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ONLINE MARKETING RESEARCH - ROLES IN GENERATING CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

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Abstract:

Companies cannot take decisions without the availability of proper information. So, marketers need to have the latest information about the target market. Marketers achieve this by collecting information based on traditional data collection methods and online marketing research. The study discusses the various aspects of conducting online marketing research, role of the internet in online marketing research, strategies followed by companies for online marketing research, the ways in which companies communicate and act on the information generated from the research, and the advantages and the disadvantages of conducting online marketing research. The study suggests that companies should conduct online marketing research not only to collect information about customers but also to utilize the insights generated to formulate better strategies and to develop better relationships with customers.

Key words: *Data Collection, Quantitative Research, Qualitative Research, Online Survey, Focus Group, Internet, Data Security, Data Privacy*

1. Introduction

Companies require information about their customers. Companies cannot take decisions and implement strategies without reliable and authentic information. Companies collect information about customers with the help of a number of methods. Information can be collected by mail, telephone, personal interview, or online. The growth of the internet in the recent years has changed the manner in which marketers collect information about customers (Ranfagni, 2019). At present, companies and market researchers are collecting primary data through online marketing research. Online marketing research is the data collection method where primary data is collected from customers through internet surveys, online focus groups, web-based experiments, or tracking consumers' online behavior (Opresnik, 2019). Companies are investing heavily in collecting data through online research. By one estimate, spending on online research in USA alone reached an estimated \$4.45 billion in 2011. Also, the spending on online research is growing at the rate of 15-20 percent per year (Ranfagni, 2019).

The digital age allows marketers to collect data about customers at a fast pace. Marketers can track the behavior of customers and create products and services tailored to

individual customer requirements based on the information collected from the web. Marketers can collect information about customers in a number of ways. Marketers collect information about customers by directly contacting them in a group or one-to-one. The process of data collection has become faster than ever with the advent of latest technologies. Marketers and researchers can conduct a focus group in Chicago or Paris by sitting at a company's headquarters in New York (Khanna, 2014). Researchers can practically collect information about customers by the single click of a mouse button. They can tap into online data services to learn anything from what car a customer drives to what a customer reads to what flavor of ice-cream a customer prefers (Tyagi, 2010). For all these reasons conducting online marketing research is important for any company to stay ahead in the competition.

The paper is structured as follows:

Section 2 discusses the different types of online marketing research with sub-section 2.1 focusing on the applications of qualitative research in online surveys. Section 3 discusses the different strategies companies adopt to conduct online marketing research. The internet plays an important role in conducting online marketing research and this is discussed in sub-section 3.1. Section 4 discusses about the communications and actions taken based on online marketing research. Section 5 focuses on the advantages of online marketing research while section 6 focuses on the downside of online marketing research. Two most important issues while conducting online marketing research are privacy and security of data and information shared by customers. These issues are highlighted in section 7. Section 8 summarizes the discussions done in the study with sub-sections 8.1 and 8.2 focusing on managerial implications and contributions of the study respectively. Section 9 concludes the discussions with sub-section 9.1 focusing on future research directions.

2. Types of Online Marketing Research

Online marketing research may be of different types. A company may conduct a web-based survey for collecting responses from its customers. The survey may include a questionnaire on its website. A company may offer incentives to those customers who respond to and complete the survey. A company may use the internet as a medium for conducting such surveys. It can use e-mails, weblinks, or web pop-ups to invite people to respond to the questions. It can create online panels where customers can have free discussions among themselves. Companies may request feedback from customers through online satisfaction surveys. Companies may also conduct live discussions or online focus groups (Kessler and Acohido, 2006).

Researchers make use of the internet effectively and efficiently. They may use the internet for conducting experiments on the web. They may experiment with different prices, headlines, or product features on different websites at different times. The information collected based on different parameters may be compared to learn about the relative effectiveness of the offers (Engle et al., 2012). Researchers may set up virtual shopping environments on the web to understand consumer behavior. Before introducing a new product in the market, market researchers may conduct the preliminary testing on the web

to understand the feasibility of the success of new products and marketing programs (Opresnik, 2019). Companies also keep track of the navigation patterns of online customers to understand their psychology. Companies analyze the clicking patterns, time spent by a customer on a specific website, and their navigation patterns once they move to other websites. This analysis helps a company to understand the behavior and consequently, the psychology of customers better (Engle et al., 2012).

