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Market Research For Newspapers:
Some Salient Issues

By

Kumkum Ghose
Media and Market Research have one thing in common: both operate in what can be termed as the Information Market. Both are engaged in capturing, processing and providing information. What makes them significantly different from each other concerns the end-objective of their operations and the entity they serve. Media disseminate varied information for the general public, whereas market research generates focused information for a specific organisation. Media produce news, M.R. produces need-related guidelines.

The role played by M.R. is, thus, that of a hand-holder to specific organisations. To the extent that newspapers qualify as such organisations, M.R. is often called upon to play the same role with respect to them.

Since the job of M.R. is to produce need-related guidelines, one must look at the need areas of newspapers to understand how M.R. can be of service to them. Generally, the areas of information relevant for newspapers can be classified under two broad labels: those of topical interest and those of academic interest. The latter are usually investigated by a newspaper's in-house team of researchers. It is with respect to the former that professional marketing research is required by newspapers.

Areas of topical interest can be subdivided into several categories, depending on the rule of categorisation. Following would be one of the possible categorisations:

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The broad type of research that is needed in all of the above areas is known as Opinion Research. As the label suggests, it consists of collecting opinions from the members of a predefined target audience and analysing them either qualitatively or through quantitative statistical techniques. The former type of analysis brings out the relevant dimensions in the opinions being probed, while the latter establishes how widespread and how significant these are. The process, thus, constitutes a thorough investigation of attitudes and beliefs. It is performed through a structured and systematic process, using scientific techniques of psycho-sociological research.

The methods used for collecting information in these studies are varied, as listed below.

* Focus Group Discussion among 7 or 8 participants, monitored by a trained researcher, for exploring and extracting all possible strands of attitudes and beliefs.

* One-to-one indepth interviews guided in a loosely structured way.

* Telephone interviews through a structured questionnaire.

* Mail interviews through a structured questionnaire.

* Brief face-to-face street corner interviews through a structured questionnaire.

* Detailed face-to-face interviews through a structured questionnaire.
MODES OF DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative Modes

G.D One-to-One Indepth Interviews

Quantitative Modes

Face-to-Face Interviews
Distant Interviews

Short Street Corner Ones
Detailed Ones
By Mail
By Phone

DATA ANALYSED QUALITATIVELY

DATA ANALYSED THROUGH STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES & MODELS

SOME SITUATIONS REQUIRING M.R. FOR NEWSPAPERS:

* Assessment of public reaction to specific issues or events

* Assessment of the standing of a party or a leader

* Assessment of the stability of the political, economic or socio-cultural environment of the community

* Assessment of the success with which the newspaper has positioned itself in a desired way in public perception

* Assessment of the status enjoyed by the newspaper itself vis-a-vis its competitors

These are but a few examples of instances where M.R. can render a significant service to newspapers. In general, whenever a newspaper is faced with a need to investigate a phenomenon both intensively and extensively in a systematic way, it needs to use the specialised skills of professional M.R. The latter alone knows how to ask the right questions for eliciting reliable and relevant information, and how to process this information for generating the necessary guidelines.