm offers the potential to

- Increase the efficiency of research by quickly finding the most appropriate forum for exploration of new insights.
- Reduce costs by using the community to follow up on questions left unanswered from ad hoc research studies.
- Improve the way consumer insights and implications are shared across organizational departments.

marketing research online community (MROC)

Carefully selected group of consumers who agree to participate in an ongoing dialogue with a corporation.

Unlike Internet surveys, participants in a research community talk to each other as well as to researchers and marketers. Consumers exchange ideas in their own language and raise questions and answers that researchers sometimes did not even think to ask. In other words, the social context and interaction are important and help provide a holistic understanding. This can only be achieved by creating engagement at different levels, however. First, there is a need for natural engagement; consumers have to identify with the topic or the brand under investigation. A second form of engagement is method engagement. Researchers should propose questions in a fun and challenging way to increase participation and the quality of input. Using gamification (point scoring, competition with others, rules of play) can spice up the research questioning. Including entertaining video clips or having celebrities ask questions can also increase respondent participation.¹⁸

Many marketers focus on the absolute number of people in MROC. Although this is important, what is more valuable is the number of interactions per discussion thread, which can only be created through engagement with consumers. Larger communities (over 100 members) require more participation in building efforts by the moderator. **Lurking**—which occurs when community members remain in the community but don't actively participate—can increase when there are too many members or an overwhelming number of posts. A paradox? Not really. When participants see too much information, they disconnect because they are convinced that their opinion has already been voiced and adds little or no value to the discussion.¹⁹

Researchers from InSites Consulting, based in the Netherlands and New York, discuss giving participants in MROCs more active roles in the communities in the Practicing Marketing Research Box.

PRACTICING MARKETING RESEARCH

Making Participants Researchers

In MROC, we are the researchers, they are the participants. What would happen if we were to bring down these walls and turn participants into researchers? Our recent case studies demonstrate that community participants are not only perfectly capable of taking on the role as co-researchers, it's also a way to close cultural, generational and knowledge gaps. By placing participants in the role of co-researcher, we can analyze a research question from multiple perspectives.

Without introducing the official role of a "co-moderator" we already see some members start behaving as moderators by asking questions or raising general issues. Of the 15 more recent communities we have set up, this moderator behavior is visible in the "off-topic rooms" of 12 of them. (Off-topic rooms are areas on the community where members can start their own discussion and talk about anything they want. This moderator behavior is observed when members start new topics with question(s) about the brand/topic of the research, to trigger a new discussion and

ultimately to contribute to the end goal of the research community. These are questions that are new to the research and that clients and researchers have not asked. For example, in a recent community about coffee, one member started a discussion on reasons why we drink coffee:

We have been talking about drinking coffee for a few weeks now and I think it's not only just because it's tasty, comforting, energizing, etc. For me, I think it's a peace of mind. I used to work on a farm. Around 10 a.m., everyone came to the kitchen for a break and we drank coffee together. There was then some talking, and when the coffee was finished, everyone went back to work. Sitting down and having a break was only done if there was coffee! So, coffee is about having a break and relaxing. Do you agree? What are your reasons for drinking coffee?

This natural moderator behavior already shows there's potential for empowering participants to be part of the research team and become actual co-moderators. There are various ways to introduce co-moderators into the community. We have identified two types of co-moderator: by role and by mission.

Role

The co-moderator task “by role” is endorsed as another moderator in the MROC of a specific room (i.e., the social corner). The co-moderator is encouraged to start discussions, moderate, summarize, and report back to the moderator. In the community “Come Dine With Me” that we ran for Campbell’s, 23 percent of the participants indicated upfront they were interested in being a co-moderator. Ultimately, the selected co-moderator took his role very seriously and started completely new topics in a dedicated room. By qualitative coding of the discussion, we concluded that the efforts of the co-moderator-by-role resulted in two times more interaction in the discussion compared to threads started by a regular (non-co-moderator) member.

Multiple Perspectives

Next to moderating, participants can also add value when they are involved during the analysis phase, also referred to *crowd-interpretation*. The rationale behind crowd-interpretation is that analysis of data is biased by a researcher’s gaze. To get all potential interpretations and insights hidden in the data, we need to include multiple perspectives.

Recently, we conducted an insight community in cooperation with Air France and LKM where we wanted to detect

new needs of transfer passengers. After an observational stage where transfer passengers reported their journey, we invited the community members to interpret each other’s contributions.

From previous research, we know that consumers who are knowledgeable about the topic are most suitable for interpreting research results.