The internet helps marketers conduct quantitative research faster. The internet is more suitable than any other medium for conducting marketing surveys and collecting data. Conducting research on the internet depends on the proportion of people having access to the internet. In USA, more than 75 percent of the population has access to the internet (Khanna, 2014). This makes the internet an effective channel to reach a broad cross-section of customers having diverse demographic characteristics, requirements, opinions, and preferences. The response rates in traditional survey approaches are usually low. The cost of conducting traditional questionnaire survey is also higher. Marketers can conduct questionnaire surveys faster on the internet. Also, since the identity of any respondent is not revealed, generally response rates are higher. Respondents feel free in responding to surveys on the internet than to traditional questionnaire surveys (O'Donnell, 2009). Also, respondents tend to be more honest online because their identity is not revealed (Khanna, 2014). For all these reasons, the internet is quickly replacing traditional approaches like mail and the telephone as the dominant data collection methodology (Temple, 2010). Online research accounts for more than 50 percent of all survey research conducted in the United States (Khanna, 2014).

3. Qualitative Research in Online Surveys

Market researchers use the internet not only for conducting quantitative surveys but also for conducting qualitative surveys and data collection. Researchers are now adopting qualitative web-based approaches like online depth interviews, focus groups, blogs, and social networks. The internet can provide researchers with a fast and cost-effective option to gain qualitative customer insights (Rambocas and Pacheco, 2018).

One of the most common web-based qualitative research approach used by researchers is online focus groups. Focus group is a gathering where participants discuss and provide their individual opinions about a particular topic (Tyagi, 2010). Online focus groups have a number of advantages over traditional focus groups. In online focus groups, participants need not be present at the same place. They can log on to the discussion from anywhere provided that they are connected to the internet. Thus, the internet facilitates in bringing together people from different parts of a country or world. The internet facilitates in gathering participants from higher-income groups who might be having a busy schedule and cannot afford to spare the time to travel to a central site. Also, it becomes easier for researchers because they can conduct and moderate online focus groups from anywhere. This eliminates travel, lodging, and facility costs for the researchers. Researchers need to schedule an online focus group well in advance to bring all the participants online at the same time. The results obtained in online focus groups are almost immediate (Tyagi, 2010).

Online focus groups can be conducted in a number of ways. For conducting most of the online focus groups, an online chat room is created where the participants log in at the same time for having real-time discussions. The participants and the moderator sit around a virtual table exchanging comments. Alternatively, researchers might create online message boards where participants can log in at regular intervals and interact over the course of several days or a few weeks (Opresnik, 2019).

Online focus groups have certain disadvantages over traditional focus groups. Although online focus groups are lower in cost and easier to administer, they may lack the real-world dynamics of more personal approaches (Tyagi, 2010). To overcome these shortcomings, researchers add real-time audio and video to their online focus groups. For example, online research firm Channel M2 tries to incorporate human touch in its online focus groups by assembling the participants in virtual focus group rooms which are people-friendly (Neff, 2009).

Channel M2 selects participants using traditional methods. The company then sends them web cameras so that both their verbal and non-verbal reactions may be recorded (Neff, 2009). Participants receive instructions regarding the focus groups in their emails. Channel M2 provides the participants with a weblink of the online interviewing room and a toll-free teleconference number to call. The participants log in to the Channel M2 interview room using their credentials at the appointed time. Once logged in, a participant can see the interview room with live video of the other participants, text chat, screen or slide sharing, and a white board. Discussions take place in a real time scenario with a remarkably live setting. Participants can respond spontaneously verbally, via text messages, or both. Researchers can observe the focus group live from anywhere or they can save a recorded version to watch and analyze later (Tyagi, 2010).

4. Strategies by Companies for Online Marketing Research

Companies develop and implement a number of strategies for collecting information from online marketing research. Companies develop their own social networks to know about their customers in details. Companies also use social networks to gain insights about those people who might be interested in their products (Khanna, 2014). Adidas developed a Facebook fan page for its 2 million users. It also created webpages on YouTube and Twitter (Nedelka, 2009). However, Adidas soon understood that it is very difficult to monitor and analyze the behavior, requirements, and preferences of such a large number of users. The company created its own private online social community called Adidas Insiders where the most active members on its public webpages were invited to join. Members discussed about their preferences in the community. This helped Adidas to quickly gather real-time customer feedback about brand perceptions, product ideas, and marketing campaigns. The members were anxious and willing to be involved. The director of digital media for Adidas commented, "It is a great help to us spending time with customers that love the brand as much as we do" (Nedelka, 2009).

