

Human Data Samples in Business Research: Company-Based vs. Online Panel Sources

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The world of business is an everchanging sector that continually evolves to attract more customers, ensure their satisfaction and retention. Business professionals must be ready to critically weigh their options when choosing data collection techniques and sources. As Saunders et al. (2019) support, the credibility, relevance, and generalizability heavily depend on the choice of techniques and data sources. Business administration in its specialty applies empirical data to study the day-to-day challenges while integrating scholarly propositions to enhance the understanding of business operations. The in-depth understanding of business management utilizes an analysis of valid and reliable human data to help improve marketing strategies, human behavior at the workplace, leadership, and financial management. Other than academic laboratories, human data can be sourced from company-based sampling or online panel providers like the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and Prolific, which offer broad-based generalizability and validity.

Saunders et al. (2019) describe company-based data samples as the first-hand data that obtained from stakeholders, employees, or customers from an organization for analysis. Conversely, online panel providers, obtain data on online platforms from respondents who are enlisted as participants in a given online research. Each source, however, has its own advantages and disadvantages, including reliability, generalizability, validity, access, and cost. This paper discusses the comparative advantages and disadvantages of online-based and company-based sampling strategies and their impacts on the quality and outcomes of research. The key domains discussed include factors like access, cost, generalizability of outcomes, ethical considerations, and quality of data accessed. Two research questions including; *How does leadership style impact employee motivation in various industries?* and *What factors impact consumer trust in*

online marketing campaigns? are also explored on how they would benefit from the different sampling strategies following the (dis)advantages outlined. The choice of a given data sampling source majorly depends on the focus of the research, its aim and objectives, ethical considerations, and availability of resources.

Theoretical and Methodological Context

Empirical research in business administration mainly focuses on the systematic gathering and analysis of data to come up with marketable and broadly relevant findings. The choice of data sources in this context is critical to ensuring external and internal validity based on their relevance and quality (Saunders et al., 2019). To effectively gather and analyze the data, it is critical to choose a sample that adequately represents the target population. The essential methodological considerations include the internal validity which involves control of confounding variables, external validity which involves the scope of applicability of the findings beyond the research context, ecological validity which is the real-life generalizability, cost-efficiency, and sampling bias (Polas, 2025). Whereas internal validity answers to whether the research study satisfactorily evaluates causal relationships, external validity focuses on the applicability of the research findings in the practical aspect (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Successful business research usually employs practical relevance as well as a methodological precision. Researchers must always align their data sources with their research goals to obtain targeted results (Saunders et al., 2019). For instance, when conducting research on employee behavior, the researcher should focus on the original workplace contexts to gather realistic data. This is because human samples gathered from companies provide in-depth background data, regardless of the ethical concerns. On the other hand, studying consumer behavior will necessitate conducting research from diverse and broad demographics available on

online panels. This is because online panels provide scalable and cost-effective data, regardless of the lack of construct and ecological validity. Business researchers must always be keen on data collection techniques, ethical considerations, including confidentiality and informed consent, and response quality to achieve quality results (University of Connecticut, 2023).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Data from Companies

Collecting data from companies requires working directly with various organizations to involve their staff, management team, stakeholders, or customers as the research participants. Company-based data sampling mainly employ interviews, surveys, access to structural datasets, focus groups or observational studies as methods of data collection. Working directly with the organizations has many benefits in the research goals and outcomes.

One of the main advantages of engaging company-specific samples in research is that the approach promotes ecological validity as it enables the researcher to obtain the practical attitudes and behaviors as they occur in the operational settings (Neelankavil, 2015). As Sharma (2024) confirms, leadership styles, organizational cultures, operational challenges, employee motivation, and team dynamics are best observable in their natural settings rather than simulated contexts. For instance, Sharma (2024)'s study reveals how leadership varyingly influences employee motivation along different industries and social structures, which are information that would not be easily gathered outside the organizational environment or hypothetical survey responses.

