THE ETHICS OF CONDUCTING E-MAIL SURVEYS

SANDEEP KRISHNAMURTHY
Associate Professor of E-Commerce and Marketing
Business Administration Program
University of Washington, Bothell
18115 Campus Way NE, Room UW1-233
Bothell, WA 98011-8246
http://faculty.washington.edu/sandeep
E-mail: sandeep@u.washington.edu

INTRODUCTION

E-mail is an integral part of all online survey research. For any survey research, there is a need to contact informants and e-mail is the most effective form of contact. Other methods of online contact (e.g. pop-ups, web site registration) are seen as ways of building a database- once an entry is made in a database, future online contact is almost entirely through e-mail.

Academic researchers have shown great enthusiasm about using e-mail because of its promise as an effective method of contact. A meta-analysis of academic studies conducted from 1986 to 2000, found the average response rate to be 39.77% (Sheehan, 2001), a number that is dramatically higher than the figure for postal mail surveys which rarely exceeds 25%[1]. Moreover, e-mail surveys are cheaper, responses are received rapidly and the data is collected in electronic form facilitating quicker analysis (Goree and Marsalek,III, 1995).

Many academic papers have compared e-mail surveys with other modes of respondent contact (Sheehan, 2001). Early studies reported both high (Anderson and Gansneder, 1995) and low (Kittleson, 1995) response rates. Clearly, audience characteristics were at play here. It is possible that the Kittleson (1995) may have attracted a sample that was less familiar with e-mail. That would be consistent with Ranchhod and Zhou (2001) who report that e-mail surveys yield better results when the target audience has high technology awareness and are extensive e-mail users. It is also the case that conducting surveys in a certain way leads to better results. Many researchers have pointed out that pre-notification and multiple follow-ups lead to better results. Kittleson (1997) found that follow-up memos led to a doubling in the response rate. In a meta-analysis, Sheehan (2001) concluded that pre-notification was perhaps the most useful tool in improving

[1] Using response rates as the metric to evaluate a mode of individual contact is problematic on many counts. An x% response rate does not tell us anything about the attitudes of (1-x)% of the audience. Moreover, a low response rate may only indicate the lack of a clear targeting approach- which may or may not be "bad". I mention this only because many published studies almost exclusively use this to evaluate effectiveness.

response rate. Moreover, Schafer and Dillman (1998) argue that e-mail surveys work very well when there is a multi-mode form of contact, i.e., where individuals are contacted in multiple ways (e.g. through e-mail, a reminder phone call and a reminder card). The bottom line is that academic researchers currently feel that, if done correctly with the right audience, e-mail surveys can lead to phenomenal results.

E-mail is a virtually costless communication mechanism for the sender. The marginal cost of contacting an additional person is nearly zero (Shiman, 1996). This creates an incentive to overload the consumers with messages. Survey researchers are tempted to pre-notify their participants and then send multiple reminders. As a result, the multiple instances of contact contribute to the transactional burden on the recipient.

Using e-mail in survey research is particularly troublesome when the researcher is contacting a stranger (i.e., prospect) for the very first time. Such solicitations to participate in surveys are Spam or unsolicited e-mail[2] (Sheehan and Hoy, 1999, Krishnamurthy, 2000). Spam is an unethical communication practice from the standpoint of consumers due to six reasons - privacy violation, volume, irrelevance, deceptiveness, message offensiveness and targeting vulnerable consumers[3] (Krishnamurthy, 2000). At the same time, Spam affects multiple stakeholders- e.g. Internet Service Providers bear significantly higher costs as a result of Spam. America Online, the leading Internet Service Provider (ISP) testified in court that up to 30% of the e-mail it processes is Spam (Alexander, 1998). In some weeks, this proportion can be as high as 50% of all messages (Patch and Smalley, 1998).

Thus, if everybody used unsolicited e-mail to contact respondents for survey research, several negative consequences result- consumers are over-burdened and researchers add

[2] There is some inconsistency in the definition of Spam as noted in Krishnamurthy(2000). Some researchers have defined Spam as unsolicited *commercial* E-mail. Similarly, some have argued that only unsolicited e-mail sent out in huge volumes should count. For the purposes of this paper, I am thinking of Spam as any unsolicited e-mail.

[3] All these characteristics need not apply to all Spam messages. For instance, academic surveys may not be particularly offensive- but may contribute to the transactional burden of the consumer due to their volume and irrelevance.

to the Spam problem described above. Formally speaking, unsolicited e-mail as a method of contact fails the deontological principles of universality and reversibility[4].

