

The Changing Landscape Of Marketing Research: A Study Of Marketing Consultants

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ABSTRACT

The field of marketing research is undergoing dramatic change as technology of various forms penetrates its realm. This study seeks to gather a snapshot of the U.S. marketing research industry in its current state of evolution. Specifically, this study examines the mix of data collection methods, analysis techniques, targeted research participants, and project topics emphasized by today's working consultants. While findings confirm a rather expected major shift toward Internet-related means of collecting data, analysis techniques remain relatively unchanged over the last twenty years. Furthermore, findings reveal that research design decisions are to some degree formed based on consultants' perceptions of their own Internet self-efficacy and their firms' orientations toward either B2B or B2C clients. Implications for both practitioner and academic researchers are discussed.

Keywords: Analysis techniques, data collection methods, research methods

INTRODUCTION

This is not your father's marketing research arena!" Today's marketing research professionals navigate a rapidly changing landscape. Relatively recent technological advances and ever-evolving customer needs present marketing researchers with the potential to greatly modify their research practices, to employ a new set of data collection tools and effective analytical techniques, and to utilize alternative means of facing current challenges.

While the prior two decades have represented a period of incredible change for marketing research, information regarding some significant elements of these shifts has not kept pace. Based on an examination of previous literature, the most recent comprehensive academic study that examines the diffusion of analytical techniques and data collection methods implemented by marketing researchers was conducted decades ago by Bellenger, Howell, Wilcox and Greenberg (1990) and included data collected in 1975 and 1987. Given the dearth of more current research into this and other important aspects of the field, the overall objective of this study is to bridge the years by updating the knowledge of marketing research as it is being practiced today.

This study's intention is to contribute to marketing knowledge by extending the scope of the Bellenger, Howell, Wilcox and Greenberg (1990) work beyond a survey of data collection methods and analysis techniques to also include the following: information regarding specific groups to be targeted for study and documentation of the nature of project topics that consultants report to be their likely future focus. Additionally, potential associations between design issues and researchers' feelings of their own Internet self-efficacy and their firms' B2B or B2C client orientation are explored. Such knowledge will be important for marketing research professionals, marketing managers, and academics alike.

First, findings of this study provide marketing research consultants with important empirical insight into how others in their field are choosing to respond to current challenges by offering a method of benchmarking their

organizations' activities against others' current practices. Second, results offer marketing managers a window regarding the techniques and research topics which others are attempting to leverage for a competitive advantage. Finally, this study provides important feedback to marketing academics regarding the state of diffusion of newer, more sophisticated aspects of the marketing research curriculum, as well as knowledge of those data collection methods and analytical techniques that continue to stand the test of time.

BACKGROUND

The face of marketing research continually transforms as technology exerts its influence on research abilities and methods for both business and academic communities. Accessing respondents and gaining knowledge of their opinions and beliefs now goes far beyond the completion of paper questionnaires. Advances in technology allow for online surveying, electronic monitoring and even brain scanning methods to measure consumer reactions (Goldsmith 2004). While techniques such as brain scanning are used by relatively few researchers, it would appear that many more have embraced research methods related to the Internet. The benefits of conducting research using such technology are obvious and undeniable. For example, utilizing e-mail surveys rather than traditional postal methods results in financial savings due to reduced paper and mailing expenditures (Sheehan and McMillan 1999). The faster response rates associated with electronically-delivered surveys produce substantial time savings (Bachmann, Elfrink and Vazzana 1996). Further, additional resources are saved when electronic data are directly transferred into analysis software, thus eliminating the need for manual data entry (Ilieva, Baron and Healey 2002).