Collecting data directly from within companies enables researchers to access the high-profile contextually-relevant data, which can employ methodologies, such as triangulation with performance data (Neelankavil, 2015). This human data sampling approach involves variables like organizational tenure, departmental culture, and job satisfaction which widens the scope of

outcomes and construct validity. The results can be used to improve employee motivation, operational workflows, and organizational culture in order to minimize turnover and improve productivity and employee retention.

The use of data from company samples also provide specificity where researchers can focus on specific roles, organizational types, or departments, which promotes refined analyses with highly detailed data. For instance, using company-based sampling enables researchers to access internal communications, longitudinal operational records, or HR information that enhance precise analyses of performance. Bryman and Bell (2015) reveal that accessing such detailed information not only enhances theory development, but also facilitates an in-depth understanding of causal determinants that are critical during executive decision-making. It is a critical approach for testing hypothesis that depends on specific target populations, that would, otherwise be challenging to obtain if applied in generalized online samples.

Finally, company-based research makes it easier to conduct longitudinal studies, which may be challenging in online panel sampling. In longitudinal studies, researchers can gather data within specific time durations to assess factors, such as the cause effect relationships by analyzing the impact of a leadership style or organizational cultural change in a given duration of time (Yin, 2018). Additionally, company-based data sampling provides avenues for testing the efficiency of change innovations aimed at improving organizational output by monitoring changes over time. In this context, the researchers may need to identify organizations with similar development interests for employee or overall organizational development.

Despite posing all the advantages, the use of human data from companies also come with several limitations. For instance, accessibility is a major barrier for gathering human data within the company settings. Gaining access into organizations usually involves lengthy processes to

maneuver bureaucratic processes, align research objectives with the organization's goals, and obtain informed consent from stakeholders. Most organizations will likely deny the opportunity to study their staff or internal operational workflows due to matters of confidentiality, reputation, or risks of workplace disruption. In most cases, accessing the necessary information may necessitate ethical assurances, time-consuming bureaucratic procedures, and thorough negotiations to reach an agreement (Neelankavil, 2015).

Secondly, there is a higher concern for response bias when collecting human data at the company setting. With the awareness of ongoing surveillance, employees may modify their responses to assume the perceived standards due to fear of facing disciplinary measures regardless of the assurances of anonymity (Neelankavil, 2015). As a result, it may not be easy to gather accurate data. Additionally, data collected from one or a few organizations may not fully represent other demographics. This is due to the possibility of participants only coming from highly performing companies that may not be hindered by the fear of poor performance. The outcome will likely produce skewed results that may not reflect the actual performance of other companies, thus limiting generalizability.

Most company samples also usually lack diversity within their employees. Collecting human data from one company or a group of similar companies may not adequately represent the overall cultural or industry contexts, which minimizes their applicability (Neelankavil, 2015). Additionally, the ethical issues on power dynamics and coercion may occur if participation is mandated by organizational management, which violates the principle of autonomy and voluntary and informed consent (University of Connecticut, 2023).

Finally, company-based research is expensive and time-consuming. This is because the researcher has to travel to gather data personally and provide incentives for participants. The

overall cost and duration of obtaining access, participating in field work, and collaborating with human resource departments can also be highly constraining. Furthermore, handling private employee or customer information requires a strict compliance with HIPAA in the United States or GDPR in Europe data protection regulations. Nonadherence to the regulations may result in legal and ethical repercussions to the researchers, which might also end up being very costly (University of Connecticut, 2023).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Data from Online Panels

Online panels involve diverse groups of participants who engage in research studies through digital platforms like MTurk, Qualtrics, and Prolific. The online panels provide an alternative approach to sampling human data by availing diverse groups of participants easily and affordably to researchers. The online platforms often recruit research participants, who, in most cases have to be compensated with incentives after completing specific survey tasks. These online panels have a number of advantages that researchers can consider.