This is not a problem limited to survey research, of course. Commercial firms with huge consumer databases are struggling with finding effective ways to contact customers. E-mail is virtually the only online vehicle for customer contact for promotion and market research for these large companies. These corporations have suggested obtaining customer permission prior to contacting them (Krishnamurthy, 2001, Petty, 2000). Interestingly, academic researchers have not followed this approach to this point (Sheehan, 2001). The low volume of academic surveys in relation to promotional messages from commercial firms has helped them get away with it. Also, the market research conducted by companies has the implication of an ongoing relationship. Companies have increasingly moved from a one-time transaction perspective to a relational perspective (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). On the other hand, academic survey research tends more often to focus on one-time individual contact[5]. Therefore, due to these two factors (low volume and one-time contact), there has not been a big backlash to the Spamming of academic surveys. However, as the legal, ethical and cultural landscapes change, this comfort may not be afforded to academic researchers in the future. Therefore, it is no wonder that obtaining respondent permission prior to contact is currently being touted as an ethical form of contact (Yun and Trumbo, 2000).

In this paper, I carefully examine the implications of taking this approach. I start off by studying the different types of online market research. Next, I look at the impact of the Internet and the Web on market research. I then introduce the notion of respondent permission and investigate the application of permission to all forms of online market research. I then turn to the problems in applying permission to email survey research and end with the conclusion and final thoughts.

[4] Universality is the ethical principle that "every act should be based on principles that everyone could act on" and reversibility is the principle that "every act should be based on reasons that the actor would be willing to have all others use" (Churchill, 1996, pg. 65).

[5] Studies which involve a customer panel providing information over a predefined time period may be an exception, for example.

CLASSIFYING THE TYPES OF ONLINE MARKET RESEARCH

Even though the role of computers in survey research has been high for a long time (e.g. Computer-Assisted-Telephone-Interview or CATI), the Internet has opened up completely new avenues for market research. I classify online techniques on two dimensions- Qualitative/Quantitative and Requiring/Not requiring direct respondent contact (for research purposes). The resulting four quadrants are shown in Figure 1[6].

[Insert Figure 1 About Here.]

The Qualitative/Quantitative distinction is well known to academic researchers. Qualitative research involves getting rich and textured information about individuals. The focus is on getting deep insights and a rich understanding into what the informant thinks. Instead of placing the respondents into pre-determined categories, the idea is to understand the categories respondents use to think of a problem. On the other hand, the focus of quantitative research is to quantify the magnitude of effects and draw inferences about the statistical validity of the inferences. Survey research is mostly quantitative. Of course, one could have open-ended questions in surveys. But, the over-riding focus of surveys tends to be generalizability and statistical inference. Surveys are typically used when the nature of the problem is already understood whereas qualitative research is frequently used to identify the structural characteristics of the problem.

Online research can either involve direct respondent contact or not. Survey research is an example where there is direct contact. On the other hand, indirect methods involving tracking the imprint of individuals as they browse and shop over the Internet. These imprints (or click-streams[7]) are stored in logs that can either be studied qualitatively or

[6] I discuss the role of permission for each quadrant at the end of this section.

[7] A clickstream is an imprint of a visitor's path on a web site. It includes information such as time spent on a page and the number of pages visited in a session. Behavioral data could include information about actions such as clicking on a link. Demographic data is the usual information about individual characteristics.

mined for relationships among different actions[8]. The respondent does not have to be bothered again. Rather, the behavior of the respondent is used to draw inferences about how he or she thinks. On the other hand, it is possible to contact respondents directly to ask them what they think about a topic of interest.

Quadrant I represents research that is qualitative and requires direct contact. Examples of this type of research are online focus groups or in-depth interviews. In this case, the interviewer can ask a single respondent or a group of respondents about their opinions of a product/service/experience. The data collected is usually in the form of a transcript.

Quadrant II is for research that is qualitative, but does not require contacting the respondent directly. An example of this is search-log analysis. Whenever respondents visit a web site and search for something, it is recorded in a search log. This log can be studied to identify patterns of behavior. For instance, if visitors are persistently and unsuccessfully searching for something at a site, that may be a clue that the content for the site needs to be revisited.

Quadrant III stands for research that is quantitative and requires respondent contact. A prime exemplar of this category is survey research. Individuals are contacted either by e-mail or a pop-up ad and asked to participate in an online survey. The survey is typically available on a web site. The data is captured in a text file that can be directly analyzed using a statistical package.

