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**(Individual Essay)**

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**What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet as a research medium? What ethical issues should be considered when undertaking Internet marketing research?**

**Internet**, the biggest network in the world, has features as global, public, open and resources-shared. Using the internet as a research medium will impact the traditional statistical research methods, because of internet's technological superiorities and developing potential. Internet research is an essential revolution. Due to development of computing network and widespread usage of multi-media on internet, the research via internet will be applied extensively more and more.

### **The research approaches via internet**

The key issue of research is collection of resources and data. Questionnaire and interview are two methods in common use. It is easy to proceed to do questionnaire and interview through E-mail, BBS, ICQ, IRC, NetMeeting and IPHONE, etc.

Traditional questionnaire research means to send the pre-designed questionnaires to sampled respondents and then receive the valuable feedbacks to arrange and analyse. By internet, questionnaire researches also can be realized. Firstly, research targets' e-mail addresses can be found out through search tools. Then questionnaires can be sent quickly through e-mails. After a period of time, researchers will receive feedbacks in their mailbox and arrange them. Moreover, the questionnaires can be published on Webpage or BBS. While visiting the Webpage or BBS, people can answer the questions directly by using mouse and keyboard. Then the results will be transferred to and stored in web's databases.

To apply interview research, it requires both parties have advanced equipments to support video and audio live transfer.

Compared with traditional research methods, research via internet reflects more interactive, immediate and convenience. Besides its worth, there are several weakness of internet statistical research. As follows, its advantages and disadvantages will be enumerated.

#### **1. Advantages of research via internet**

##### **a. extensive**

Research via internet cannot be limited by space and time. People can research and can be asked wherever and whenever. It can ensure the

quantity and variety of samples.

**b. speedy**

The traditional questionnaire research methods, e.g. post, are not so fast as using internet as the medium, such as E-mail or webpage. Through internet questionnaires can be sent to the whole world in few minutes, and people can finish them wherever and whenever. Normally, in a short-term, researcher can receive large quantity of feedbacks. On other hand, there are advantage of collecting and arranging data as fast, complete and accurate. Moreover, interview by internet, the researcher can concentrate rather than spending time to record, because the interview will be recorded completely and immediately on-line.

**c. low – cost**

Contrast with high-cost traditional research, internet statistic research is simple and economized. During the research, there is no limitation of weather and distance, researchers do not need to go out, and there is no cost of questionnaires print, etc, etc.

Sending questionnaires by E-mail saves much more than posting, and can send to infinite targets. Usage of internet interview can just be paid cost of internet connection even if the international interview. In addition, record, the most important and strenuous step in research, usually is done by questioned people on on-line questionnaire or e-mail. And examine and analysis of information and data can be done automatically by computers.

**d. Multimedia**

Through electronic and internet platform, audio, video and image can be transferred, besides words, charts and picture. It can make research to be interesting and impressive.

**e. secluded**

Respondents normally finish questionnaires alone through internet so that they can answer questions frankly and honestly and research can receive adequate and valid information.

**2. Disadvantages of research via internet**

**a. limitative**

Researching via internet, researchers and respondents must be the users of internet. It cannot research people who do not connect on internet so to cause the limitations on targets and locations. Especially interview via internet, it requires very advanced standardised equipments between both sides of interview. Internet statistic research currently faces one main

problem that amount of internet-users is not large enough and some of technologies are not ideal, which of these influence sampling and researches' representative.

**b. non-attractive**

Although, on internet people are more tendentious to express and cooperate, compared with in off-line life. However, without the researchers' guide and explanation, people would not assist to finish the researches very well if the questionnaires are not designed irrational and repulsive. It will directly affect the quality, objectivity and factuality of the researches' results.

**c. shortage of participating**

Except e-mail questionnaires, most of on-line researches, such as BBS, webpage, must be based on web. Hence, the result of research may not be as wishes if the web has lack of visitors.

**d. weakness of secret and safety**

Because of technological leaks, secret protection and network safety is one of main problems with internet. Research via internet usually infringes on people's privacy inadvertently, for example, researchers can gain e-mail addresses by search tools. Furthermore, network safety is difficultly guaranteed. For example, virus from feedbacks can crash researchers' computers surprisingly.

## **Ethical issues of internet marketing research**

Perhaps one of the more contested areas in internet research involves ethical considerations for conducting online research. As bellows, there are the unique ethical features of internet research, contrasting with traditional researches.

**1. greater risk to individual privacy and confidentiality because of greater accessibility of information about individuals, groups, and their communications – and in ways that would prevent subjects from knowing that their behaviors and communications are being observed and recorded**

There are contexts of Internet research such as large -scale conversation studies and observation of exchanges in chatrooms that call into question the ethical necessity of acquiring informed consent of those being studied. For example, the historical archives of USENET newsgroup postings may contain messages from hundreds or thousands of posters. Where research is on the form of those exchanges, and especially if posters' e-mail addresses are no longer valid.

**2. greater challenge to researchers because of greater difficulty in obtaining informed consent**

In multiple environments (E-mail, Chatrooms, and BBS), people's experience of identity - including multiple selves, avatars and other forms of intentionally difference "faces" - is constituted online through the construction and reception of texts.

**3. greater difficulty of ascertaining subject's identity because of use of pseudonyms, multiple online identities, etc.**

In light of the *global reach of the Internet* – both similarities and differences emerge in the ethical and cultural values that shape Internet research ethics.

**4. greater difficulty in discerning ethically correct approaches because of a greater diversity of research venues (private e-mail, BBS, webpages, etc)**

**5. greater difficulty in discerning ethically correct approaches because of the global reach of the media involved**

Actually, researcher and respondent have the relative **rights and obligations** in internet ethical issues. There are the instances of the rights and obligations:

First, there are the obligations of researchers must be conducted.

**1. the obligation to respect human dignity**

Human dignity implies that every one of us has interests that can not be set aside, whether in the interests of greater insight or to benefit society in other ways.

**2. the obligation to inform research subjects**

Persons who are the subjects of research must be given the information they need for a reasonable understanding of the research field, of the consequences of participating in the research project, and of the object of the research. They must also be told who is paying for the research.

**3. the obligation to respect individuals' private lives and families**

Researchers must show due respect for the individual's private life. Each person is entitled to control over whether or not to make identifiable information on his or her private life and close relations available to others.

Respect for privacy is intended to protect people against unwanted interference and against unwanted observation.

#### **4. the confidentiality requirement**

Persons who are made the subjects of research are entitled to confidential treatment of all information they give. The researcher must prevent the use and transmission of information which may harm the individual on whom the research is being carried out. The research material must normally be rendered anonymous, and the storage and destruction of lists of names or personal identity numbers must satisfy strict requirements.

Second, due to they are relative, the respondents fulfill following obligations while adopting several above rights.

##### **1. the obligation to be truthful**

Respondents must answer the questionnaires honestly and avoid to deception in order to assist researchers to obtain accurate and qualitative information.

##### **2. the obligation of**

#### **Conclusion**

Internet, invented for transferring and exchanging information, provides the unprecedented low-cost, speedy, convenient channel of information communication and feedback. All of these are the preponderances of research via internet. Network, a platform of statistical research, has a strong vitality. There are several disadvantages and weaknesses of research via internet in different aspects. Nevertheless, prospect has been determined: research via internet must be one of main approaches of research in the future.

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