

# **The Impact of the Internet on Research Methods in Social Sciences: Are New Methodologies Being Created or Just a New Use of Existing Methodologies?**

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# Presentation Outline

1. Internet Characteristics
2. Major Questions
3. Research about the Internet
4. Research through the Internet
5. The Implication on Carrying Out Studies
6. Some Conclusions

# Characteristics of the Information on the Internet

- **Increase the amount of data and speed of collection**
- **Interactive collection (e.g., study on quality of service of airline companies)**
- **Anonymity or exposure – as you like it**
- **Variables can be changed dynamically**
- **Media can alternate dynamically (video, audio, text)**
- **Internationally accessible**
- **Easily accessible**
- **Multi types of data sources**

# Types of Internet Research in Social Sciences

- **Research about the Internet**: Research that deals with phenomena related to or derived by the Internet itself. For instance: addiction to the Internet; quality of service in B2C services.
- **Research through the Internet**: Research that employs the Internet as a platform to study issues that traditionally were used to be studied through other channels. For example: political polls; customer satisfactory surveys.

# Major Questions

- How the special characteristics of the Internet affect the execution of a research project (about of through the Internet)?
- Does the use of the Internet create new research methodologies or is it just a revised implementation of existing techniques?

# Research about the Internet: a new method (?) -- **Structured Observation**

- **Structured Observation**: A sample of observations made by a person or a few persons filling out a questionnaire approved by experts and validated on a pilot sample.

A Structured observation may be an appropriate substitute for a survey!

# Research about the Internet: Some Examples

- Comparative analysis of various websites (e.g., Cultural differences among Yahoo and MSN around the world, quality of service of airline companies)
- Comparative analysis between physical and virtual processes (e.g., virtual teams vis-à-vis face-to-face teams)

# Research about the Internet: Some Examples (cont')

- Observing human interactions over the Internet in chats, forums, blogs, and the like



# Research about the Internet: Advantages

- No geographical boundaries
- 24/7 time availability
- Virgin soil for all kinds of research topics
- Ability to incorporate qualitative and quantitative analysis (e.g., content of website and quantitative data)
- Non linear walkthrough

# Research about the Internet: Problems

## **Methodological questions:**

- Is the sample representative?
- Are structured observations made by a few observers not biased?
- Competence of the experts chosen to validate the questionnaire.

# Research through the Internet: some examples

- [Relationship Between Thinking Styles and Creativity](#)

## **self test:**

- [Social Psychology Study](#)

## **cross cultural questionnaire:**

- [Cross-cultural definitions of abuse within families](#)

Vanderblit University eLab

- [We're looking for people like you...](#)



Dear Yael,

- You've been **randomly chosen** from the Vanderbilt University eLab Panel to participate in a brief study. This study should take about **15 to 20 minutes** to complete. You may complete this study at **any time of your choice during the next 5 days**. We ask that you **find a quiet time and location** to sign in to the study, and to try and minimize any outside distractions. If you complete the study, you will be entered into a drawing for a cash **prize of \$100**. To participate in the study, please proceed to the following URL:  
<http://elab.vanderbilt.edu/experiments/tsts-6/study1/>  
You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. Thanks for your participation in our research!

**Tom Novak**  
**Professor of Marketing and Co-Director, eLab**

# Research through the Internet

- Annual spending: 960 Million \$ in 2004
- In 2001: 8%; in 2004: 60% of survey studies were performed through the Internet
- WebSM Web Survey Methodology

# Research through the Internet: Advantages

- Large samples
- Low cost
- High speed of data transfer and analysis
- Flexibility in questionnaire handling and walkthrough
- Easy to send memo
- Quick, easy and cheap feedback

# Research through the Internet: Advantages (cont')

- No bias due to interaction with the interviewee
- Integration of various media
- Flexibility in questioning; adapting the questions to the population type
- Accessibility to remote places
- Anonymity; can ask sensitive questions
- 24/7

# Research through the Internet: Problems

- Partial coverage (only those who are accessible to the Internet)
- Is the sample representative?
- Can you be sure no one has answered to more than one questionnaire?
- Internal and external validity
- It all boils down to the reliability of the results, analysis, conclusions and forecast

# The Implication on Carrying Out Studies Through the Internet

<b><u>The Unique Trait of the Internet</u></b>	<b><u>The Sampling Process</u></b>	<b><u>The Research Instrument</u></b>
Multimedia capability	Approachable to diversified populations	Multimedia Questionnaire
Nonlinear walkthrough		Nonlinear questioning
Access to diversified communities	Richer sample	Adaptive to multicultural/ multilingual study
Interactive		Flexible to the respondent reaction
Anonymity	Approach large sample on sensitive issues	Relate to sensitive issues

# The Implication on Carrying Out Studies About the Internet

<b><u>The Unique Trait of the Internet</u></b>	<b><u>The Sampling Process</u></b>	<b><u>The Research Instrument</u></b>
Multimedia capability	Revised definition of the sampled unit (e.g., a whole process)	New measurements (e.g., virtual distance); analysis of multimedia variables
Nonlinear walkthrough		Nonlinear investigation
Access to diversified communities	Accessible to a diversity of websites	multilanguage; multiculture; multimedia
Interactive		New measurements to observations
Anonymity	Anonymous sample (an ethical problem?)	Non-intervention observation

# Some Concluding Remarks

In the area of **research through the Internet**, it seems that traditional research methods in Social Sciences have not become obsolete but rather have been upgraded by the introduction of the Internet as a vehicle to approach sampled population.

## Some Concluding Remarks (cont')

However, it seem that a new research area is now emerging – **research about the Internet**. This area, beside employing the traditional methods and upgrading them, is also developing new approaches. The most salient one is the **structured observation** which will likely substitute the traditional survey technique in many cases.