Quadrant IV is for research that is quantitative and requires no respondent contact. Clickstream analysis and profiling are examples of this. As the respondent passes through the web site, data is recorded about his or her behavior. This can be analyzed

[8] Collecting and analyzing consumer clickstreams can create many ethical concerns. Perhaps, the main concern is if consumers are aware that this process is going on. To some, this may sound like somebody is watching them as they shop or browse and create a sense of paranoia. The FTC principles of Notice, Choice, Access, Security and Redress might apply in this context as well.

using data mining models to identify relationships among variables. E.g. Does greater time spent on a sub-page increase the likelihood of buying a product?

The role of respondent permission is different in each quadrant. Whenever there is direct contact, only individuals who have provided permission may be contacted. Hence, this holds for survey research and online focus groups. In many cases, it may be possible to contact a customer a few times to achieve efficiency based on the terms of the original permission. When there is no direct contact, the issue of permission continues to be important. However, here, the permission may be obtained prior to conducting the research (e.g. when a user signs to be on a panel or registers for a web site). The ethical issue of maintaining the privacy of respondent records is an important one and is discussed later.

IMPACT OF INTERNET ON SURVEY RESEARCH

There are four steps in the market research process- data collection, data storage and sharing, data analysis and result reporting/action. The Internet has affected all four steps significantly and has generated new ethical dilemmas. Let us look at its impact on each step.

Data Collection

The Internet has impacted the first step, data collection, in five ways.

1. Multiple modes of information gathering.

Organizations now have detailed databases about their respondents. Each respondent has a profile that includes clickstream, behavioral and demographic data. By linking these data elements with survey data, organizations are able to gain a deep understanding into the respondent. This leads to an ability to target the respondent better.

2. Efficient, quick and low-cost respondent contact for surveys

All companies survey their respondents from time to time to gather information about perceptions, attitudes etc. In general, this is a cumbersome and drawn-out process. Respondents may be sent surveys by mail or contacted at their local mall by interviewers. The answers then need to be manually entered into a computer. This is usually the step that takes the longest time and is prone to human error. In general, it is not uncommon for a company to have to wait for 3-6 months to get the results from a survey. Using e-mail and pop-up ads, marketers are now able to survey respondents quickly and obtain the data in electronic form in a fraction of that time. This approach also allows for low cost per contact.

3. Large-scale information gathering

Partly driven by the arguments in point 2 (i.e., efficient, quick and low-cost), using online market research it is possible to gather information from consumers on an unprecedented scale. For example, every twenty-four hours America Online (AOL) subscribers are invited to participate in a short survey. The company was able to collect about two million responses from consumers over a period of eighteen months and use this for detailed evaluations of its respondent support.

4. Contacting respondent groups that were previously hard to access

Some respondent groups have traditionally been hard to access. For example, companies pay a lot of money to survey working professionals who are strapped for time and thus, may not be willing to participate in a mail or telephone survey. Similarly, respondents in remote locations and those who are place-bound are usually very hard to survey. Now, these types of groups can be contacted easily using Web technology easily leading to more representative samples.

Data Storage and Sharing

The Internet has enabled complete digitization of the market research process. Rather than worrying about paper surveys, researchers can store all research data digitally on computers. As a result, much more data can be stored effectively for a longer period of time. This also allows for more efficient sharing of information. Using the Internet for

market research also changes the sheer scale of information collected. It is possible to collect millions of records about individual behavior on a daily basis.

Data Analysis

Generally, the data is subjected to statistical analysis to make proper inferences. The data may be analyzed using statistical packages such as SAS and SPSS. Typically, the analysis starts with the descriptive statistics (e.g. mean, standard deviation) and then progresses to more advanced modeling techniques such as regression and clustering. The nature of data analysis changes substantially when the Internet is used to conduct market research. Specifically, the changes are:

1. Data mining

Traditional statistical techniques were built for the days when there was a scarcity of data. Now, there is an abundance of data. In many cases, it is no longer necessary to sample a subset of the population- a census can be done, i.e., data on the entire respondent base of an organization can be made available. New variables are being measured for the first time. Data mining is the new label for a set of techniques that companies can use to work on large datasets. It incorporates learnings from statistics, pattern recognition, machine learning and database technology. It can be defined as the process of inductive computer analysis of large datasets aimed at finding unsuspecting relationships among variables. Since it is inductive, the researcher does not start the process with a set of hypotheses. Rather, he or she starts with a large dataset and a set of objectives (e.g. to maximize sales).