The crowd-interpretation was done in a game. During the first round, members had to give their interpretation on the input of their peers. In the second round, the original contributor could rate the analysis. Upon each correct analysis, a member could receive points. Consumers who were best in the analysis (highest amount of points) won the game and got a special incentive. Comparing the results of the researcher group with those of the participants, we concluded that involving co-researchers led to up to 21 percent more new insights.²⁰

Questions

1. Is it a good idea to let members of a MROC play the role of marketing researchers? Why or why not?
2. Are MROCs a substitute for online focus groups and/or IDIs? Why or why not?
3. Should all companies be using MROCs? If no, which types should not?

Online Survey Research

The Internet has forever changed the way we conduct survey research. As noted earlier, a vast majority of all U.S. research firms are now conducting online research. In the United States, the online population is now closely tracking the U.S. population in most key demographic areas. Moreover, the number of Internet users around the world continues to explode. As the number of users grows worldwide, characteristics of a country’s population and Internet user characteristics tend to meld. The reason for the phenomenal growth of online research is straightforward. The advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

Advantages of Online Surveys

Most companies today face shorter product life cycles, increased competition, and a rapidly changing business environment. Management decision makers are having to make complex, rapid-fire decisions, and Internet research can help by providing timely information. The specific advantages of online surveys include the following:²¹

- **Rapid deployment, real-time reporting** Online surveys can be broadcast to thousands of potential respondents simultaneously. Respondents complete surveys and the results are tabulated and posted for corporate clients to view as the returns arrive. Thus, Internet survey results can be in the decision maker’s hands in significantly less time than traditional survey results.

- **Reduced costs** The use of electronic survey methods can cut costs by 25 to 40 percent and provide results in half the time it takes to do traditional telephone surveys. Data-collection costs account for a large proportion of any traditional marketing research budget. Telephone surveys are labor-intensive efforts incurring training, telecommunications, and management costs. Online surveys eliminate these costs almost completely. Although the costs of traditional survey techniques rise in proportion to the number of interviews desired, electronic solicitations can grow in volume with less increase in project costs.
- **Ready personalization** Internet surveys can be highly personalized for greater relevance to each respondent's own situation, thus speeding up the response process. Respondents appreciate being asked only pertinent questions, being able to pause and then resume the survey as needed, and having the ability to see previous responses and correct inconsistencies.
- **High response rates** Busy respondents may be growing increasingly intolerant of "snail mail" or telephone-based surveys. Online surveys take less time to complete than phone interviews do, can be accomplished at the respondent's convenience (after work hours), and are much more stimulating and engaging. Graphics, interactivity, links to incentive sites, and real-time summary reports make the interview more enjoyable. The result: much higher response rates.
- **Ability to contact the hard-to-reach** Certain groups are among the most difficult to reach (doctors, high-income professionals, CIOs in Global 2000 firms). Most of these groups are well represented online. Internet surveys provide convenient anytime/anywhere access that makes it easy for busy professionals to participate.
- **Simplified and enhanced panel management** Internet panels are electronic databases, linked via the Internet, that are committed to providing feedback and counsel to research firms and their clients. They may be large or small, syndicated or proprietary, and they may consist of customers, potential customers, partners, or employees. Internet panels can be built and maintained at less cost and time required for traditional panels. Once a panel is created and a questionnaire is finalized, surveys can be deployed, data are collected, and top-level results are reported within days.

A sophisticated database tracks panelist profile data and survey responses, facilitating longitudinal studies and data mining to yield insights into attitudes and behaviors over time and across segments. Response rates are high, typically 20 to 60 percent, because respondents have agreed in advance to participate in the survey. These participants tend to provide more detailed and thoughtful answers than do those in traditional surveys, because they don't have to give demographic and lifestyle information (it's already been captured) and because they become engaged in the panel over time.

- **External Internet panels simplify life for research suppliers** The availability of huge Internet panels maintained by firms such as Harris Interactive, SSI, Greenfield Online, Research Now, and Decision Analyst makes the sampling process much easier for research companies that utilize these panels. We will discuss these panels in detail later in the chapter. Moreover, the cost to use the panels has dropped as the number of panel suppliers has increased.²²

Disadvantages of Online Surveys

The most common complaint about the use of online surveys traditionally was that Internet users are not representative of the population as a whole. As mentioned earlier,

this comment has largely disappeared in the United States. Harris Interactive and DSS Research have conducted over 300 surveys using parallel modes (telephone and Internet) and found that the research produced similar results. In all of the studies, it was rare to find a statistically significant difference between the sampling modes.²³ DSS concluded that the Internet panel methodology offered the best alternative for market share measurement and competitive benchmarking objectives based on cost (half the cost of telephone), speed (can be completed in less than half the time of telephone), and accuracy of measurement.