The move to these newer electronic methods may be driven by more than just the benefits that they provide. The adoption of these newer methods may be encouraged in part by the atmosphere that exists today for some data collection mainstays of the past. Consider for example, the current environment for telephone data collection, once the major means of survey data collection in North America (Nathan 2001). Today, in response to irritation over mounting unsolicited calls and previous abuse by those engaging in sugging (selling under the guise of research) or frugging (fund raising under the guise of research), millions of consumers have registered with Federal and State "do not call" lists and employ call blocking techniques (Leeuw and Hox, 2004). These consumer strategies add to the difficulty of data collection for legitimate marketing researchers. In addition, by 2004 about 11 million American households had forsaken their landlines and were solely using cell phones for their communication needs, thus presenting marketing researchers with new challenges for accessing certain market segments such as younger groups (Cuneo 2004).

Paralleling this changing landscape, a number of relatively recent academic studies have focused on fairly broad-spectrum marketing research topics in an effort to tap into customer perceptions of the benefits of marketing research and the current attitudes toward the field. For example, Callahan and Cassar (1995) surveyed small business owners about their ability to conduct and interpret formal market studies. As predicted, confidence in their own marketing research skills and their reported likelihood of using such research for long-term planning increased within this group as their level of experience concerning these activities increased. Ogunmokun, Chin and McPhail (2005) examined the link between company marketing research usage and business performance. Their research reveals that, compared to highly performing organizations, lower performing companies perceive marketing research to be not worth the effort, expensive, highly time consuming, and unlikely to significantly contribute to their companies' performances. Finally, Struse (2000) compiled the responses of 45 senior-level research professionals in major firms regarding their predictions for what they believe will be the ten most influential factors for marketing research in the 21st century. The Internet, e-commerce, digital and broadband media and globalization were among the most frequent responses. Struse (2000) envisions a world where the electronic infrastructure will be in place to allow marketers to capture behavioral and attitudinal marketing information as a by-product of business interactions and thereby to develop a one-to-one solution for individual customers.

Diverging from the broader focus of the above research, other studies have taken a more narrow view by exploring specific elements of marketing research or the implications of a new method or technique. For example, Lee and Kim (1994) explored the ability of managers and researchers to evaluate the role of sampling related factors such as sample size, the sampling process and the response rate in determining the quality of marketing research. Contrary to findings in cognitive psychology (Tversky and Kahneman 1974), these groups appeared to be able to

correctly assess the influence of these factors, perhaps due to familiarity and regular exposure to the types of judgmental tasks involved.

Corresponding with the spread of electronic means of communication, a growing number of studies have investigated particular elements of Internet-related research. Sheehan and McMillan (1999) report on variations in response rate and response time for e-mail surveys across three different respondent populations. These researchers report significantly greater response rates when the research topic was more salient for the sample population and quicker response for those that had received pre-notification. Schaefer and Dillman (1998) review previous research for the purpose of developing a standard e-mail methodology. They posit that techniques found to be successful in traditional mail surveys are also effective in e-mail research. Further, they and other researchers provide experimental evidence that a multi-mode approach is valuable for use with participants that cannot be reached via e-mail. Ilieva, Baron and Healey (2002) recommend a combination of on-line and postal methods when participants reside in countries where Internet users are not representative of the population. Cuneo (2004) also advocates the use of multi-mode or hybrid methodologies such as using the Internet as an initial screening tool later to be followed by live interviews. The determination of the best day of the week and time of day to send an Internet survey was the objective of Faught, Whitten and Green (2004). Findings of their field experiment support the distribution of such surveys on Wednesday morning for the best response. In a final example of Internet-focused research, Sheehan and Hoy (1999) investigate the attitudes and behaviors adopted by consumers in response to online advertising practices and Internet-associated privacy concerns. Results indicate that as privacy concerns increase, individuals are less likely to register on websites that require personal information and more likely to complain to senders of unsolicited e-mail and to report them to their Internet Service Providers.