2. Analysis of data in real-time.

Generally, there is a gap between measurement and the availability of data. With the Internet, researchers can access information in real time. This creates the opportunity for new types of academic research.

3. Individual-level data

It is possible now to build a complicated database that includes disparate data elements. This changes the nature of academic research where typically not much is known about the respondent prior to contact. Having deep knowledge about our informants prior to contact allows us to tailor our questions appropriately leading to better responses.

Reporting/Action

With the Internet, the gap between information gathering and action has diminished. The Internet now allows for real-time decision making using fresh market research. This is best illustrated using an example from the corporate world.

Consider Internet advertising. Systems now capture fresh respondent response information in real-time. As a result, it is possible for a company to simultaneously release (say) 20 banner ads with creatives which vary on dimensions such as colors, fonts etc. on a subset of the market. Then, the response to each ad can be monitored in real-time. Based on the click-through and then, the conversion rate, managers can quickly decide to discard the ones that lead to poor results and can focus all resources on the ones that have performed well.

This sort of quick-strike capability is provided by the melding of fresh market information with quick marketing action. As a result, marketing objectives are met more effectively in shorter time and with lower cost. In short, with the advent of the Internet, market research is not an activity that is conducted periodically with tenuous links to action. Rather, its value lies in providing fresh market data to managers who can act quickly to maximize the return on marketing investments.

The implications of this shrinking distance between information gathering and action on market research are yet to be fully explored.

INTRODUCTION TO PERMISSION

Even though early academic papers involved Spamming a group of individuals (e.g. Sheehan, 2000), researchers are now slowly, but surely, turning to e-mail lists that have been collected with the permission of the individual (e.g. Yun and Trumbo, 2000). As

Jackson and DeCormier (1999) demonstrated, the use of targeted lists using respondent permission leads to dramatically better results. By targeting people who had indicated an interest in financial matters, they reported a response rate as high as 85%.

Many survey research organizations have developed a code of ethics that includes a reference to permission. For instance, the code of ethics for Internet research of Council of American Survey Research Organizations enclosed in the Appendix says in part (4) of the code- "When receiving email lists from clients or list owners, research organizations are required to have the client or list provider verify that individuals listed have a reasonable expectation that they will receive email contact".

Market research is an asymmetric activity--- the agency conducting the market research activity needs information from an individual and hence, initiates the contact. One way to overcome this intrinsic asymmetry is to compensate survey participants. Financial compensation turns market research into a transaction and makes it less asymmetric. Consumers provide information about themselves in exchange for financial gain. However, it may not be a sufficient motivator for people who do not care about the topic of the survey. Permission marketing proposes grouping individuals by their interests and then targeting them based on these interests. The idea is that consumers may be more receptive to surveys in areas that interest them.

The key difference between Spam and permission marketing is the extent of targeting. As shown in Figure 2a, Spam targets indiscriminately. Large numbers of people are targeted and therefore, a great proportion of recipients find the message to be irrelevant. On the other hand, as shown in Figure 2b, permission-based targeting is focused only on those who have expressed an interest in a certain topic or activity. As a result, it is likely to receive a better response.

Clearly, from a statistical point of view, Spam may represent an ideal. By targeting the population, Spam can be thought of as maximizing the chances of attracting a random

sample[9]. At the other extreme, permission marketing can be thought of as introducing a self-selecting respondent bias making it less attractive statistically. This is where the statistical and ethical perspectives collide. While the statistician may cheer for Spam, the ethicist is much more comfortable with permission-based targeting.

How to obtain respondent permission is still a matter of some ethical controversy. Three methods have emerged- opt-out, opt-in and double opt-in. Opt-out refers to the case when the agent sends an unsolicited e-mail and then provides individuals an option of not receiving future messages[10]. Each message includes a statement to the effect of- "If you do not wish to receive such e-mails in the future, just click here.". Typically, the consumer has provided personal information to the sender for some other purpose- e.g. purchasing a product, registering for a newsletter. Opt-in requires the consumer to explicitly tell the corporation that it has the permission to send messages to him or her. For instance, when an individual may shop at an online retailer she could provide it with permission to send her promotional messages from time to time. But, opt-in leaves out one problem. Consumer A can sign up a friend, consumer B, for a service that B has no interest in. All of a sudden, B starts to receive e-mails for products that she does not care for. In order to avoid this loophole, double opt-in calls for a stricter standard in building e-mail lists. It asks for researchers to send a confirmation e-mail to all individuals who have opted in. When an individual confirms, the loop is complete and the sender can be doubly sure that the right person is on the list.