The first advantage offered by the online panels is efficiency with speed, cost-effectiveness, and scalability, which enables researchers to collect data from numerous participants within a short duration of time. Online panels have an advantage over the company-based sampling methods, especially in exploratory research where randomization and timing are key, such as in pilot studies (Wright, 2017). For example, online panels make it easy to recruit and survey large-scale samples within a short duration of time, which reduces resource misuse while maximizing diversity.

The samples collected from online panels are usually more flexible and diverse demographically compared to company-based samples when considering socio-economic

backgrounds, age, geographical location, ethnicity or other psychographic traits (Greenacre, 2016). While the company-based surveys are constricted to specific companies where the research is carried out, online panels are open, and could recruit diverse participants. Researchers could also specify the exact details of participant profile they would like to ensure respondents meet a certain criterion required for the research. The diversity aspect enhances its generalizability in wider scopes of research targets.

Online panels also provide researchers with a controlled study setting (Wright, 2017). The platforms are created with a focus on research, and can be manipulated to meet the needs of researchers with the data. Advanced features as artificial intelligences are also available within the platforms to enhance the study settings. The ability to control the study settings makes it easy for researchers to carry out random assignments, experimental manipulation, and controlled procedures on an online platform, enhancing research outcomes.

Another advantage of online panels is that they are more affordable compared to company-based data sampling. According to Peer et al. (2017), researchers using online platforms, such as MTurk or Prolific incur minimal resource use compared to company-based data sampling, due to lower recruitment fees. On other online platforms, researchers may only be required to pay a subscription fee to access raw data or analyzed data, based on their research needs.

Additionally, online platforms produce high standard data due to its enhanced anonymity feature. Greenacre (2016) find online platforms as effective approach, especially when researching sensitive topics like job dissatisfaction, consumer complaints, or unethical conducts, without compromising the safety of the respondents. Moreover, the anonymous feature of in

online panel data sampling comes with more benefits of reducing social preference bias, which increases data quality.

Although online panels present many advantages for human data sampling in business research, they also have their disadvantages. Online panels have less ecological validity or contextual relevance compared to company-based data sampling. As Greenacre (2016) argues, most online respondents usually lack the experiential information due to their non-contextual positions. For instance, an inexperienced respondent may fail to understand the contextual and authentic response to a specific behavioral scenario, resulting in superficial responses. Similarly, researching on workplace improvement information from unemployed participants may not adequately reflect the real experiences of employed individuals, making the responses vague for applicability.

Greenacre, (2016) also finds online sampling to be inclined to sampling bias. As identified by Polas (2025), most online panel respondents are usually technologically literate, unemployed, or students seeking financial incentives. Data sampled from this group of participants may lack the real-world contextual solutions for applicability.

Another disadvantage of using data from online panels is that the respondents may fail to respond with integrity. Due to a lack of situational context, the respondents may apply minimal effort and use bots to rush through surveys or engage in several surveys for monetary benefits (Wright, 2017). This highly affects the quality of data collected as well as the applicability of outcomes. To minimize poor quality data sampling, Kennedy et al. (2020) recommend employing quality control strategies, such as response time filters and respondents' attention checks.

Finally, in online panel sampling, respondents usually participate in self-selection based on their self-recorded demographics, which may be unverifiable (Greenacre, 2016). In order to qualify for a given research study, some respondents may be motivated by the monetary incentives involved and eventually provide false information so as to fit in the requirements. This presents challenges for studies that require proven professional or employment experience for generalizability, thus weakening the external validity in data samples from online panels.

Application to Research Questions

Research Question 1: *How does leadership style influence employee motivation in various industries?*

This research question requires a context specific and prompt issue on the impact of leadership on virtual team dynamics. The most suitable sample for this research study would be employees working in a specific company that relates to the general topic of study. Data collection for the research question can therefore be best acquired through company-based human data sampling. This is because the research question is context-specific, studying the organizational structure, leadership exposure, and job roles. To adequately understand leadership effectiveness, it is critical to have a direct access to the organizational social structures, actual leadership behaviors, and team structures. Employing hypothetical scenarios independently cannot fully capture the practical experiences of employees under transactional, transformational, or laissez-faire leadership styles (Irianti et al., 2024).