In conclusion, the body of work relating to marketing research is vast and wide ranging in its focus. While existing research provides some understanding of significant issues and much has been learned from these studies, they still do not provide answers to the important questions of how marketing research has changed through the years and to what extent the latest developments in the field have become diffused among practicing marketing researchers. The objective of this study is to address this gap in the literature by capturing a snapshot perspective of the industry in its current stage of development.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument Development: Stage One. Prior to developing the survey instrument, in-depth, one-on-one telephone interviews were conducted among a small number of marketing managers and marketing employees with one or more years of experience in marketing research. These interviews sought feedback regarding current marketing research terminology and the general thoughts and perceptions of the direction of the industry. Participants were asked to consider the following adapted definition of marketing research as offered by Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2006): Marketing research can be broadly defined as the gathering of information that allows for the generation, refinement and evaluation of marketing actions.

Ideas gained from this qualitative phase were critical to the development of a survey instrument for the next phase of this research. Interview results highlighted the diversity that exists concerning the perception of which activities fall within the domain of marketing research. While some interviewees expressed a more traditional perspective (observation, survey and experimentation), others described their Google searches and their use of secondary data bases as examples of marketing research that they conduct. Based on this feedback from interviewees, an existing, but fairly general, definition of marketing research was adopted for use in the survey instrument.

Instrument Development: Stage Two. The final form of the survey for the quantitative phase included the following sections: 1) data collection methodologies, 2) analysis techniques, 3) targeted research participants, 4) project topics, 5) perceptions of Internet self-efficacy, and 6) firm and personal characteristics.

MEASURES

Online survey participants were presented with categorized lists of data collection methods, analysis techniques, names for types of potential survey groups, and project topics or purposes for which marketing research might be conducted. Survey items relating to data collection methodologies and analysis techniques were based on a combination of content adapted from Bellenger et al. (1990) and the feedback gained from several in-depth interviews. With the exception of the measurement of Internet self-efficacy (described later), content for the remaining sections of the survey was developed particularly for the current research based on interview feedback and the authors' own professional experiences.

Participants were asked to indicate the proportion of data collection methods their company had utilized in the past two years. Furthermore, respondents were also asked to indicate the likelihood in the next two years that their company would use specified data collection methods, analysis techniques, conduct research on specific targeted groups and conduct research for various specified purposes. Responses were gathered using a 5-point Likert scale (coded 5=Very Likely and 1=Very Unlikely). Each list also contained an open-ended "other" category to allow for individuals to insert additions to the lists as they deemed appropriate.

Internet self-efficacy, a factor with potential influence on one's use of electronic methods, is defined for purposes of this study as, "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of Internet actions required to produce given attainments" (Hsu and Chiu 2004, p.369). Internet self-efficacy was measured using a 5-item scale using items adapted from Hsu and Chiu (2004). Respondents were asked indicate their degree of agreement / disagreement (coded: 5=Strongly Agree and 1=Strongly Disagree) with statements related to their confidence in using search engines like Yahoo and Google, in downloading information, in searching for information on the Internet, in visiting a website if given a web address, and in having an overall comfort level using the Internet. Cronbach's Alpha for the scale is .883, indicating strong reliability. Information concerning firm and personal characteristics was also collected in the latter sections of the survey.

SAMPLING

Results from the interview phase of this research suggest that marketing consultants represent a strong driver within the marketing research industry. Therefore, marketing consultants were chosen as the participants for the quantitative phase. The American Marketing Association directory served as the initial sample frame. Requests for survey participation were e-mailed to approximately 250 members listed as marketing consultants in the 2006 American Marketing Association's directory of marketing services providers. Additional marketing consultants were added to the sample frame by using both a referral method as well as convenience sampling. Two participation requests were sent via email at one week intervals. Emails were initiated during mid-week morning periods as suggested by Faught, Whitten and Green (2004) for optimal response rates. The email request contained an Internet hyperlink to the survey form that was hosted on a university server.