Researchers who use e-mail lists must pay careful attention to how those lists were put together. I propose that the following elements must be part of any well-designed permission-based program[11]:

1. Explicit Permission Seeking Process

[9] The author is grateful to Maxmillan Forte for this point.

[10] There are other problems with opt-out. In many cases, Spammers masquerading as legitimate senders introduce false opt-out links. Clicking on a opt-out link then merely alerts these Spammers to the legitimacy of the e-mail address leading to further messages in the future.

[11] A previous version of this appeared in Krishnamurthy(2000).

2. Verification Process
3. Recognition of Relationship
4. Access to Personal Information
5. Communication Control
6. Frictionless Exit Ability

First, the permission must be obtained in an explicit rather than an implicit manner. This means that the sender must first assume that it does not have the respondent's permission to send out promotional e-mails. Then, the respondent must be presented with a real choice of granting permission to the firm or not. The respondent's right to be left alone must be honored. The permission-seeking process must be clear and devoid of deceptive tactics.

Second, the firm must verify the identity of each consumer. This is necessary to disallow consumers deceptively signing on others without their knowledge. For example, consumers may signup their friends and associates indiscriminately thus placing undue transactional burden on them. Permission-based services that offer this are referred to as "double opt-in" – e.g. yesmail.com. This is easily accomplished by sending an e-mail immediately after an individual registers.

Third, the consumer must understand that he or she is entering an on-going two-way relationship that is mutually beneficial. The consumer must understand that he or she is a willing partner of equal stature who stands to benefit from this alliance. A well-designed permission-based campaign will create well-defined expectations in the mind of the consumer about the nature and volume of messages. Moreover, the consumer's perception of the level of permission will be aligned with the sender's perception of the permission level.

Fourth, the consumer must know exactly what the sender knows about him or her. Moreover, the consumer must be able to modify this information suitably at any point in time. This is the "access" part of the FTC's fair information practice list(Culnan 2000). The argument is that such continuous access to one's personal information would be empowering and reassuring to the consumer. Moreover, this is beneficial to the firm

because consumers who update their profiles more often are more likely to receive relevant ads and hence, have higher response rates.

Fifth, the consumer must be able to control the nature and volume of messages being sent to him or her. The true promise of permission marketing is that consumers can control the flow of promotional messages to them. They can dictate the types of categories they will see ads for by filling out forms on interests and product preferences. This is being done routinely by many firms today. Some firms also allow consumers to control the volume of e-mail in any category. This sort of control over promotional communication underscores the true promise of permission marketing.

Finally, the consumer must be able to effortlessly exit from a permission marketing relationship at any point. Not letting consumers exit at any point equates to assuming one has the permission to market to them when, in fact, one does not. Moreover, frustrated consumers will no longer attend to the messages leading to low response rates.

THE APPLICATION OF PERMISSION TO ALL MARKET RESEARCH

Permission is typically discussed in the context of e-mail based survey research. However, as discussed in Section 2, there are at least four types of Internet research. The issue then becomes if permission can be an over-arching test of ethical respondent contact. Questions such as these come up in this context: Should respondent permission be a pre-requisite for click-stream or search log analysis? Should e-mail-based respondent contact be held to a higher standard or should pop-ups (for example) also require prior respondent consent?

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) identified five fair information practices in an 1998 report that are now widely accepted. These principles are-

1. Notice: Data collectors must disclose their information practices before collecting personal information from consumers.

2. Choice: Consumers must be given options with respect to whether and how personal information collected from them may be used for purposes beyond which they were collected.

3. Access: Consumers must be able to view and contest the accuracy and completeness of data collected about them.

4. Security: Data collectors must take reasonable steps to assure that the information collected from consumers is accurate and secure from unauthorized use.

5. Redress: Consumers must have a way to complain if these practices are not being followed.

Notice and Choice taken together come close to the permission standard--- but fall short of it. However, the consistent application of these principles is likely to lead to more ethical practice. Annoyance (e.g. pop-up ads), in and of itself, is not sufficient to label something as unethical. Rather, the violation of one or more of these principles is a necessary condition for the judgment of ethical practice.

