

4.9: Advantages and challenges

Market researchers are increasingly turning to online tools in their research processes. The Internet allows for research at a far lower cost; it can also more easily cross geographic boundaries and can speed up the research process.

This is not to say there are not downsides. While the Internet makes it possible to reach a far larger group of people without the cost of facilitators, this does come with some challenges. For example, you cannot control the environments in which information is being gathered. For an online sample, it's important to focus on getting the correct number of people to make your study statistically viable. If your questions are not carefully drafted, confusing questions could lead to answers that are flawed or not relevant. Additionally, online incentives could lead to answers that are not truthful, meaning that the value of the data could be questionable. Certain target groups are not accessible via the Internet, and so it's important that you carefully consider who you are trying to reach.

The value of Internet research should by no means be discounted, but it is important to consider the nature of the study carefully, and interrogate the validity and legitimacy of the data as a valid representation. Data is meaningful only if it is representative, so be sure to establish goals and realistic expectations for your research.

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