Lee Smith, COO of Insight Express, conducted a side-by-side comparison of online research and mail surveys. He found that online research delivered data of the same quality as using mail surveys in one-eighth the time and at one-eighth the cost.²⁴ Other research has shown that in most countries where the Internet penetration rate exceeds 20 percent, online surveys tend to yield results similar to those found in traditional methods such as telephone or paper-and-pencil survey research.²⁵

A second problem exists when an **unrestricted Internet sample** is set up on the Internet. This means anyone who wishes to complete the questionnaire can do so. It is fully self-selecting and probably representative of no one except web surfers. The problem gets worse if the same Internet user can access the questionnaire over and over. For example, the first time *InfoWorld*, a computer user magazine, conducted its Readers' Choice survey on the Internet, the results were so skewed by repeat voting for one product that the entire survey was publicly abandoned and the editor had to ask for readers' help to avoid the problem again. All responsible organizations conducting surveys over the Internet easily guard against this problem by providing unique passwords to those individuals they invite to participate. These passwords permit one-time access to the survey.

A third problem is that the sample frame needed may not be available on the Internet. Assume that Guido's, a popular Italian restaurant in Dayton, Ohio, wanted to know how its customers perceived the food quality and service compared with that of the big chains, such as Olive Garden. A large Internet panel, such as Greenfield Online, is probably not going to have enough members in Dayton, Ohio, that patronize Guido's to give a representative sample. If Guido's doesn't have customer e-mail addresses, then an Internet sample isn't feasible.

Other problems include a lack of *callback* procedures to clarify open-end responses, potential for questionnaire programming errors, and a lack of bandwidth (some potential respondents can't complete the survey or download photos and video quickly). Many companies and researchers have become concerned with the quality of online samples. Procter & Gamble states that a high-quality online sample must include only respondents who are real people whose identity and location can be authenticated; are qualified to answer the survey based on screening and behavioral criteria we determine; only take each survey once; and answer questions thoughtfully.²⁶

As a result, all research suppliers for Procter & Gamble must do the following:

- Use objective quality criteria that are predetermined, replicable and standardized.
- Rely on automated processes to meet quality requirements.
- Ensure that potentially fraudulent respondents cannot easily identify or circumvent the quality measures in place.
- Uniformly apply quality requirements to all projects when requested, regardless of sample source, survey technology, and geography.
- Deliver reports demonstrating the impact of applying the quality requirements.
- Protect and secure all personally identifiable and confidential information collected from respondents, suppliers and/or clients.²⁷

unrestricted Internet sample
Self-selected sample group consisting of anyone who wishes to complete an Internet survey.

Methods of Conducting Online Surveys

There are several basic methods for conducting online surveys: web survey software, survey design websites, and web hosting.

Web Survey Software Web survey software includes software systems specifically designed for web questionnaire construction and delivery. In a typical use, the questionnaire is constructed with an easy-to-use edit feature, using a visual interface, and then automatically transmitted to a web server system. The web server distributes the questionnaire and files responses in a database. The user can query the server at any time for completion statistics, descriptive statistics on responses, and graphical displays of data. Several popular online survey research software packages are IBM SPSS Quanquest, Sawtooth CiW, Infopoll, and SurveyGold.

Gaining Survey Completions Do-it-yourself software, such as IBM SPSS Quanquest, requires that you offer the respondent a good experience if you expect the person to complete the survey. The more engaged respondents are, the better quality insights they will provide. The following tips can help create a better experience for the interviewee:

- As with any questionnaire, use language that is less “research-ese” and more conversational.
- Be honest and upfront about the time required to complete a study.
- Provide more opportunities for participants to provide open-ended answers and truly express themselves.
- Ensure that all possible answer choices are given; avoid overuse of “other.”
- Keep survey to less than 20 minutes in length and provide participants with progress information as they advance through the survey.
- Consider using graphics when possible or appropriate to make the experience more visually engaging.
- Explore new ways to facilitate interaction between respondents and a researcher.
- Make studies more informative—participants are particularly motivated by acquiring new knowledge and information about a product or topic.
- Offer participants the opportunity to be contacted again to receive updates on projects of products being tested.²⁸

How important are incentives in online research? And does the cosmetic appearance of the questionnaire have an impact on completion rates? Decipher Inc. conducted an online study to address these questions.²⁹ It conducted a survey using a domestic customer list provided by eBay Inc. Over 1,900 eBay members participated in a 7-minute online survey. The recruits were sent an e-mail invitation containing a link that directed them to the survey. The study employed four parallel cells:

	Survey Design	Incentive
Cell 1	Plain	None
Cell 2	Fancy	None
Cell 3	Fancy	1 in 500 chance to win \$1,000
Cell 4	Fancy	Guaranteed \$2 cash to first 500 qualified completes

Exhibit 7.3

Does a Fancy Survey Design Matter?