OBSTACLES AND ISSUES WITH USE OF PERMISSION IN SURVEY RESEARCH

Issues

Low Volume

Spam is unsolicited e-mail. Large commercial Spammers send out messages in huge volumes. However, high volume is not a requirement for labeling a message as Spam. Unsolicited e-mail messages are unethical mainly because the consumer does not have an understanding of the total number of messages sent out. From the individual's perspective, an unsolicited message is an unsolicited message. Similarly, a low volume of messages does not justify the use of opt-out as a strategy for respondent contact.

Source characteristics

Some thinkers have argued that the main problem with Spam is the nature of the message. Consider, for example, the result of a content analysis of about 100,000 messages by the Spam Recyling Center shown in Table 1. The categories are all unsavory and are likely to irritate and offend.

[Insert Table 1 About Here.]

The argument, therefore, is that it is fine if academics and non-profit organizations send Spam- but not if unsavory marketers do so. This is not an ethical argument. Once again, taking the recipient's perspective, an unknown sender is just that. It is possible to spoof the names of senders (i.e., act as if the sender is someone that he/she is not)- this is considered an unethical practice by all (e.g. See the code of ethics in the Appendix). Due to this, unless a recipient instantly recognizes the sender, it is unlikely that an e-mail from an .edu address will be treated more favorably.

Length of Survey

Many researchers have pointed out that a long survey is likely to add to the transactional burden of the recipient making it harder to process. Some studies have found that a shorter survey is likely to lead to a higher response rate. From a consumer perspective, it is not easy to prejudge the length of an electronic survey- especially if multiple screens are used in the delivery of the survey. Hence, it is hard to conclude that the length of the survey contributes to the transactional burden.

Obstacles

There are several obstacles to the implementation of permission while conducting survey research. Some of these obstacles are due to the structure of academic institutions and how academic research is conducted and published. Others have to do with resource constraints.

Self-selection of respondents

Perhaps the most serious problem with using permission in survey research is that there could be serious self-selection problems. Consider the case of a survey trying to assess interest in a new financial software. Targeting respondents who have indicated an interest in financial matters may mean focusing on those who already know the basics of financial management. This may not provide an accurate account of perceptions towards the software in question.

In other words, permission may lead to a sample that skews towards those with a greater level of awareness and knowledge about a topic. This is not always what the researcher is looking for and consequently, it may create problems in generalizations.

Of course, there is the usual self-selection problem of respondents who are "career" survey participants. In other words, respondents who want to participate in surveys may not be the ones that researchers want to reach.

Resources to obtain and maintain permission

Academic researchers do not have the resources to obtain and maintain permission. As a result, they will be tempted to send Spam. Unless there is a community-wide effort to create disincentives for this, researchers will not stop. For instance, journals must start requiring that the respondents provided permission before accepting the results of survey-based papers. Code of Ethics must incorporate language about permission-based respondent contact. One of the problems is that the organizational structure of academic research is inefficient. Recruiting a sample for each study by a lone researcher leads to an inefficient process. A cooperative effort to build a large sample that could than be shared among researchers could be more resource-efficient. Already, the Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences(TESS) project at http://www.experimentcentral.org has been set up along these lines. More such projects need to be initiated.

Permission and Privacy

A permission is not tradable--- not even if a company has gone bankrupt. Academic researchers, especially, must be careful about what is being told to respondents when they fill out surveys. If the respondents are aware that the raw data will be shared with other researchers, then it is legitimate to do so.

CONCLUSION

The prospect of using e-mail in survey research can be very exciting to academic researchers. However, it raises many ethical concerns. While many people have started to say that obtaining consumer permission is important, there is no clarity on how to obtain and maintain permission. Some academic researchers might argue that due to the low volume and infrequent nature of their surveys and the general positive perception of academia, their e-mail surveys do not add to the Spam problem. However, this is problematic from an ethical perspective since it changes the definition of what Spam is from any unsolicited e-mail to a subset of these e-mails which have certain predefined characteristics. There are ways to implement permission-based respondent contact if the academic community wants to. The only negative to keep in mind will be the statistical problem of self-selection and the "loss of complete randomness" to some degree. Regardless, the future legal landscape may force academic researcher to adopt permission as the standard.

If the academic community buys into respondent permission as the appropriate approach to contacting consumers, it must put its money where its mouth is. Journals must ask researchers to use permission when compiling databases and scrutinize for this in the review process. For starters, there needs to be a serious conversation about this problem in the community and the hope is that this paper is a solid start in that direction.