RESULTS

A total of 107 usable responses were collected. The average length of time in the research industry for consultant respondents was 20 years, and the average length of time in their current positions was about 10 years. Furthermore, 63% of respondents reported that they hold a graduate degree. Lastly, almost 60% of respondents represented primarily business-to-consumer firms while approximately one fourth of respondents claimed a business-to-business orientation and about 15% stated that their firms have a balanced orientation of both consumer and business customers. Thus, respondents from the final sample appear well-qualified for this research.

Data Collection Methodologies. Table I presents a selection of 2006 results along with some of the findings from Bellenger, et al's (1990) data collections in 1975 and 1987 to allow for comparisons regarding data collection methods across the decades. These particular comparisons are offered for their descriptive value rather than for statistical inference due in part to the non-existence of particular methods for some of the data collection

time periods. Values in Table I reflect past usage of the method (Bellenger et al. – past one year; 2006 date – past two years). Furthermore, column percentages add to more than 100% since multiple responses were allowed.

Regarding data collection, the use of the telephone appears to remain a popular method despite the problems noted earlier of “do not call” lists and consumers’ privacy concerns. However, findings suggest a decrease in the proportion of respondents using this method from a reported 90% in 1987 to 71% currently. Results also indicate a likely decline in the use of focus groups (83% in 1987, 61% in 2006) and test marketing (30% vs. 14%). The largest apparent reduction in the use of a data collection method was for mail, with only 38% of the respondents claiming its use compared to a previous proportion of 86% reporting mail as one of their methods in 1987. Use of the fax machine to help collect data was the least popular method with only 4% of respondents claiming to use this method in the past two years.

As might be expected, electronic methods of data collection have gained great utilization in recent years. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents report Internet hosted surveys among their methods. Forty-six (46) percent of the sample report sending surveys via email. While many marketing researchers are making use of these newer Internet-related methods, still others have not incorporated them to a great extent. It is an accepted natural human response when faced with uncertainty to tend to remain within one’s own zone of familiarity. In an effort to begin to understand if this phenomenon is at work in the case of choosing whether to move to electronic methods of data collection, the association between their use and consultants’ perceptions of their own Internet self-efficacy was explored as well as their level of comfort or familiarity with Internet activities. Respondents with the highest stated levels of Internet self-efficacy were compared to those that reported lower levels. Resulting t-tests suggest that marketing consultants with high levels of Internet self-efficacy are significantly more likely to have conducted surveys that were hosted on Internet servers (mean_{high}= 26%, mean_{low}=7%, t-value = 2.86, p< .05) and report that they are also more likely to conduct future research hosted on the Internet than were consultants with lower levels of stated Internet self-efficacy (mean_{high}= 4.08, mean_{low}= 2.57, t-value = 1.97, p< .10). Notably, significant differences do not appear between these groups when the method is email-based for previous use percentages (mean_{high}= 15%, mean_{low}= 18%, t-value = .36, p=.72) nor for future expected usage (mean_{high}= 3.42, mean_{low}= 3.44, t-value = .04, p=.97). Perhaps this is partly due to the common use of email for other purposes and the lack of expertise required for email-based data collection.

Table I
Utilization of Selected Data Collection Methods

	1975 Data Bellenger, et al (1990)*	1987 Data Bellenger, et al (1990)*	2006 Data Current Study**	2006 Rank
Data Collection Method				
Telephone Surveys	74%	90%	71%	1
Focus Groups	47%	83%	61%	2
Internet Hosted Surveys	N/A	N/A	58%	3 (tie)
Personal Interviews	76%	36%	58%	3 (tie)
Email	N/A	N/A	46%	4
Mail Surveys	70%	86%	38%	5
Observations	N/A	N/A	20%	6 (tie)
Test Marketing	35%	30%	14%	7(tie)
Pilot Studies	N/A	N/A	14%	7 (tie)
Experiments	N/A	N/A	6%	8
Fax Machine	N/A	N/A	4%	9

* Percentage of respondents who had used the method at all in the past year.

