

THE INTERNET - SECONDARY DATA SOURCE IN MARKETING RESEARCH

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Abstract

This paper aims at presenting several aspects regarding the use of the Internet as a secondary source of data in marketing research.

In order to carry out its activity, the modern enterprise must have a well-developed marketing information system. A component of the enterprise's marketing information system is related to data collection.

There are several methods of collecting data in marketing research, one of these and the most convenient being the analysis of the secondary sources.

The Internet is currently a component of the secondary data sources, one of the possible secondary data sources. The internet is one of the most prominent news of mankind, which has already put its mark on its evolution.

Today's internet is the result of evolution for decades. The internet has evolved and will continue to evolve.

The advent of the Internet has meant changes in communication, showing new useful possibilities inclusively in marketing and in marketing research.

The use of the Internet as a secondary source of data means both advantages and disadvantages; the qualities of the Internet should not be overvalued, although they exist.

Because of the disadvantages the Internet has and of which we need to be aware, there must be some caution in its use and not to exaggerate the virtues of the Internet.

To increase the accuracy of a marketing research, it is recommended to be used more data source, if possible, and not just the Internet.

Keywords: marketing research, secondary data sources, the Internet.

JEL Classification: M31

1.Introduction

In the modern economy, the enterprise acts in a dynamic environment and must have a well-set marketing information system, i.e. an ensemble of specialists, equipment and procedures for collecting, sorting, analyzing, evaluating and distributing the necessary information, correctly and on time to the marketing decision makers [5].

A component of the marketing information system is that of data collecting. The data collecting methods most used in marketing research include: secondary source analysis, survey, observation, experiment, projective tests, individual interview, group interview, simulation.

Among the possible secondary sources of data is the Internet, a relatively recent appearance compared to other data sources, which can be useful in many ways and whose use as a secondary data source presents advantages and disadvantages.

Many of the secondary data sources also have online version, and in the future, probably the online version of the marketing data sources will be one of the most important and most used.

2.Secondary data sources

The methods of collecting information in marketing research include: analysis of the secondary sources, the survey, observation, experiment, other methods (projective tests, individual interview, group interview, simulation).

2.1. Definition

The secondary data sources are sources that offer secondary information.

The secondary information is already existing information obtained from research carried out previously by other organizations or for other purposes.

Most of the research begins with the analysis of the secondary information sources. Often such sources exist. It would be desirable not to do primary research (that is, especially designed to achieve the proposed objectives by providing fresh data on the field), but which is more expensive in all respects than the research based only on secondary sources (financial, time, personally involved). Unfortunately, sometimes there are no useful secondary sources.

Using secondary data sources can lead to time and money savings; in other words, to lower research costs [12].

2.2. Content

By their origin, the secondary sources can be internal or external to the organization.

The internal secondary sources come from within the organization, from its departments (such as Production, Technical, Marketing, Human Resources, Accounting, Supply, Sales, Legal, Research-Development, Import-Export, Prices etc.). The existence and sometimes even the name of these departments differ from one enterprise to another, or depending on the specifics of the enterprise's activity.

The departments of the enterprise can provide important marketing information, such as information about sales, products, stocks, costs, prices, customers, human resources, etc.

The most valuable internal secondary sources are considered, for many businesses, those on sales and previous research [10].

The external secondary sources come from outside the organization, are very diverse and may include:

- government sources (in Romania, probably the most known source of this kind is the National Institute of Statistics, for the official statistical data);
- the Internet - is currently a known method of information and communication, inclusively for the business environment. The interest in Internet of the business firms is increasing, since 1995.
- print media (especially newspapers and magazines, and especially the economic ones) - it contains a lot of national or international news.
- Chambers of Commerce - are non-governmental organizations that can provide information about their members list, the business environment
- publishers- can make available to those interested in guides or information about the markets in which they are present;
- companies - can provide activity reports, catalogs, price lists;
- various international sources (at European, regional or global level)-which publish numerous information on national and international economic issues. For example, statistical data sources are notorious at the European Union and United Nations level.
- libraries- which can provide various information.

The secondary sources must be evaluated [6] and the secondary information must be reliable [11].

In assessing secondary sources, several aspects are concerned, among them the originality of the source, the actuality of the source, the author, the beneficiary, the methodology used, the purpose of publishing the data, the objectivity of the source.

Many of the types of sources mentioned above are also online [13]; but this is not true for all the sources, nor for all the possible information. For example, not all the books in a library can be read online, but you can find some information about these books for many libraries.

3.The Internet, secondary source of data in marketing research

The emergence and development of the Internet constitute notable facts at the level of all mankind, with influences in many areas, inclusively in marketing research.

The Internet has gained an important place both in daily life and in business [8] and it will probably have an important role in the following decades.

The Internet has gone through several stages; Internet development includes several points of reference [4].

As recent studies show, the Internet has also gained an important role in Romania. There are important differences between the European Union member states in terms of Internet usage, and even differences at regional level in some countries [1].

The fact that there are sometimes significant differences in the use of the Internet does not reduce its importance as a subject of study.

It is obvious that the Internet has contributed and continues to contribute into changing the world we live in. The Internet has brought changes in the human communication, inclusively in marketing research [7].

The Internet can be used for primary marketing research and for secondary research [3; 14].