Source: Jamin Brazil, Aaron Jue, Chandra Mullins, and Jamye Plunkett, "Capture Their Interest," *Quirk's Marketing Research Review* (July/August 2006), p. 48.

Privacy Policy • Help

Survey project for consumers

Approximately how many items have you bought here in the last 12 months?

Select one

- None
- 1 to 5
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 25
- 25 to 50
- 51 to 100
- More than 100

Continue

Figure 1 - Plain

Privacy Policy • Help

Approximately how many items have you bought here in the last 12 months?

Select one

None	<input type="radio"/>
1 to 5	<input type="radio"/>
6 to 10	<input type="radio"/>
11 to 25	<input type="radio"/>
26 to 50	<input type="radio"/>
51 to 100	<input type="radio"/>
More than 100	<input type="radio"/>

Continue

Figure 1 - Fancy

As can be seen from the setup, a comparison between Cell 1 and Cell 2 measured the effect of a plain versus fancy survey design. Color, the use of tables, and the right-aligned buttons distinguished the fancy from the plain survey design (see Exhibit 7.2).

A comparison between Cells 2 and 3 or Cells 2 and 4 measured incentive effects. Finally, a comparison between Cells 3 and 4 measured the effects of the different types of incentive: a cash prize drawing or a smaller, guaranteed cash incentive.

The appearance of the survey had no measurable impact on the completion rate (in both instances, about 77 percent completed the survey). Nor did the type of incentive

affect completion rates. However, either incentive boosted completion rates about 10 percent. For all four cells, dropouts occurred primarily over the first 90 seconds after a respondent entered the survey. Persons offered an incentive were significantly less likely to drop out during this period.³⁰

Survey Design and Web Hosting Sites Many websites allow the researcher to design a survey online without loading design software. The survey is then administered on the design site's server. Some offer tabulation and analysis packages as well. Popular sites that offer web hosting are WebSurveyor, Survey Monkey, Zoomerang, and Google Consumer Surveys.³¹ People in over 200 countries have responded to more than 33 million surveys produced by Survey Monkey.³²

Commercial Online Panels

commercial online panels

Group of individuals who have agreed to receive invitations to do online surveys from a particular panel company such as eRewards or SSI. The panel company charges organizations doing surveys for access to the panel. Charges are usually so much per survey depending on survey length and the type of people being sought for the survey. The panel company controls all access to the members of its panel.

Many researchers turn to commercial online panel providers to assist in the process of completing a market research study, often by hosting a survey on their website. Commercial online panels are not created for the exclusive use of any one specific company or for any one particular project. Instead, **commercial online panels** are created for the use of multiple projects by many different companies. The companies providing access to the online panels have invested in the pre-recruitment of people who opt to participate in online market research surveys. Some online panels are for use by a specific industry, such as construction, medical, or technology industries, and may have a few thousand panel members, while the large commercial online panels have millions of people who have opted to participate in online surveys of varying topics. When people join most online panels, they answer an extensive profiling questionnaire that records demographic, lifestyle, and psychographic information, typically with hundreds of dimensions. This profiling information enables the panel provider to record detailed information on every panel member. Using this information, the panel provider can then target research efforts to panel members who meet specific criteria.

Although online panels are quite effective at reducing costs and field time, the quality of the data is dependent on how well the panel is managed. Several factors influence the quality of an online panel. These include the recruitment methods, respondent participation, panel management practices, and types of incentives offered.

Panel Recruitment

The method of recruitment of panel members is critical to the quality of the panel. If the panel is to meet a researcher's needs for a study requiring a general audience of consumers, it is important to evaluate whether the panel's recruitment method draws from a representative audience of consumers. Likewise, if a researcher's project requires business professionals, the panel's recruitment methods should draw from a universe of business professionals. Ideally, a panel should represent a diverse sampling of the population under study. Panel member recruitment methodology is a key distinction among online panels. There are essentially two methods for recruiting for an online panel: open source and by invitation only.

Intercepting people as they surf the Internet through ads is known as open recruitment. **Open online panel recruitment** allows any person who has access to the Internet to "self-select" and enroll in a market research panel. This provides the benefit of building a panel quickly with people who are Internet-savvy and responsive to online advertising.

open online panel recruitment

Any person with Internet access can self-select to be in a research panel.

A key drawback is the lack of control over who is recruited. A panel with open recruitment may sign up millions of web surfers who share similar characteristics, but may include only people who are responsive to web ads and/or “seek out” an opportunity to join an online panel by using search engines. This leaves out a large percentage of the general population.

