

Chapter 5

Market Research through Online Custom Panel: Co-Creation Value and Customer Relationship

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ABSTRACT

Online panels are, more and more, an important form of collecting consumer information for marketing decisions. Consumer online panels are more used in developed countries than in third world countries. This chapter also talks about customized online panels within online panels in general. This chapter discusses the current challenges to the use of online panels in Brazil, according to the research experience of the leading provider of such methodology in the country. The chapter describes two cases of online panels in Brazil, and in one of them it describes the communal aspects of the panel and the implications that the communal traces bring to panel management. The chapter concludes with an analysis of research results, managerial implications, and future research directions.

INTRODUCTION

Everyday consumers use the Internet as their major form of communication as well as to express their ideas in blogs and social media. Consumers, through internet, also interact directly with the industry in fan pages, social relationship sites and e-commerce sites. Furthermore, old communal

relationships evolve to incorporate the new Internet medium; and communities became online communities. All these technological advances offer to companies the opportunity to work closer to the consumer in these more interactive virtual communities.

The digital technologies that companies use to communicate with their clients and to enhance their knowledge divide within many typologies

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such as websites, email blasts, online advertising, search engine placement. These technologies, combined with traditional forms of advertisement, contributed to improve the interaction between companies and consumers. With the help of the Internet, the interaction between companies and consumers was made possible while integrating a marketing intelligence system that offers access to low cost real time information.

In the area of market research, some ways to collect research information include mail, telephone, personal interviews, and the Internet. Modern research incorporates intelligence systems via website panels (when information is collected from a group of respondents during a period of time).

Interactive online panels can be customized for each company. This type of market research combines the benefits of collecting information online along with an interactive virtual community using systematic questions directed to specific consumers. According to Decision Analyst, the world leader company of online research, the interactive online panels offer the best quality information at fast pace and with high cost-effectiveness (Thomas, 2011).

These new forms of research are now commonly used in developed countries like Canada, France, and USA. However, there is currently little evidence of its wide acceptance and use in less industrially developed countries, such as Brazil.

The methodological decision to use customized online panel is often misunderstood in Brazil. Moreover, companies are unaware of the benefits of its application. Customized online panel method is ridiculed and not considered a good choice to collect “good data”. Further, there is feeling of uncertainty about this method of collecting the information. Consequently the methodology is not well used by Brazilian professional research institutes and thus provides near no benefit. However, on the positive side with changing market parameters in the eyes of these Brazilian research institutes, the increased use of modern online

methodology could create better opportunities to maintain strong relationships between consumers and corporations.

The purpose of this study is to show that customer online panels are indeed useful for companies, and the data collected can have “good quality”, although the choice of a panel implies certain losses in terms of results generalization towards population. These online panels may or likely to have some characteristics of online communities of consumption, a fact that increases the engagement of the panelists with the researches to which they are submitted to. Companies need to understand better about the implications and advantages of using online panels, and professional market research institutes can benefit from a more communal approach to the social relationships present in online panels.

This chapter is presented into two sections: the first one introduces the reader to Internet marketing research and the actual situation of online research in Brazil. This first section also discuss the barriers to the implementation of customer online panels in particular with reflection on customized online panels, the fears that corporate clients have, the relationship that panel providers and clients have, the implications for sampling panelists and, finally, a revision on the online communities of consumption literature. The second section describes two panels that QualiBest implemented in Brazil. It shows the results of two research projects that were conducted in these panels and discusses the community aspects present in one of the panels. QualiBest is one of the pioneers of online research in Brazil and one of the key players in the Brazilian market research business, having more than 13 years of experience in the field.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

The main objective of this chapter is to describe the actual scenario and discuss some improvements on the use of Online Customer Panels in

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