

16.5.2: The nature and importance of marketing research

Informal and, by today's standards, crude attempts to analyze the market date back to the earliest days of the marketing revolution. Only in recent years, however, has the role of research as it relates to management been clearly recognized.

Reflecting this change in orientation, the following definition of marketing research is offered: marketing research is the scientific and controlled gathering of nonroutine marketing information undertaken to help management solve marketing problems. There is often hearty disagreement over the answer to the question of whether marketing research is a science. One's answer depends on the employed definition of "science". To be specific, a research activity should use the scientific method. In this method, hypotheses (tentative statements of relationships or of solutions to problems) are drawn from informal observations. These hypotheses are then tested. Ultimately, the hypothesis is accepted, rejected, or modified according to the results of the test. In a true science, verified hypotheses are turned into "laws". In marketing research, verified hypotheses become the generalizations upon which management develops its marketing programs. (To simplify our discussion, we will use "questions" as a synonym of "hypothesis".)

The mechanics of marketing research must be controlled so that the right facts are obtained in the answer to the correct problem. The control of fact-finding is the responsibility of the research director, who must correctly design the research and carefully supervise its execution to ensure that it goes according to plan. Maintaining control in marketing research is often difficult because of the distance that separates the researcher and the market and because the services of outsiders are often required to complete a research project.¹

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