Members of Adidas Insiders willingly participate in testing strategies and concepts. This provides Adidas with fast, actionable, and implementable customer insights for its product marketing teams. "We are able to play with colors and materials and get instant

feedback from these fans, which allows us to be more efficient in development and do go-to-market planning,” says the Adidas marketing executive. “We have even asked about the things like voiceovers for videos and received surprising feedback that has caused us to alter creative” (Nedelka, 2009). The insights gained enable Adidas to formulate better product strategies for the future.

The above discussions confirm that in recent years the internet has become an important research tool through which researchers and companies collect information and develop customer insights. However, companies and researchers go beyond only collecting information from customers on the web through structured online surveys, focus groups, and web communities (Akar and Dalgic, 2018). They also listen to and keep a close watch on the activities of their customers on the web. They try to gather marketing intelligence by analyzing and mining unsolicited and unstructured information about their customers already available on the web. Companies may analyze reviews, comments, and feedback provided by customers about specific brands on their blogs or other available communication forums on the web. Companies closely analyze the shopping behavior of customers on shopping sites like Amazon.com or BestBuy.com (Tyagi, 2010). Companies also analyze customer comments and messages on blogs or social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. The collected information provides the companies with valuable insights about real-time perceptions and attitudes of customers about specific products and brands (Barnes, 2009).

5. Usage of Internet for Online Marketing Research

Marketers and researchers may use the internet for conducting extensive marketing research. There are various outlets on the internet through which researchers may conduct marketing research. These outlets include online customer review boards, discussion forums, chat rooms, and blogs. Marketers can collect information from these outlets to understand their customers. Marketers can research competitors’ product strengths and weaknesses online based on a number of ways (Opresnik, 2019).

5.1. Independent Consumer Goods and Service Review Forums

There are various websites like Epinions.com, RatelItAll.com, ConsumerReview.com, and Bizrate.com where consumers can provide their reviews on goods and services (Wright, 2009). For example, Bizrate.com collects millions of customer reviews of stores and products each year. It has 1.3 million volunteer members who provide information. The company also collects feedback from stores and directly from their customers as they make purchase (Needleman, 2009).

5.2. Feedback Websites for Distributors and Sales Agents

Companies can collect information from feedback websites which are maintained by distributors and sales agent (Wright, 2009). These websites provide both positive and negative product and service reviews. For example, buyers, readers, editors, and others

can review all products, especially books on Amazon.com and provide interactive feedbacks (Sullivan, 2009). Elane.com is an online professional service provider where contractors can describe their experiences and levels of satisfaction with sub-contractors.

5.3. Websites for Customer Reviews and Expert Opinions

Websites are maintained where customers can provide their experiences and reviews of products and services. Based on the feedback provided by customers, experts provide their suggestions and opinions. These types of websites are maintained mostly by companies dealing in financial services and high-tech products that require professional knowledge. For example, ZDNet.com is an online advisor on technology products. It collects customer reviews and feedback on its website (Changchit and Klaus, 2020). These are evaluated based on ease of use, features, and stability. Also, experts provide their own reviews. A product supplier can compare experts' opinions with those of customers and take decisions.

5.4. Customer Complaint Websites

Customers may not be always satisfied with the performances of products and services. There are various customer complaint websites where dissatisfied customers may voice their unfavorable experiences. PlanetFeedback.com allows customers to vent out their frustrations with specific companies. Another website, Complaints.com allows customers to voice their bitter experiences with particular firms or offerings (Changchit and Klaus, 2020). Companies may collect information from such websites and work upon and improve the customer experiences.

6. Public Blogs

There are a number of social networks and public blogs existing online. Individuals can offer personal opinions, reviews, ratings, and recommendations on virtually any topic (Changchit and Klaus, 2020). Firms such as Nielsen's Buzz Metrics and Scout Labs analyze the contents of blogs and social networks to generate customer insights (Khanna, 2014).

The internet offers a number of ways to conduct online marketing research. A company may follow several strategies for conducting research online. A questionnaire may be embedded on its website. The company offers incentive to any individual who completes the questionnaire (Spors, 2009). A company may post a banner on websites like Yahoo! or Facebook which are frequently visited by people. Individuals may be provided the incentive of winning prizes on answering questions (Sweeney, 2009). The internet makes online product testing easier for companies. Companies may float trial balloons for new products. This tactic is growing and generating results much faster than traditional new-product marketing research techniques. There are companies which have used the internet for conducting research on new product development.