In many cases, open recruitment leads to an overabundance of panel members who participate in many different panels and complete an inordinate amount of surveys. These are known in the industry as “professional survey takers”—people who sign up to take hundreds of surveys in order to enter into sweepstakes drawings or other types of incentives. The primary concerns associated with professional survey takers are that (1) they can give false or misleading information in an attempt to get through a survey quickly without regard to providing well-considered responses; (2) they tend to go through surveys in a perfunctory manner, which shows up in the time they take to complete the survey; and (3) they can make up a disproportionate amount of survey responders, leading to biased and unrepresentative research data. To the detriment of Internet marketing research, some websites have been developed to recruit people to sign up for several panels at one time. However, it is important to consider that not all online panels are made up of professional survey takers. This is why it is so important to understand the recruitment methods used by an online panel before employing them in the research process.

The other method used for recruiting respondents to an online panel, the by-invitation-only method, was first used by Research Now, one of America’s largest commercial online panel providers. **Closed online panel recruitment**, or by invitation only, invites only prevalidated individuals, or individuals who share known characteristics, to enroll in a market research panel. Most often, this is accomplished by inviting customers from large, highly trusted leading brands who collectively have a large, diverse base of customers in a given population (i.e., general consumers or business professionals). In recruiting for its consumer panel, for example, Research Now has partnered with large, well-known companies that have large, diverse customer bases. Similarly, in recruiting for its panel of business professionals, they have partnered with major airlines, hotels, and car rental companies. There is some natural overlap in the recruiting since business professionals who travel are also consumers, but Research Now pays close attention to panelist enrollment to ensure there isn’t panelist duplication.

The “by-invitation-only” method enables a panel researcher to recruit people with specific demographics into the panel in order to meet a client’s needs for a representative sample of the understudy population, or to meet specific needs. For example, in order to recruit affluent panel members, the panel provider may recruit customers from upscale retailers to join the panel. To recruit teenagers, a panel provider may recruit customers of specific clothing retailers that specialize in the teen market. To recruit business decision makers, a panel provider may recruit customers from companies that cater to businesspeople, such as airlines, hotels, car rental companies, and subscribers to business publications.

Using a “by-invitation-only” recruitment method gives a panel provider greater control over who is invited to the panel and greatly reduces the likelihood of professional



©GlobalStock/Stockphoto

A research study may focus on people who meet a specific criterion such as golfing once a week.

closed online panel recruitment

Inviting only prevalidated individuals or those with shared known characteristics to enroll in a research panel.

survey takers. One particular area that requires attention with this approach is that the panel composition is dependent on the people who are invited to join the panel and may be biased by customers of a specific recruitment source. Thus, it is important that a “by-invitation-only” panel have a large number of diverse recruitment sources by working with companies in many different areas to ensure balanced representation in the panel.

Respondent Participation

Respondent participation is critical to the success of the research process in order to minimize nonresponse bias. Therefore, it is important to understand the panel management practices and incentives employed by an online panel. Response rates for online surveys can vary dramatically, with some populations having average response rates less than 5 percent, others with response rates closer to 30 percent, and sometimes well over 60 percent for pre-screened individuals, who have been alerted to expect to receive a survey at a specific time or date. The diminishing response rates observed with telephone interviewing have played a key role in the increased usage of online panels.

Ensuring participation is a function of several factors, including to what extent panel members are engaged in the research process, their experience with surveys and the panel in general, and the topic of the research. Of course, one of the primary drivers of participation is the incentive program.

Generally, online panels use two incentive models: the sweepstakes model and the pay-all model. The sweepstakes model offers survey participants a chance to be entered into a drawing for a prize, often hundreds or thousands of dollars, albeit with extremely low odds of winning. Pay-all incentive models pay each respondent a small incentive for their time and participation each time they take part in a survey.

The choice of incentive model is not trivial. A sound incentive model influences not only survey response rates but also retention rates for panel members—which becomes very important when there is a need to use profiling information for targeting a specific type of respondent. Panel members who do not feel adequately compensated for their time and effort are much less likely to participate in research studies.

Panel Management

In addition to effective panel recruitment and respondent cooperation programs, online panel providers must have effective ongoing management of their panel to ensure a high level of quality. Panels must continually see that their participants have positive experiences with every research project. Among other components, good panel management includes frequency controls to see that panel members are not surveyed too little or too much. Panel members should be given enough survey opportunities to stay effectively engaged in the research process, but not surveyed too much as to be burdened with survey invitations. Other keys to guaranteeing a positive panel member’s experience is providing respondent privacy, safeguarding personal information, and protecting members from bogus research that attempts to use online surveys as a sales channel (this is the practice of *sugging*—selling under the guise of research).