Traditionally, the Internet was considered as a secondary data source, but this point of view must be changed following the evolution of the Internet and becoming useful also for primary research [2].

The Internet can be used in marketing research from several points of view:

- as a data source (with more possibilities: statistical data, published results of other studies - inclusively of the research firms, online media, etc.).
- as a data collection tool (for example, studies based on the questionnaire distributed online).
- for communicating with clients [9].

Among the main available online sources are include:

- national statistical sources, such as the National Institute of Statistics, in Romania [15]
- the Government
- different non-governmental organizations
- the Chambers of Commerce
- market research institutions
- Eurostat [16]
- Eurobarometer [17]
- the open data portal of the European Union [18]
- online media (with a variety of components)
- libraries
- scientific databases.

Some of the sources can be accessed for free; others for a fee (for example, many of the scientific databases).

Should be noted that not all information is available online (although the tendency is increasingly clear in this regard). So some information is still available only in physical format, in those organizations.

4.The advantages of the Internet, as a secondary data source in marketing research

The Internet as a data source in marketing research has many obvious advantages:

- it is easy to consult
- it is convenient to use
- can be quickly consulted, meaning substantial time savings over the traditional data sources
- provides a great amount of data available

- offers data from many areas
- eliminates the travel and other costs related to the consultation of the traditional sources of information (such as libraries)
- it is available 24 hours a day (an enormous advantage compared to other sources, which have a certain working schedule or that do not allow the access to data until after completing of some formalities)
- technical progress allows a variety of possibilities to access it and the future will surely bring other news from this issue
- provides the opportunity to interact with long-distance people, practically anywhere in the world.
- costs for users are quite low.

5.The disadvantages of the Internet as a secondary source of data in marketing research

The Internet as a data source in marketing research has also some disadvantages, including:

- there are online data sources without a specified author (it is unknown whom they belong to)
 - there are online sources without a specified date ("no data" sources)
 - there are online sources that do not specify the methodology used ("no methodology" sources)
 - there are online sources that misinform
 - there are online sources that contradict each other, which creates great puzzles for the Internet user.
- Instead of helping, it causes confusion.
- there are online sources that take up altogether another source, without quoting it
 - the requested information may not be available online, although this at first glance does not seem possible
 - Internet use means some costs; it is not free.

In other words, the online sources either sometimes lack some of the elements needed to evaluate them, or they present some negative aspects specific to the online sources.

The confidence level of the online sources as a source of news is lower compared to that of other sources of information (radio, television, print media), or at least this was the European perception on them at the beginning of the year 2018 [16].

It sometimes reaches even to the misinformation made by online sources. If it can come to misinformation in regards to the news, this can be extended to other types of online data, including the marketing data.

The misinformation is of several types or forms. One of the forms of misinformation is to publish online old information without specifying their time (information that can be taken as current). Another form of misinformation is to intentionally publish erroneous information, which will then be taken over as such.

The disadvantages of the Internet must be taken into account; the Internet fans do not pay much attention to the disadvantages, but in a marketing research they can substantially influence the results obtained, and then the decisions taken based on the research results.

6. Internet evaluating criteria as a secondary source of data in marketing research

The criteria for evaluating secondary sources in general are also valid for the Internet, with additional aspects specific to the Internet.

The most used criteria for evaluating online sources of marketing data are:

- the author of the source (who is it, what reputation it has, how credible it is, what references it has)
- the objectivity of the source
- the originality of the source: if it is the original source, or if it takes over another source (which unfortunately happens sometimes in the online environment)

- the date of the source (which should be specified and be as recent as possible)
- the methodology used
- the purpose of publishing those data.

7. Conclusions

The secondary marketing data sources are already existing sources. The secondary information is that obtained from research previously carried out by other organizations or for other purposes. Research usually starts with analyzing the secondary sources of information.

The external secondary sources come from outside the organization and include: the government sources, the Internet, the banks, the newspapers and magazines, the Chambers of Commerce, the publishers, the data banks, various international sources, etc.

The Internet is a relatively recent secondary source of data, but more and more used, inclusively in marketing research.

Although its advantages are clear, we must be aware that it has disadvantages too.

Among the advantages of the online data sources there are: the convenience of the consultation, the speed of the consultation, the large amount of the available data, the possibility of using it non-stop, the possibility of the long-distance communication.

Among the disadvantages of the online data sources can be recalled: the lack of essential elements such as the author, the date, the followed methodology, the possibility of providing old or erroneous data, sometimes the contradiction between some sources on the same information.

The data sources must be evaluated before being used. The criteria for assessing the Internet as the secondary source of data in the most used marketing researches are: the source author, the source objectivity, the originality of the source, the source date, the methodology used, the purpose of publishing the data.

In relation to the marketing data, the online sources are diverse and there must be caution in using them. There are reliable sources too, such as the online statistical sources, as well as sources that disinform, contradict themselves, take over altogether another source without quoting it, etc.

Many of the types of the traditional secondary sources are also online, and in the future, perhaps the online version of the marketing data sources will be one of the most important and most used.

Due to the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet, there must be a certain caution in its use and not to be exaggerated its qualities. It is recommended to be used several sources of data in a marketing research, if possible, and not just the Internet.

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