Local Motors is a small-scale automaker located at Wareham, Massachusetts. The company allows anyone to upload design ideas on its website (Kristoff, 2009). Local Motors also hosts competitions on its website for cash prizes of up to \$10000. Registered members who participate in the competition include trained design engineers and transportation experts. They vote for the designs which they like the best or provide suggestions for decisions related to building the vehicles and running the company (Kristoff, 2009). Local Motors implements the best design ideas in building its vehicles. It also seeks suggestions and opinions from the members throughout the process of the cars' development and even when the competition gets over. Local Motors expands its car design community by marketing the website of the company on other related websites which attract design enthusiasts and experts (Kristoff, 2009). Local Motors is aware that those contributors whose design ideas are actually implemented may seek compensation. So, the members of the online community are required to sign a legal agreement which the members willingly do because of a sense of belongingness and achievement (Kristoff, 2009).

Marketers and researchers sometimes invite customers to participate in a real-time consumer panel or virtual focus group or sponsor a chat room, bulletin board, or blog (Steel, 2008). Questions are posed to customers from time to time. Companies know that customers who have used their offerings are the most suitable people to brainstorm about their ideas. Companies may also have followers on Twitter and they rate an idea. Online communities and network of customers allow a company to generate quick and fruitful insights. Kraft Foods was able to develop its popular line of 100-calories snacks based on insights provided by sponsored online communities (Johnson, 2006).

Del Monte was considering introducing a new breakfast treat for dogs in the market. Del Monte created an online community called "I Love My Dog" which consisted of 400 members. The members suggested a breakfast with a bacon-and-egg taste and an extra dose of vitamins and minerals. The online community provided continuous and quick suggestions throughout the product development. This allowed Del Monte to introduce fortified "Sausage Breakfast Bites" in half the time usually required to launch a new product (Steel, 2008).

Companies like InterContinental Hotel Groups use both online surveys and communities to gather data on customer satisfaction. Online surveys allow the company to receive quick responses from customers. The company can provide speedy and actionable results to solve issues related to customer services. The online community provides insights which the company focuses on to build its strategies (Sullivan, 2008).

Companies can learn about individuals who visit their websites by tracking their clicking patterns and the manner in which they move to other websites. A company can post different prices, use different headlines, and offer different product features at different times to understand the relative effectiveness of its offerings (Khanna, 2014). Although conducting marketing research online is becoming popular with time, smart companies apply online research to supplement more traditional methods and not to replace them (Helm, 2008). For example, at Kraft Foods, online marketing research is only to augment traditional research. Seth Diamond, director of consumer insights and strategy, says,

“Online is not a solution in and of itself to all of our business challenges, but it does expand our toolkit” (Helm, 2008).

7. Communicating and Acting on Online Marketing Research

Companies appoint employees who scan the internet to collect the latest updates about customers and competitors and prepare a report for marketing managers (Changchit and Klaus, 2020). The results obtained from online marketing research are of use when they are closely coordinated with the decision-making process (Khanna, 2014).

Companies realize that given the speed at which information gets disseminated online, they need to act quickly on information and insights generated online (Sullivan, 2009). There are several instances where companies benefited by acting promptly to the insights generated online. For example, there were negative responses and sentiments about the brand of ticket broker, StubHub regarding the refunds for a rain-delayed Yankees-Red Sox game. After StubHub became aware of customer sentiments, it offered appropriate discounts and credit to its affected customers (Needleman, 2009). The director of customer service observed, “This episode is a canary in a coal mine for us.” In another instance, a customer of Coke was frustrated when he could not redeem a prize from a MyCoke rewards program (Needleman, 2009). The customer posted a message on his Twitter account which resulted in 10000 followers instantly. Realizing this, Coke quickly posted an apology on his Twitter profile for its mistake. Coke also offered to help resolve the situation. The customer changed his Twitter avatar to a photo of himself holding a Coke bottle after receiving the prize from Coke (Wright, 2009). So, companies should not only conduct online marketing research. They should act promptly on the issues revealed in the process of conducting research online.