Panel providers are continually recruiting new members to keep up with the growth in demand for online samples, as well as replace any panel members who may drop out. Even with exceptional panel member retention, some panel members will become less active in responding to surveys. In addition, panels will often recruit new members to assist in growing certain hard-to-reach segments and/or balancing the panel to have maximum

representation of the overall population. Ensuring a growing supply of engaged, active panel members is a constant goal of every panel provider.

Finally, panel management includes ensuring panel freshness. As panel members change, their profiles must be updated. A single, 25-year-old college student with an annual income of \$12,000 from last year may now be a married 26-year-old accountant with a new baby and a household income of \$45,000. Updating profiles ensures that panel providers are able to consistently target qualified people for surveys.

Mobile Internet Research— The Future Is Now

By the end of 2013, the number of smartphone, cell phones, and tablets on the planet exceeded the world's human population. Smartphone traffic grew by 81 percent in 2012 alone. Fifty-six percent of American adults now own a smartphone, and 57 percent of adults use their phone to go online (the number jumps to 79 percent of adults in households with incomes over \$75,000). Thirty-four percent of adults own a tablet.³³

People carry their lives on their mobile devices, using them to take and store pictures, read news, keep in touch with friends and colleagues, and engage with apps that make their lives easier and more fun. The mobile experience is far more intimate than the desktop experience, and mobile users want to feel that the content that they are consuming on their devices is equally personal. Mobile has the unparalleled capability to reach a customer anywhere, but it also means that an infinite number of distractions compete for his or her attention.

Advantages of Mobile

Today, one quarter of survey respondents prefer to participate in survey research via their mobile devices.³⁴ This number will continue to rise. The only question is, how fast? With traditional survey research, researchers ask consumers to recall their experiences. Smartphones enable researchers to not only observe consumers' whereabouts through geolocation, geofencing, and mobile analytics but to ask them for real-time feedback via mobile surveys. Geofencing is the creation of a virtual fence around a location.³⁵

When a person with a smartphone crosses a geofence, a location-specific survey can be triggered. For example, a person might leave a Macy's store and be pinged to answer a few questions about the shopping experience. Other questions may focus on each of locating a product, in-store promotional effectiveness, and shopper intent-to-purchase versus just browsing.

Mobile research offers several advantages in addition to intercepting respondents at specific locations:

- *Increased response rates.* Respondents respond at higher rates (and more quickly) on mobile devices vs. current methods.
- *Increased convenience.* Respondents have better experiences when they can provide feedback when and where they want to.
- *Broader reach.* The ability to reach respondents in developing and remote countries creates a huge opportunity to capture insights in those regions.
- *Richer content.* Respondents can easily share media (e.g., photos, videos, voice recordings, etc.) via mobile devices.³⁶

- *Broader demographic reach.* Respondent cooperation from all demographic groups is higher.
- *Immediate feedback.* Mobile surveys provide immediate feedback on research questions concerning marketing campaigns, ad testing, and more.
- *Cost savings.* Researchers receive faster reply to surveys, shorter project completion time.
- *Additional options.* Use as a mobile recruiting tool to direct respondents to online surveys, or connect with hard-to-reach groups. It is another way of reaching people on the go.³⁷

A Few Bumps at the Beginning

Anxious to be a trendsetter, some research firms moved to mobile surveys without a well-thought-out game plan. Simply taking a survey designed for a Mac or PC and converting it to a text-messaging (SMS) format was a recipe for disaster. Responding to a complex, 40-minute, slow-loading survey by typing out the responses led to high incompletion rates. So while mobile research is still quite new, surveys conducted via text-messaging are already scarce. The industry focus has shifted to surveys conducted via WAP or via a survey application designed for a specific phone operating system like an iPhone or Android device.³⁸

Both WAP (or web-based mobile surveys) and app-based surveys have their own benefits and challenges. WAP surveys allow for cross-platform text and multimedia surveys (meaning they're compatible with mobile browsers on multiple operating systems). Device compatibility is over 70 percent. The downside is that mobile browser speed can vary considerably based on the wireless connection. App-based surveys are device-specific (meaning an iPhone app won't work on an Android phone; thus, multiple versions of the app are necessary to allow for cross-platform research) but generally bring faster delivery and upload times. This may ultimately work to increase respondent satisfaction with the survey-taking process. In addition, survey apps can be developed on and integrated into preexisting apps, which may present marketers with opportunities to add in survey functionality to apps that have served other functions to date.³⁹