Researchers can start implementing a permission-based approach in many ways. First, researchers can adopt a multi-mode approach to individual contact. Then, permission can be gathered through an offline approach before online contact. Second, frequently researchers have direct access to the audience- the infamous student subject pool comes

to mind. In this case, obtaining permission for online contact may be relatively straightforward and may require a simple announcement in class. Third, as academic researchers, we must seriously think of approaching e-mail list brokers and asking them to donate lists for academic use. The lists can be updated every year to avoid repetition and over-exposure. Fourth, academic researchers must rethink their approach of recruiting individuals from scratch for each study. Reusing existing mail lists is likely to lead to a more efficient approach. Finally, sharing of e-mail lists can be considered on a limited basis.

The number of e-mail accounts per person has exploded in recent times due to free e-mail services. The number of messages sent out is increasing at a rapid pace. Over time, the scarce resource will be the attention of the consumer and using respondent permission gives us a fighting chance of getting high-quality data from individuals.

APPENDIX-

Internet Research Ethics from the Council of American Survey Research Organizations

(Source: http://www.casro.org/codeofstandards.cfm, This is an excerpt.)

a. The unique characteristics of Internet research require specific notice that the principle of respondent privacy applies to this new technology and data collection methodology. The general principle of this section of the Code is that survey research organizations will not use unsolicited emails to recruit respondents for surveys.

(1) Research organizations are required to verify that individuals contacted for research by email have a reasonable expectation that they will receive email contact for research. Such agreement can be assumed when ALL of the following conditions exist.

a. A substantive pre-existing relationship exists between the individuals contacted and the research organization, the client or the list owners contracting the research (the latter being so identified);

b. Individuals have a reasonable expectation, based on the pre-existing relationship, that they may be contacted for research;

c. Individuals are offered the choice to be removed from future email contact in each invitation; and,

d. The invitation list excludes all individuals who have previously taken the appropriate and timely steps to request the list owner to remove them.

(2) Research organizations are prohibited from using any subterfuge in obtaining email addresses of potential respondents, such as collecting email addresses from public domains, using technologies or techniques to collect email addresses without individuals' awareness, and collecting email addresses under the guise of some other activity.

(3) Research organizations are prohibited from using false or misleading return email addresses when recruiting respondents over the Internet.

(4) When receiving email lists from clients or list owners, research organizations are required to have the client or list provider verify that individuals listed have a reasonable expectation that they will receive email contact, as defined, in (1) above.

Table 1
Content Analysis of Spam Messages

Categories	No. of Messages	% of Total
Pornography	29884	30.2
Money Making/Get Rich/Work from Home	29365	29.6
Other Direct Product or Service/Misc	23326	23.5
Become a Spammer	4200	4.2
Gambling/Sweepstakes	3279	3.3
Health/Cures/Weight Loss (including Viagra)	9804	9.9
Totals	**99858**	**100.7**

Figure 1
Types of Online Market Research

	Respondent contact	*No respondent contact*
Qualitative	Cell I Online Focus Groups In-depth Interviews Lab Studies	Cell II Search log analysis
Quantitative	Cell III Surveys -E-mail -Pop-ups Lab Studies	Cell IV Click-stream analysis Profiling