8. Advantages of Online Marketing Research

Research conducted online has certain advantages over research conducted through traditional approaches like phone calls, mails, and personal interviews. As already mentioned above, the most important and obvious advantages are the speed at which the survey is conducted and the minimum cost incurred in conducting the survey. Online research is faster than traditional research. Questionnaires can be distributed to the respondents simultaneously. Responses may be obtained the moment respondents complete and submit the questionnaire. Results can also be transmitted immediately. One estimate says that an online survey can generate 75 percent to 80 percent of the targeted response in 48 hours, compared to a telephone survey that may require 70 days to obtain 150 interviews (Sullivan, 2008).

Online survey eliminates the requirement of people for collecting the data. A large cross section of the population can be targeted at a single point of time. Questionnaires may be distributed to thousands of respondents simultaneously via email or by posting them on the official website of the company. Possibilities of errors are minimal as the respondents themselves enter the information. The responses are usually instantaneous or at least faster than traditional surveys. Researchers get access to the collected data on a

real-time basis which helps them to tabulate, review, and share research data as they arrive (O'Donnell, 2009).

Online research costs much less than other traditional research approaches for data collection like mail, phone, or personal interviews. In online research, the internet is used as the medium and this eliminates the costs associated with postage, phone, interviewer, and data-handling. As a result, internet surveys typically cost 15-20 percent less than mail surveys and 30 percent less than phone surveys (Davis, 2009). A typical email survey may cost between 20 percent and 50 percent less than what a conventional survey costs. Response rates are also higher in online research. For an email survey, response rates may be as high as 50 percent (Helm, 2008). Moreover, unlike traditional surveys conducted through mails and telephones, it costs nothing extra to target more respondents. Once the questionnaire is prepared, it can be sent to a large number of people without incurring any extra cost. There is a little difference in cost between 10 respondents and 10000 respondents on the web.

Online surveys can be conducted by companies doing any type of business. Previously, data collection could be done only by research experts. However, with the advent of the internet, data collection has become easy and simple for any researcher. There are various websites which help researchers in conducting online research such as Zoomerang (www.zoomerang.com), SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) or Google Docs where researchers can create, publish, and distribute their own custom surveys in minutes (Temple, 2010).

Online surveys have advantages other than speed and cost reduction (Khanna, 2014). Respondents are more engaged in online surveys. Respondents tend to be more interactive. Online surveys are easier to complete and less intrusive than traditional phone or mail surveys. For all these reasons, response rates are higher in online surveys. The internet is an effective medium to those people who otherwise would not have participated in surveys. They include the often-elusive teen, single, affluent, and well-educated audiences. Online surveys are also effective for reaching working mothers and other people who lead busy lives. There is a good representation of such people in online surveys because they can respond in their own space and at their own convenience (Mitchell, 2009).

Majority of the respondents tend to be honest online. Also, respondents are allowed to respond at their own pace. So they tend to respond after being thoughtful. Respondents provide their responses online privately where researchers do not judge them. Respondents feel free in answering sensitive questions (e.g. "How often do you smoke?") because identity is not revealed. Respondents can choose when and where to take the survey and the amount of time to be invested. For all these reasons, respondents may be more relaxed, introspective, and candid (Helm, 2008).

Researchers experience more versatility in online marketing research due to recent advances in technology. Increased broadband penetration offers flexibility and capabilities. Researchers may apply latest technologies like wi-fi, web cameras, and virtual reality to make online surveys more interesting and more effective. Online surveys make answering a questionnaire easier and more fun than paper-and-pencil versions. Online

marketing research also allows respondents to interact with each other through various social networks, blogs, and other discussion forums (Sullivan, 2008).

9. Downside of Online Marketing Research

Online marketing is extensively used at present for conducting both quantitative and qualitative research. As already discussed above, it has a number of advantages over traditional marketing research. However, at the same time, online marketing research has its own drawbacks. It is extremely difficult for a researcher to have control over the people in the sample i.e. it is difficult for a researcher to ensure about the individuals forming the sample. It is difficult to know about the identity of the respondents. To overcome such sample and context problems, many research firms use option communities and respondent panels. For example, Zoomerang creates profiles of the respondents based on 500 attributes (Khanna, 2014).

