

# Why Social Media Research Should be an Important Part of your Research Portfolio



*A J.D. Power and Associates Special Report*



During the past few years, many companies have renamed their internal research departments. Now, numerous corporations have “consumer insights” departments, illustrating a fundamental change in how organizations are utilizing market research, and what their expectations are from the market research.

Traditionally, the market research function of an organization has focused on validating and confirming what was already known. This application of market research is quantitative-focused, providing companies with a way to measure success and/or failure, and research quality is defined by statistical methodologies and scientific purity. However, the increased speed at which information is disseminated in a digital world has made the patterns of the past less predictive of the future, and it is becoming increasingly important for research teams to seek new research methods that move beyond what is already known.

To achieve this, market research needs to uncover not just what is happening but also why it is happening. This often requires more qualitative forms of research, where quality is not defined by statistical soundness but by how the research provides perspective to its users.

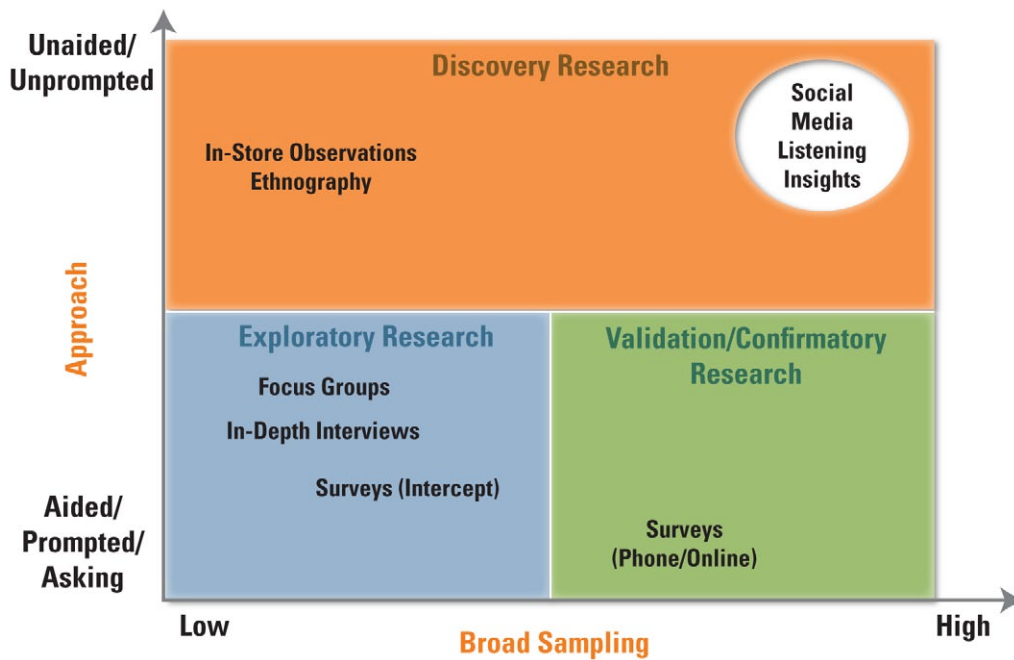
### ***Using Social Media Research as a Complement to Traditional Research***

Social media research allows a company to study large volumes of conversation at a lower investment and with faster turnarounds. Most important, social media research is not prompted or aided, but rather is based on the unprompted, unfiltered, and unaided conversations occurring in content created behind a keyboard and published to a digital platform.

***“The increased speed at which information is disseminated in a digital world has made the patterns of the past less predictive of the future.”***

For example, traditional forms of discovery research are typically expensive, rely on low sample sizes, and take a long time to field. By contrast, social media research is comparatively inexpensive, contains large sample sizes, and provides quick turnaround on the data, making the resulting discovery research broader in perspective, and timelier in nature.

## Listening is a Powerful Complement to Traditional Research



*“Social media research provides the ability to understand basic human attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and values.”*

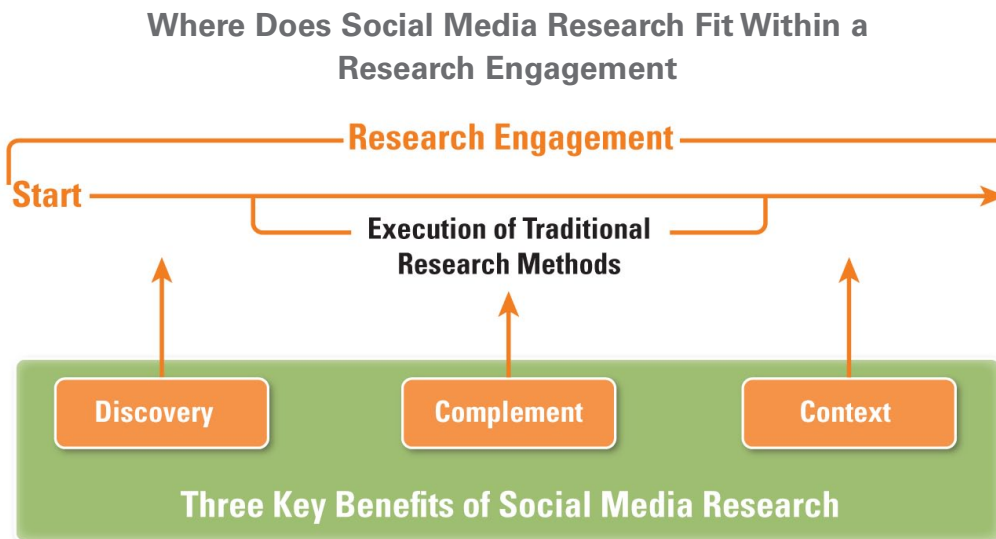
Indeed, social media research often uncovers “tacit” or “unspoken” knowledge that cannot be realized using other market research methodologies. Beyond studying the consumer or shopper, social media research provides the ability to understand basic human attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and values. The speed at which information is now disseminated and digested significantly affects the behaviors and attitudes of consumers and shoppers, and the only true way to get ahead of the cascade of information, generating anticipatory insights and breakthrough innovations, is by moving beyond the consumer to understanding the human core.