** Percentage of respondents who had used the method at all in the past two years.

Analysis Techniques. Use of various analysis techniques was also a topic of interest. In particular, the survey asked participants to indicate how likely they would be to use various analytical methods in the next two years. Table II displays the Bellenger et al. (1990) data that had been collected in 1975 and 1987 along with this study’s 2006 responses. Unlike in the case of data collection methods where much change appears to have occurred

in the last two decades, the popularity of analysis techniques appears to have remained more stable from 1987 to 2006. This is the case for using charts for graphic analysis (89% vs. 91%), analysis of variance (55% vs. 51%), regression or correlation (67% vs. 69%), perceptual mapping (45% vs. 45%) and conjoint analysis (34% vs. 43%). It appears that cluster analysis may have experienced a decrease in popularity from 58% of respondents stating they had used it in 1987 (Bellenger et al. 1990) to 38% of respondents in 2006 stating that they will be likely to use this analysis method in the future.

The relative stability of analysis techniques over the last two decades may be attributed in part to the fact that many of these methods had already been developed by the late 1980s when integrated and highly comprehensive computer packages for statistical analysis such as SAS, SPSS, BMDP and SYSTAT were becoming widely available (Stewart 1991). These packages, menu driven and no longer requiring knowledge of computer programming for the user, quickly facilitated the diffusion of the then newer powerful multivariate analysis techniques that generally tend to remain adequate for handling today’s analysis needs as well.

Table II
Utilization of Selected Analysis Techniques

	1975 Data Bellenger, et al (1990)*	1987 Data Bellenger, et al (1990)*	2006 Data Current Study**	2006 Rank
Analysis Technique				
Graphic Techniques (charts, etc.)	N/A	89%	91%	1
Cross-tabs, percentages	NA	86%	89%	2
Central Tendency (mean, median, mode)	NA	80%	86%	3
Qualitative Analysis	NA	NA	82%	4
Regression/correlation	56%	67%	69%	5
Analysis of Variance	26%	55%	51%	6
Multidimensional Scaling / Perceptual Map	16%	45%	45%	7
Conjoint Analysis	N/A	34%	43%	8
Cluster Analysis	18%	53%	38%	9

* Percentage of respondents who had used the technique at all in the past year.

** Percentage of respondents who are likely to use the technique in the next two years

Target Respondent Groups. Another area of interest includes learning which type of groups marketing researchers perceive as the focus of their future studies. Table III presents the results. Participants used a 5-point scale to estimate their firm’s likelihood of targeting a specific group for study in the next two years. As might be predicted, the group with the highest likelihood of being researched was a firm’s existing customers (mean = 4.92) and potential customers (4.80). However, employees, market partners such as distributors, sales representatives, and suppliers all had a greater than average likelihood of being targeted for study as well, with means of 3.43, 3.42, 3.38 and 3.29, respectively. Stockholders (mean = 2.05) comprised the least likely group to be focus of future marketing research.

Table III
**Average Likelihood of Targeted Participant Groups
for the Next Two Years**

Targeted Research Groups	2006
Existing Customers	4.92
Potential Customers	4.80
Employees	3.43
Market Partners	3.42
Sales Representatives	3.38
Suppliers	3.29
Stockholders	2.05

Note: Scale 1 = Extremely Unlikely; 5 = Extremely Likely

Project Topics. To better understand the most likely objectives for potential research projects, respondents were asked to indicate their likelihood of conducting research on particular topics in the coming two years (See Table IV). Using a 5-point scale, the most likely project topics include research conducted to determine customer wants and needs (mean = 4.67) with product development research (mean = 4.61), customer satisfaction (mean = 4.59) and segmentation research (mean = 4.47) following closely behind. Value analysis and industry analysis were the topics with the lowest reported likelihoods. However even here, the topics were at least as likely as not to be performed (means= 3.28, 3.15 respectively).