The samples in online marketing research may be small and skewed. Online marketing research may be conducted only for those respondents who are technology-savvy and have access to the internet (Sullivan, 2009). Many households in the United States are without broadband internet connection. The percentage is even higher among lower-income groups and in rural areas (Krauss, 2009). Most parts of Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and Africa have poor socioeconomic conditions having different education levels. High percentages of the population in these regions are not computer-literate or technology-savvy (Fielding, 2006). Although it is certain that slowly and gradually more and more people will go online, online market researchers should also address the issues related to targeting the majority of the population who are not online. One option is to combine offline sources with online findings. Another option is that researchers provide temporary internet connections for conducting surveys consisting of respondents without internet access. Researchers may provide temporary internet connections at places such as malls and recreation centers (Sullivan, 2009). Market researchers may also fill up the gaps in responses received in online surveys by advanced statistical tools like interpolation and extrapolation (Khanna, 2014).

Researchers need to attract respondents for participating in online surveys. Many respondents may participate unwillingly or halfheartedly. This may affect the reliability and the validity of any type of marketing research (Churchill, 1979). Researchers should carefully monitor participation and engagement levels. New features, events, games, and other such activities that keep respondents interested and engaged should be introduced on a regular basis by companies and researchers (Khanna, 2014).

Online marketing research depends heavily on technology. Conducting online marketing research requires uninterrupted internet connectivity. Researchers need to ensure continuous internet connectivity at a reasonable speed and without fluctuations. Also, the survey should not have accessibility issues for the respondents. Appearance of the survey on the internet server of a respondent should be similar to that intended by researchers (Engle et al., 2012).

Another major and important issue in online marketing research is ensuring and maintaining the privacy and security of the respondents. The importance and the sensitivity of the issue warrants elaborate discussion.

10. Privacy and Security Issues in Online Marketing Research

Companies are able to generate a lot of customer insights from online marketing research. However, the internet is an open forum where there is seamless flow of information between individuals and companies. This may raise privacy and security issues for customers. Critics fear that the information and insights generated by companies about customers may be misused without the knowledge of customers (Aydin, 2019). Unethical marketers and researchers may use personal information of customers like email addresses and confidential responses for their own benefits to promote and sell products after the research is completed. Critics are concerned about the misuse and sharing of customer information with the help of latest technologies. This may happen without the respondents' consent and sometimes even without making the respondents aware about the usage of their personal and sensitive information (O'Donnell, 2009). Failure to address such privacy issues and concerns may result in angry and non-cooperative customers. Customers may lose faith in those companies involved in such unethical activities (Temple, 2010).

Many customers believe that information gathered from them is used beneficially by companies (Clifford, 2009). Such customers feel positive about marketing research and believe that a useful purpose is served. However, a majority of customers is skeptical about the collection of personal information for online marketing research. They strongly resent or even mistrust online marketing research (Clifford, 2009). They do not like intrusions on their privacy by market researchers. People worry that companies collect personal information about customers to build their own databases. Companies may then extract data from such databases to analyze sensitive information to understand their deepest feelings. Customers also feel that companies may try to influence their tastes, preferences, and buying behavior based on the analysis of information collected by the companies (Davis, 2009).

Customers worry a lot about privacy issues and identity thefts (Atsmon et al., 2012). Customers are cautious about sharing personal information with companies and they do so only for customized products from marketers they trust (Sisodia et al., 2007). Customers worry that they will be robbed or cheated. They worry that companies will misuse their personal information. Customers may be flooded with unsolicited communications from companies and market researchers (Wasserman, 2009). Customers also fear that their children might be targeted to collect information (Davis, 2009). Wise companies are aware about the apprehensions of customers and establish consumer affairs departments to formulate and resolve complaints (Clifford, 2009).

Rising customer resentment has resulted in lower response rates to online surveys (Davis, 2009). Again, those customers who actually respond provide biased responses which affect the analysis and the validity and the reliability of the results obtained (Churchill, 1979). This has resulted in a challenge for companies of unearthing valuable

but potentially sensitive customer data while also maintaining customer trust (Davis, 2009). Consumers also are in a constant dilemma regarding the trade-offs between personalization and privacy. There are many customers who willingly share information for free services, offers, discounts, product upgrades, and rewards. However, those customers also worry about the unauthorized usage of their personal information (Mladenovic et al., 2019).

Major companies have started taking initiatives which indicate that they care for their customers and respect their privacy. Companies like IBM, Facebook, American Express, Citibank, Microsoft, and others have now appointed a Chief Privacy Officer (CPO). The primary responsibility of CPO is to safeguard the privacy of consumers of the company. For achieving this, the CPO needs to coordinate with all the other functions of the organization like technology, legal, and accounting to marketing, sales, services, and communications to work as a single unit and to safeguard consumer privacy (Vijayan, 2006).

