Internet Usage Research: Comparing Household Expectations and Concerns

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the issues and concerns different types of households had with participating in Internet research and what steps a research company could take to diminish these concerns. The research focused on factors that were found in previous studies to impact willingness to participate in Internet research; privacy, confidentiality and data security, uses of the information collected, and general attitudes and trust of companies collecting such information. Interviews were conducted with all household members twelve years old and older present together, similar to a focus group. The sample selected included three groups based on their relationship with Nielsen: households that were currently participating in Internet (and television) research, households that had previously participated in television research and households who had not participated (or been recruited) to participate previously in any Nielsen research. Along with the difference in the relationship, groups were also sampled by demographics (race, age, household size and primary language including English and [1] Spanish dominant). Comparing the differences and similarities in attitudes and perceptions across these groups provided insight into what households expect of Nielsen, or other research companies, to do before they would be willing to agree to participate in Internet research.

The findings suggest that despite the relationship with Nielsen most household have similar attitudes and expectations of Nielsen and other research companies conducting Internet Usage Research. Similarities across all groups were found in lifestyle, understanding, comfort with varying levels of data collection, disclosure, data security as well as with incentives and motivations.

Key Words: Internet research, trust, expectations, participation

1. Background

As more and more people turn to the Internet for school, work and entertainment it is important to understand their Internet consumption patterns. But before we can measure these patterns we must be able to gain household participation. The purpose of this research was to gain insights into the issues and concerns households had with participation in Internet research and what steps a company could take to diminish these concerns and gain participation.

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[1]Spanish dominant in this study was defined as a person who was very comfortable speaking Spanish and either moderately or very uncomfortable speaking English. Because these were family interviews it could include households where the head of household was very or moderately comfortable in English if at least one adult household member was moderately or very uncomfortable speaking in English.

2. Methodology

Three panels comprised the Internet Usage Research. These panels included 48 individuals from 20 different households. The types of panels included in this study:

- Were currently participating in Internet (and television) research,
- Had previously participated in television research, or
- Had not previously participated or been recruited to participate in Nielsen research.

Along with the difference in the household relationship, groups were also sampled based on demographics (race, age, household size, head of household age, and primary language). Interviews were conducted with all household members twelve years of age or older present together, similar to a focus group. Households that were currently or had previously participated in a Nielsen research panel were interviewed in their home. Those households that had not previously participated in Nielsen research were interviewed at a focus group facility.

3. Summary of Findings

3.1 Disclosure
Participants expect the following to be provided to them both in writing and verbally in order to elicit their participation in online research:

- How and why the Internet research is collected,
- How long the Internet information is stored,
- How the Internet data is kept secure,
- How the software impacts computer performance,
- Action plan if Internet data is ever breached, and
- Confirmation of financial reimbursement if their Internet data is ever breached.

3.2 Confidentiality of TV versus Internet data
Participants expressed a higher degree of trust over their television research data than their Internet data because they share personally identifiable information (PII) online.

3.3 Level of Data Collected / Tracked
Households have specific levels of tracking they would and would not allow as it relates to Internet research.

- Nearly all participants were comfortable tracking their online videos and websites.
- Most participants were not comfortable tracking their online transaction data.

3.4 Trust and Reputation
Participants who had previous experience or knowledge of Nielsen said they trusted Nielsen based on their good reputation; while those unfamiliar with Nielsen wanted an endorsement from a company they perceived as experts.

3.5 Motivation and Incentives
Money motivates people to participate in Internet research.

- Gifts such as cash or checks would serve as incentive to participate and
- Influence did not motivate most households.

4. Conclusion

Overall most people said they would participate in Internet research though they expressed doubts and concerns about the nature of their participation. Participants' concerns were often rooted in the fear of someone accessing their personally identifiable information (PII) and being financially impacted as a result. The key to gaining participant agreement was in not collecting transaction data. Participants also noted that they need to understand how their data is collected, stored and secured. Despite a household's relationship with Nielsen most households had similar attitudes and expectations of Nielsen and other research companies conducting Internet research. Households noted that trust and reputation are key factors in gaining their participation in Internet research.

Supporting Quotes

- *[What if a company were to ask you to participate in research that tracks your Internet usage, what would your reaction be?] I'd say 'How much are you going to pay me.'*
- *I would agree, but I would also, again, like to know how secure this is...say, for instance the receptionist at Nielsen, would she be able to access that information easily...how secure is it really, that some hacker couldn't get in?*
- *[What could a company do to make you confident that your data could not be breached?] Documentation, paperwork, maybe even signing because typically when people put a paper behind it with some kind of signature makes you feel a bit more better to have a letter or to have somebody with the company...if you have any concerns, contact information.*
- *I would say national reputation is what let me have you guys [Nielsen] come in the door in the first time...*
- *The first question involved the televisions...you trust Nielsen, you know Nielsen, you know the name, you know what they do. Now this is new with the Internet, so this company is going to have to get like Nielsen to get totally trusted.*