Gone are the days when surveys had to be programmed and loaded on an actual PC. Today, tablets can easily access surveys and instantly feed data into online reporting toolsets via a basic wireless connection. Researchers are even using tablet PCs to evolve qualitative research into hybrid quant/qual techniques. For example, respondents are given a short quant survey to quantify individual preferences, after which survey results can be instantly aggregated and summarized via real-time online reporting tools. Afterward, a focus group discussion of preference or other drivers can take place, incorporating the initial quantitative survey data into the qualitative group discussion.⁴⁰

Designing a Mobile Survey

Survey designers must be proactive in the design of both the questionnaire and user—interface in order to give mobile respondents an excellent survey experience. First and foremost, mobile surveys need to be short. Ten questions or fewer is a good rule. This is because it takes longer to navigate on mobile devices due to limitations of the user interfaces and data transfer speeds. Second, a good mobile survey will minimize the number of pages. Each time the page refreshes, the respondent has to wait. It is important not to put too many questions on a page, as mobile devices also have less memory to

work with, so a page with too many elements may cause the device to become slow or nonresponsive.

Third, the type of questions should be kept simple. Single-dimension radio, checkbox, or “select” questions are better than multidimensional grid questions, which could be difficult to complete due to mobile devices’ small screens. Also, limit the use of open-ended questions, as they require typing. Finally, all nonessential content should be minimized. It takes extra load time and visual space for every element that appears on the screen. Even a progress bar increases the load time and the need for vertical scrolling.⁴¹

The immediacy of mobile surveys, along with geolocation and geofencing, enables a new range of survey incentives. Many companies are offering real-time incentives such as a virtual coupon for the store that you are approaching.

The advantages of mobile surveys are illustrated by Toluna, an Internet and mobile marketing research company. A Toluna client wanted to conduct a survey during the Super Bowl regarding the ads that ran during the game. The client wanted to get a read on real-time reactions—but most people who watch the Super Bowl aren’t simultaneously sitting in front of their desktop computers. They are, however, multitasking, using their mobile phones (63 percent of those 18- to 24-year-old smartphone owners in the United States text, use apps, check e-mail, surf the Internet, or participate in social networking discussion while watching TV at least once a week). Only a mobile survey could gather the immediate data that the agency craved. Respondents were recruited in advance of game day and then, during the Super Bowl, surveys were pushed out in real time to ask about commercials as their aired.⁴²

Social Media Marketing Research

Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn, give opportunities to marketing researchers to understand their customers and potential customers like never before. Companies can ask themselves, “Who are our fans? What can they teach us about our brand?” Answers to these questions first require building dialogue and customer communities about a company or brand.

Much social media marketing research is different from traditional survey research. Rather than a product manager asking a research team to determine X, Y, and Z, and then having the researchers conduct the survey and provide the requested feedback, social media research is more interactive, via a few questions and observations over time. By analyzing social media exchanges about a product or service, researchers can learn what factors customers use to determine value, as well as the way they speak about the product, service, or brand. Much social media research is based on forms of observation, and these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Dr. Pepper spent years building its 8.5-million-strong fan base on Facebook. Now, careful tracking and testing with those Facebook users who say they “like” the soft drink helps the brand figure out how to hone its marketing messages. It sends out two messages daily on its Facebook fan page, and then listens to the fan’s reactions. Using tools from Facebook, Dr. Pepper can measure how many times a message is viewed, how many times it is shared with other Facebook users, and what fan responses say.

“We mine the data to understand what is appreciated, and what is not,” says Robert Stone, director of interactive media services for Dr. Pepper Snapple Group.⁴³

For example, the company learned that diehard Dr. Pepper fans like edgy one-liners. One of the best performing messages: “If liking you is wrong, we don’t want to be right.” And they dislike messages that focus on prices and special offers. “It just isn’t relevant to their passion about the brand,” Mr. Stone says.⁴⁴

Conduction a Facebook Focus Group

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) was interested in understanding beef consumption habits of millennials (those between the ages of 13 and 30). A group of respondents were recruited who not only met the age criteria to be considered a millennial but also met certain demographic and psychographic screening criteria specific to this study: eat beef at least twice a month; have some level of involvement in meal planning and/or prep; use Facebook regularly (at least twice a week) and have at least 25 friends on Facebook; can answer a series of attitudinal questions about current and future life plans; and are part of a representative mix of gender, age, and marital status.⁴⁵

Participants were recruited the same way they would for any other online focus group or IDI—with one exception. After qualifying and agreeing to take part in the study, participants were asked to visit a Facebook page the researchers set up for the group, become its friend, and then return to the survey and answer some additional questions to verify that they had indeed visited the site. The latter measure was added to ensure that they were comfortable navigating on Facebook.

One of the concerns with using Facebook as the platform was a general lack of security associated with using an open social networking site. To remedy this, once the group was fully recruited, the researchers simply changed the settings of the page to the highest level of privacy (by invite only).