Although social media research provides both online and offline insights, it is not a replacement for traditional forms of research. Rather, it is an essential part of the market research portfolio.

## How Does Social Media Research Fit into Your Research Portfolio?

Social media research is a highly qualitative form of information gathering that provides three key benefits:

- **Discovery**—The ability to discover what you didn't already know
- **Context**—The ability to answer the “why” to “what” you see happening
- **Complement**—The ability to supplement other forms of marketing research that employ low sample sizes, hard-to-reach segments, and conceptual topics difficult for consumers to articulate



*“Companies that listen to consumers before conducting traditional research can identify what’s actually important to them based on the digital conversations they’re having.”*

### How Social Media Research Facilitates Discovery

Traditional forms of discovery research are expensive and include low sample sizes. Furthermore, exploratory and validation types of discovery research are less likely to provide new insights due to their approach, which requires a researcher to have a general sense of what is to be discussed, which often limits findings only to known topics.

By contrast, social media research is an effective form of discovery research based on broad sample sizes that facilitates the ability to generate deep consumer insights.

To discover the unknown and set the foundation for research engagements, social media research should be considered the first step in the research process. Starting with social media research ensures that brands are asking the right questions when executing traditional research projects, and are extracting maximum value from these expensive, quantitative types of research. Rather than forming questions

based on assumptions, companies that listen to consumers before conducting traditional research can identify what's actually important to them based on the digital conversations they're having. This qualitative understanding is critical for properly seeding surveys, developing focus groups, and conducting interviews to quantify and validate areas of interest.

### ***How Social Media Research Provides Context***

Traditional forms of research are quantitatively focused and provide detailed insight into what is happening or what has happened. However, numbers, metrics, and indices don't answer the question of why something is happening or has happened. Beyond a client's qualitative data sets, the Internet is an expansive source of consumer opinion and human behavior. Because traditional forms of research frequently trigger just as many questions as they answer, social media research provides a convenient way to resolve them quickly and inexpensively.

### ***How Social Media Research Complements Traditional Research***

Traditional survey methods may fall short of generating full sample sizes and/or make it difficult to reach particular consumer segments, shortcomings that are increasingly obvious as technology races ahead. For example, a growing number of consumers are dropping their landline home telephones, preferring instead to use their cell phones as a sole source of communication. This shift in consumer behavior decreases the pool of potential candidates for outbound market research phone surveys, and can skew the demographics associated with survey findings. Social media research provides an effective method to supplement and validate traditional research findings.

Even when traditional research reaches the right consumer segments, conceptual topics of interest are often hard for consumers to articulate. As an example, asking "How do you feel about the term 'optimism'?" is a difficult question for consumers to answer. Social media research doesn't rely on a consumer's ability to fully comprehend how they feel about a topic. Rather, social media research has the ability to aggregate the attitudes and behaviors around how consumers discuss a concept to understand how it is viewed.

***"Social media research aggregates and analyzes the unprompted and unaided opinions consumers express online, every single day."***

### ***Social Media Research Answers the Who, What, Why, and How***

There is no question that social media research is changing the market research landscape. In fact, major consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies are currently re-allocating budgets away from traditional market research methodologies, such as testing and evaluation, and investing more heavily in social media market research. Social media market research allows companies and progressive marketers to “listen” to target customers and more accurately anticipate how they will react to new products and services by providing actionable insights to answer far more than the simple “what” question addressed by traditional research methodologies. Social media research also answers questions about the “why,” the “who,” and the “how” by aggregating and analyzing the unprompted and unaided opinions consumers express online, every single day.

### ***About J.D. Power Web Intelligence***

The J.D. Power and Associates Web Intelligence Research Division offers a breakthrough capability to analyze social media—to provide richer and deeper insights about topics of most importance to online content creators. J.D. Power Web Intelligence crawls more than 100 million blogs each week and collects unaided opinions of the online community—turning it into valuable marketing intelligence about markets, trends, issues, segments, brands, products, and services. *To learn more about Web Intelligence research, please visit: [jdpower.com/webintelligence.com](http://jdpower.com/webintelligence.com)*

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