Company-based interviews or surveys enable researchers to observe and gauge employee motivational outcomes, such as turnover intentions, job satisfaction, and engagement depending on the leadership styles practiced (Sharma, 2024). It would be impossible to obtain such

specificity and depth through online panel responses where participants lack the workplace experience and may misunderstand leadership styles. Furthermore, longitudinal studies within organizations can monitor the variations in motivation depending on different leadership interventions applied, which enhances its internal validity. Nevertheless, when collecting the company-based human data, researchers must be ready to work through access issues and handle possible response bias (Polas, 2025).

Research Question 2: What factors impact consumer trust in online marketing campaigns?

This research question is not as direct or context specific as the first question. Furthermore, the consumer profile requires diverse data sets, which makes the question to majorly dependent on samples from online panel data. Digital consumers are easily accessible through online platforms like MTurk and Prolific, making it more convenient to assess responses to various marketing content, including influencer endorsements and personalized ads (Peer et al., 2017). Online search panels provide the grounds for reaching broad-based demographics that helps to compare variables, such as cultural background, trust levels, age, and digital literacy.

Online panel sampling techniques also has the advantage of speed in collecting large amounts of data within a short duration of time. Additionally, it makes it easier for researchers to conduct website interfaces and integrate ads or product endorsements. Its real-time nature facilitates timely response by multiple respondents concurrently, that enhances the speed of data collection compared to company-based data sampling (Wright, 2017). Additionally, online panel sampling is an effective approach for researchers to conduct randomized controlled experiments for determining causal relationships. Kennedy et al. (2020) recommend integrating data quality controls, such as response time filters and attention checks to enhance data quality.

Key Considerations for Researchers

When undertaking a research study, researchers need to select a sampling approach that best meets their research objectives. For instance, when looking to gather insights on contextual workplace questions, researchers should focus on company-based data sampling. Conversely, when seeking broad-based, scalable experiments, it will be more appropriate to use online panel sampling technique (Wright, 2017). Aside from the objectives, ethical considerations also depend on the type of data sampling source selected. While company-based research requires confidentiality and voluntary participation, online panels necessitate obtaining informed consent and guarding against exploitation of respondents' private details. Overall, researchers must always ensure quality control approaches to gather quality data for easy applicability (Kennedy et al., 2020).

Researchers should also limit managerial influence when conducting company-based research to promote anonymity and gather reliable data. Nevertheless, to ensure reliability and quality of data in online panels, researchers should employ attention checks and verification protocols (Kennedy et al., 2020). To maximize the quality of results, researchers should consider hybrid techniques of using controlled online panel experiments then proceeding with company-based follow-ups. For instance, a researcher can obtain probing insights from online panels which they can then use as a basis for research in specific companies or conduct longitudinal studies. For researchers, employing mixed approaches is an effective approach enhance reliability and internal and external validity, which widens the scope of applicability of outcomes (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the choice of research methodologies is highly reliant on research objectives. It is critical to note that different data sampling techniques have their advantages and limitations, requiring adequate consideration before use. Whereas company-based data sampling enhances ecological validity and contextual insights, online panels ensure diversity, scalability, and efficiency. To resolve job dissatisfaction and improve employee experience, researchers must employ company-based sampling. However, when examining consumer attitudes on specific development insights, researchers should opt for online panels. These considerations not only enhance data quality, but also ensure the applicability of outcomes. In business management, understanding the impacts of leadership approaches requires company-based sampling techniques. On the other hand, understanding consumer behavior necessitates a high-standard flexibility and extent of online panels. Researchers can always mix the two approaches to achieve enhanced and applicable outcomes. Ultimately, researchers must be willing to cross-examine their research aims, ethical considerations, and available resources before selecting their data sources. This is because the selection of a data source will largely impact the reliability, impact, and validity of research outcomes on their research.

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