A company may undertake certain policies which assure its customers that it cares for them. The company may adopt a formal written code of ethics. The code needs to be shared with the stakeholders. The company should build a tradition of ethical behavior while conducting online surveys and hold its people fully responsible for observing ethical guidelines (Ellison, 2005). Google is known for its ethics. Google has earned this reputation in the corporate world by supporting a touch-feely work environment, strong ethics, and its basic guiding principle: "Don't be evil" (Chang, 2009). Sometimes, government intervention may be required to control the privacy and security concerns of customers. Despite all these issues, analysts predict a healthy growth of online marketing research in the near future (Khanna, 2014).

11. Discussions

A company needs to conduct online marketing research to collect information from a large proportion of the target population who are online. Conducting online marketing research is required by a company to understand its customers better and formulate its future marketing strategies. It helps in gathering information so that decision-making becomes easier. The study discussed the different types of marketing research – both quantitative and qualitative – which companies and researchers may conduct. The study discussed the various strategies companies adopt for conducting online marketing research. Usage of the internet becomes imperative for conducting online marketing research. The study discussed the ways in which companies make maximum usage of the internet for conducting online marketing research. Companies should not only collect data and information through online research. They need to analyze the collected data and communicate and act based on the results of the analysis. The study also focused on the advantages of online marketing research. At the same time, online marketing research has its own shortcomings. The study focused on the downsides of conducting online marketing research. One of the major issues related to online marketing research is the issue of maintaining and ensuring privacy and security of the customers. The study discussed these issues at length and also the various initiatives taken by companies to protect the

privacy and security of the data collected from customers online. Conducting online marketing research should be considered as a strategic decision and not only as a method for collecting data about customers. Keeping this in mind, the study focused on the different strategies which companies adopt based on online marketing research. Finally, the study also discussed how communicating and acting on the analysis based on online marketing research in a timely manner helps organizations in understanding their customers and solving their problems faster and more efficiently. Academicians may study the various ways, analyze their advantages and disadvantages, and suggest new ways of collecting data about customers online.

11.1. Managerial Implications

Practitioners and marketers may understand the benefits and shortcomings of the various ways of collecting data by conducting online marketing research. They may also evaluate which methods of online data collection are already in place and which methods need to be incorporated in their organizations to understand and serve their customers better. Managers will understand the importance of qualitative research in collecting data and the role of qualitative research in understanding customers. Companies should consider conducting updated online marketing research while taking any important strategic decision. They will understand the importance of privacy and security issues in online marketing research.

11.2. Contributions of the study

The contribution of the study lies in the fact that an in-depth discussion of the various strategies adapted by companies related to conducting online marketing research was discussed. The discussions have both theoretical and managerial implications. Based on the discussions presented, academicians may conduct a further review of the different strategies and suggest improved strategies for conducting online marketing research and collect data and consequently, building relationships with customers. The discussions will sensitize managers in an organization about the importance of conducting online marketing research and its role in taking decisions, and building relationships with customers. Efforts were made to include the relevant and the latest literature related to online marketing research and the connection between online marketing research and its roles in decision-making in an organization.

12. Conclusions

The study discussed the various aspects of online marketing research and the ways in which an organization may conduct surveys online and collect data about their customers. The study reviewed the various strategies companies adopt to collect and communicate updated information about their customers. Proper usage of online marketing research may help companies to achieve the goal of building relationships with customers.

However, conducting online marketing research and managing relationship with customers is an evolving field with developments happening regularly.

Based on the information provided by online marketing research, marketing managers develop insights to understand the customer requirements better and formulate marketing strategies for the future. In this age of internet and information technology, companies equipped with online marketing research will have an edge over other companies who do not give importance to online marketing research. The discussions in the study will sensitize both academicians and practitioners about the importance of online marketing research. As discussed throughout the study, online marketing research will be extremely important for knowing customers better and those companies exploiting online marketing research will have an edge over others in the competition.

12.1. Future Research Directions

Researchers and practicing managers in future require keeping themselves updated about the latest trends and developments taking place to understand the roles of online marketing research in collecting data and developing relationships and implement better strategies for building relationships with customers. Researchers will realize the importance of privacy and security issues in online marketing research. They will be motivated to conduct research on the various privacy and security issues which are of concern to customers.

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