Table IV
Average Likelihood of Various Project Topics
for the Next Two Years

	2006 Data
Customer Wants/ Needs Determination	4.67
Product Development	4.61
Customer Satisfaction/ Loyalty Studies	4.59
Brand Positioning	4.31
Advertising / Media Effectiveness	3.99
Pricing Strategy	3.75
Marketing Channel Effectiveness	3.51
Competitive Intelligence	3.45
Value Analysis	3.28
Industry Analysis	3.15

Note: Scale 1 = Extremely Unlikely; 5 = Extremely Likely

B2C versus B2B Client Orientation. Compared to consumer firms, B2B organizations tend to have smaller research budgets, possess fewer formal marketing research departments, need to estimate derived in addition to direct demand, rely more on secondary data and expert judgment for decision making, and emphasize “market” information rather than “marketing research” data (Desphande and Zaltman 1987). Given these contrasting client needs, this study examines marketing research consultants’ perceptions based on client orientation. Specifically, this study focuses on differences in methods and analysis techniques between consultants with an emphasis in B2C clients compared to those consultants with a B2B emphasis. Consulting firms were divided into two groups based on the nature of the clients they reported serving. The B2B consultants (58%) were those who indicated that over half of their clients were from the B2B sector, with the remaining participants (26%) accordingly being grouped as B2C consultants. Results provide some support for the notion that the tools employed by today’s consultants are influenced by the predominant composition of their client base.

Consistent with the idea that B2B firms place greater focus on the use of secondary data, t-tests reveal that consulting firms with a majority of B2B clients are more likely to have conducted research using the Internet, an immense repository for secondary data (mean_{B2B}= 34%, mean_{B2C}= 20%, t-value = 1.85, p < .10). Consultants with a greater proportion of B2B clients were also more likely “to have used Internet searches” to conduct research for their clients (mean_{B2B}= 16%, mean_{B2C}= 3%, t-value = 2.05, p < .10) and also more likely to expect to conduct Internet searches for their clients in the future (mean_{B2B}= 3.69, mean_{B2C}= 2.49, t-value = 2.57, p < .05) and use secondary sources for research in the future (mean_{B2B}= 2.88, mean_{B2C}= 1.94, t-value = 2.59, p < .05).

CONCLUSIONS

The diffusion of technology in the field of marketing research has changed the landscape and created a new environment for both academic and managerial research professionals. Findings from this study suggest that these changes currently appear to be most pronounced regarding data collection. Internet and email methods of gathering data have gained substantial popularity and as a result have spelled a sizable decrease in the usage of some other methods, such as postal mail surveying. Regarding the move to Internet hosted surveying, a consultant’s own degree of Internet self-efficacy appears to be positively associated with this change.

In comparison to data collection methods, the usage of various analysis techniques appears to have remained more consistent over the last two decades. Despite their limitations, telephone surveying and focus group sessions still remain at the top of the list for methods of research conducted among American businesses. Internet hosted surveys and personal interviewing are tied for the next level of popular use. Regarding analysis techniques, developing charts is the most likely analytical method used according to participating consultants.

Existing and potential customers are the most likely groups to be targeted for research projects based on the findings. Determining customer wants and needs takes top priority regarding research topic followed by product development and customer satisfaction studies. Furthermore, a positive association exists between consultants' use of Internet searches, Internet hosted surveys and secondary studies for firms with a predominance of B2B versus B2C customers within their client base.

Findings are summarized as follows:

- 1) Telephone surveys and focus groups remain popular methods for data collection.
- 2) Internet hosted surveying earned a strong third position tied with personal interviewing for stated use among marketing researchers.
- 3) The use of postal mail for surveying has declined substantially over time.
- 4) Graphic methods continue to maintain relatively high levels of use for analyzing survey data.
- 5) Existing and potential customers are the most likely target groups for survey research while stockholders are the least likely group.
- 6) Topics of highest interest for survey research include studies which help understand customer wants and needs, product development and customer satisfaction.
- 7) Firms with a B2B orientation appear to conduct more extensive secondary research.