Participants would need to be engaged in this discussion for six weeks. The researchers knew that a study of that length could lead to participant burnout, so they initiated processes to minimize the impact:

- A new topic was posted about two to three times per week. This reduced the need for the participants to come to the group every day and avoided inundating them with daily messages.
- The moderator of the discussion was a millennial himself who understood the principles of moderating and knew how to engage the group in a fun and unthreatening way. He was talking to his peers on Facebook, something he does regularly anyway.
- The moderator validated the opinions of the participants. He added his commentary to their responses and occasionally would try out a new idea that was developed based on their answers. These millennials knew they were being listened to because the discussion was built around what they had said previously.
- Random prize drawings were held throughout the six weeks of the discussion. In addition to the honorarium they received for taking part in the discussion, participants would occasionally be offered a chance to win a gift card for giving the best idea, sharing recipes and cooking ideas, or just being selected at random among those who participated that day.⁴⁶

The aim was to have 60 millennials fully participate in the discussion. Some drop-off was expected, particularly given the length of time and the season in which this session was conducted (it began mid-November and ran right up to the week of Christmas). A total of 227 millennials qualified and agreed to take part in the group. Of this, 119 *friended* the group (52 percent) and, of those, 66 were actively engaged (55 percent). These were 27 topics posted, with 1,545 total responses by the participants. This equates to about 57 responses per topic and about 22 responses per participant.⁴⁷

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association obtained valuable insights on how to improve packaging, distribution, in-store promotions, and social media marketing. The focus group allowed for a rich, colorful, and dynamic dialogue between participants and the moderator.

Conducting Surveys

For researchers wanting to conduct traditional survey research, social media can be used as a respondent recruiting tool. Persons who “like” a product or service or members of web communities, can be sent an email with a link to an external site where the person can take the web survey.

There are many apps available for administering social media surveys. Survey Monkey’s app enables the researcher to embed a survey on Facebook. A survey can be created by using a Survey Monkey template, or one can choose from the Survey Monkey Question Bank. Survey Monkey’s advice is to make the survey short, offer incentives, and make it fun. That is, be friendly and show some personality.

Facebook also offers tools for conducting surveys at <http://apps.facebook.com/opinion-polls>. For example, to ask a question or questions to a group, you click ASK QUESTION at the top of a group. Next, you enter a question and add poll options if you wish. Then click POST to share it with the group.

TwitPolls lets Twitter users ask questions of their followers and receive tallied results at the cost of the user-determined survey time frame. The app allows brands and companies to gather real-time feedback from their followers without forcing followers to leave the Twitter environment.

All social media have apps for survey research. The researcher must decide which social media will provide the survey population of interest and which app offers the tools needed to best extract the type of decision-making information needed.

SUMMARY

Over 3 billion people worldwide are online. In the United States and Canada, the figure is over 80 percent. Over 90 percent of U.S. research firms are conducting online research. Secondary data can play a key role in the marketing research process. It can clarify a problem, suggest a particular research methodology, or sometimes actually provide a solution to the problem. Exhibit 7.1 offers an extensive list of online sources of secondary data. The Internet has, in many ways, revolutionized the gathering of secondary data. Now, rather than wait for replies from government agencies or other sources, users can find millions of pieces of information on the Internet. Trips to the library may become a thing of the past for many researchers. Search engines and directories contain links to millions of documents throughout the world. Special-interest discussion groups and blogs on the Internet can also be valuable sources of secondary data.

More and more focus groups are being conducted online. Traditional online focus groups were in a bulletin board format. Moderators typed questions and respondents typed replies. All nonverbal communication was lost. People have different levels of typing ability, which also created problems. Webcam focus groups with voice connections

and software create a more traditional offline-like focus group. Also, respondents can be in various cities around the world. Telepresence creates a virtual traditional focus group environment that simulates all participants being in the same room.

Channel M2 provides virtual focus group interview rooms where respondents participate via a webcam. Questions and answers occur in real time, thus simulating a traditional focus group. Asynchronous focus groups are time-extended focus groups conducted much like an online chat group. Web community research is where a group of consumers agree to participate in an ongoing dialogue with a company. The discussion may last a year or more, and participants respond to questions that are regularly posted to the community. Insights from the community can be used as a basis for traditional marketing research. Recently, Channel M2 introduced real-time voice analysis. The program details the respondent’s emotional mindset, cognitive processes, and veracity.

Firms are now conducting individual depth interviews (IDI) online. IDIs are conducted like a webcam online focus group, except just with one person at a time.

Marketing research online communities (MROC) are increasing in popularity. MROCs are by invitation only and