Figure 2a
Spam targets indiscriminately

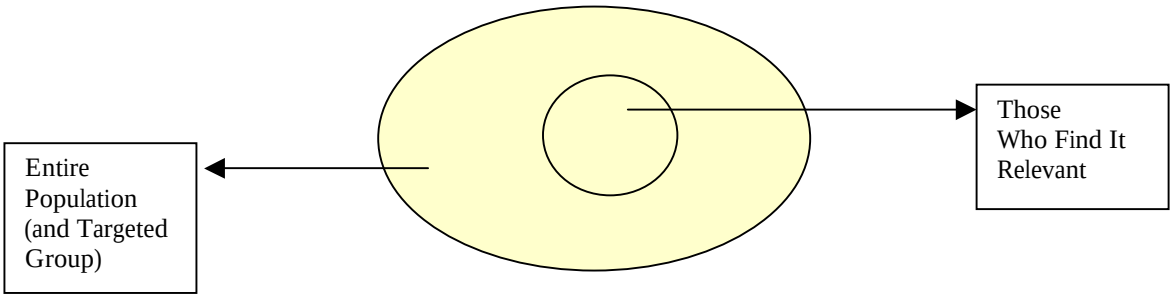
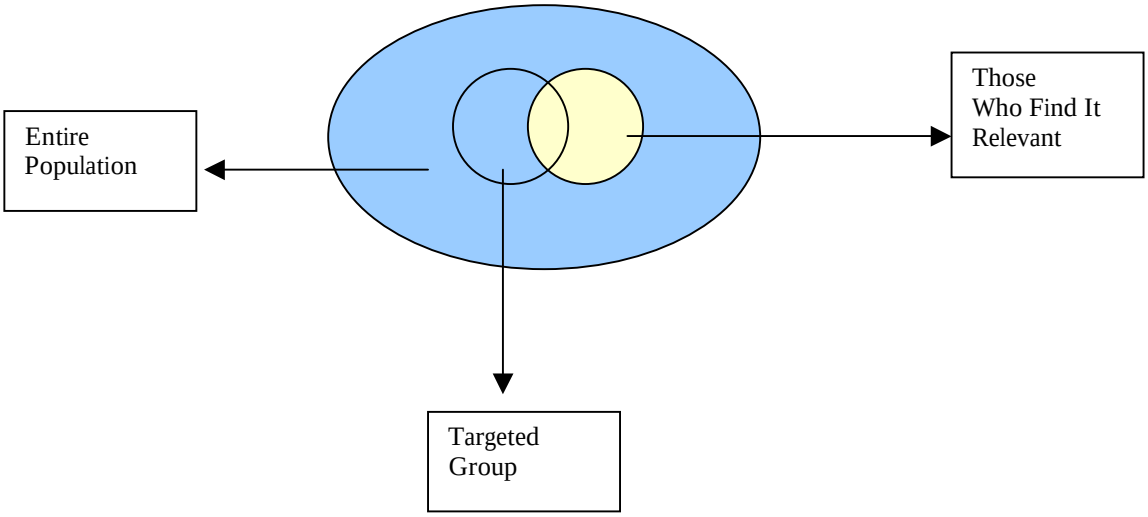


Figure 2b
Permission Marketing Leads to Targeting



REFERENCES

Alexander, S.(1998), "A Spam hating man with a Spam stamping plan", *Computerworld*, 32(25), 69-70.

Anderson, Susan E and Bruce M.Gansneder(1995), "Using Electronic Mail Surveys And Computer Monitored Data For Studying Computer Mediated Communication Systems", *Social Science Computer Review*, 13(1), 33-46.

Churchill, Gilbert(1988), *Marketing Research*, The Dryden Press.

Goree, Cathryn T. and John F. Marszalek, III(1995), "Electronic Surveys: Ethical Issues for Researchers", *College Student Affairs Journal*, 15(1), 75-79.

Jackson, Anita and Ray DeCormier(1999), "E-Mail Survey Response Rates: Targeting Increases Response", *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 17(3), 135-139.

Kittleson, Mark J(1995), "An Assessment Of The Response Rate Via The Postal Service And E- Mail", *Health Values: The Journal of Health Behavior, Education and Promotion*, 19(2), 27-39.

Kittleson, Mark J(1997), "Determining Effective Follow Up Of E-Mail Surveys", *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 21(3), 193-196.

Krishnamurthy, Sandeep (2000), "Spam Revisited", *Quarterly Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 1(4), 305- 321.

Krishnamurthy, Sandeep (2001), "A Comprehensive Analysis of Permission Marketing", *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 6(2), http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue2/krishnamurthy.html .

Patch, K. & Smalley, E.(1998), E mail overload, *Network World*, 15(43), 1-46.

Petty, Ross D. (2000), Marketing without consent: consumer choice and costs, privacy and public policy, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 19(1), forthcoming.

Ranchhod, Ashok and Fan Zhou(2001), "Comparing Respondents Of E-Mail And Mail Surveys: Understanding The Implications Of Technology", *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 19(4), 254-262.

Schaefer, David R and Don A. Dillman(1998), "Development Of A Standard E Mail Methodology: Results Of An Experiment", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62(3), 378-397.

Sheehan, Kim, & Hoy, M. G. (1999), “Using e mail to survey internet users in the United States: Methodology and assessment”, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 4 (3), http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue3/sheehan.html.

Sheehan, Kim(2001), “E-mail Survey Response Rates: A Review”, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 6(2), January, http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue2/sheehan.html.

Sheth, Jagdish.N. and Parvatiyar, Atul. (1995), "Relationship Marketing in Consumer Marketing: Antecedents and Consequences", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 23, 255-271.

Yun, Gi Woon and Craig Trumbo(2000), " Comparative Response to a Survey Executed by Post, E-mail, & Web Form", *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 6(1), September, http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue1/yun.html.