IMPLICATIONS

This study reports important and timely information regarding the methods of data collection, analysis techniques, targeted participants and research topics currently being pursued by today's marketing researchers in the U.S. This updated information is relevant for both academics and practitioners with an interest in collecting data using methods current within the research industry to capture dynamic opinions of the marketplace. Business managers can use this information as a benchmark to gauge their firm's position with regards to the research industry while also understanding trends.

The current trend toward greater use of electronic data collection methodology is expected to continue, and its effects are predicted to ultimately modify methods of analysis and operational practices. (Struse 2000) suggests that, in the future, the required standards and skill sets for marketing researchers will change from those of project management to those including knowledge of information systems and other technologies. Findings support this expectation and underscore the trend of moving research forward through the use of electronic methods as a response to this more technologically-driven environment. As a result, business managers may need to consider the changing research tools when evaluating the required skills set for marketing researchers.

Additionally, this snapshot gives managers and academic researchers a gauge for customer expectations of research tasks. As respondent groups such as external groups, including current and potential customers, and internal groups, including management and employees, participate in research, their expectations of the research task are shaped based on the methods research firms use to gather thoughtful responses. Both managerial and academic researchers need to gain an understanding of respondent expectations in order to conduct effective research among target audiences.

Finally, besides bridging the years since the Bellenger et al. (1990) work, this study's findings can facilitate greater cooperation and understanding between the two worlds of marketing research practitioners and academics. "Academia can learn much from real world researchers out on the firing line, including which methods and techniques have proven their value in early applications; which methods and techniques have stood the test of time

in the marketplace; how academics have addressed their tutorial role in making new methods both available and understandable to practitioners; how practitioners have addressed their role in testing the value of new techniques in real applications and communicating their findings to academics; and what the potential is for combinations of academics and practitioners in addressing industry and corporate problems (Green 2004, p. 12)”.

In summary, findings from this research provide both the academic and managerial community with an updated perspective of trends and current practices within the marketing research industry. This information can benefit both communities in the following ways:

- 1) Researchers can use this information to benchmark their survey methods and gauge their organizations’ practices.
- 2) Findings provide researchers with an understanding for the necessary skills sets needed of survey researchers. This is applicable for both hiring and training among the managerial community as well as educating future marketing researchers within the academic community.
- 3) Researchers can better understand respondent expectations from survey research experiences.
- 4) Trends in survey methods can help researchers plan for future research studies by examining their capabilities with regards to anticipated future research methods.
- 5) The academic community can benefit by deeper understanding for the survey methods that have endured as well as rising methods from a managerial perspective.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As is true for much research, this study could have been improved with a larger sample of consultant respondents. Also, results have descriptive value of current practices although there is no indication that the most popular methods of data collection, analysis, etc are considered best. Also, the differences discussed between these findings and those from the Bellenger, et al (1990) study cannot be tested for statistical significance for several reasons including the slight differences between respondent types. Furthermore, while marketing consultants may primarily drive the movement of research tools, there are certainly progressive organizations with significant influence on the field. Therefore, research may have been strengthened by the inclusion of marketing professionals from the client side of the research industry.

Participation was solicited via email for this study while the earlier research (Bellenger et al. 1990) invited participation by postal mail. While it is likely that many organizations are using email as their primary form of communication, this recruitment method may have encouraged participation from research consultants who are technologically savvy.

With technology changing rapidly, it will be important for future researchers to also clearly distinguish between variant forms of one data collection method. For example, this study does not assess the use of IVR (Interactive Voice Response) to collect data separately from other forms of telephone data collection, such as telephone interviewing. Therefore, the extent of usage of this newer evolving method, IVR, is not separately captured from these findings. Despite the above noted limitations, the current research addresses important and under-researched issues.

Two decades had elapsed between the data collection for Bellenger et al. (1990) and this study. If marketing researchers, other marketing practitioners and academics are to have a better understanding of the then current practices, future researchers should study this topic at much closer intervals.

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