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Research-Based Market Research and Practical Methodologies

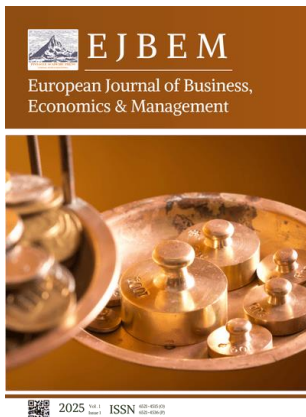
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Abstract: This report explores the "research-based" marketing approach, which helps companies make decisions and identify market opportunities through systematic data collection and analysis. Compared with "data-driven" marketing, the research-based approach focuses more on the combination of data and human insights, supporting the formulation of precise marketing strategies. In terms of brand building, service quality is crucial, and the SERVQUAL model can effectively improve service quality. Digital marketing improves brand conversion rate through SEO, content marketing and optimizing user experience, while public relations and social media marketing need to balance brand building and crisis management. In short, adopting a research-based marketing strategy can help companies reduce risks, optimize long-term marketing results, and gain sustainable advantages in a highly competitive market.

Keywords: market research; research methodology; consumer insights; data analysis



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1. Introduction

1.1. What Is "Research-Based" Marketing?

At its core, "research-based" marketing involves the systematic and objective acquisition and analysis of information to guide marketing decisions. Market research is defined as the process of identifying, collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information to help management address marketing problems and opportunities. It aims to answer key business questions such as market size, competitive landscape, optimal product positioning, customer pricing preferences, and emerging industry trends. This process combines both first-hand data and second-hand data.

1.2. Reasons to Take a "Research-Based" Approach to Marketing

Adopting a "research-based" marketing approach is critical to business success. Market research can help companies accurately identify the target audience for their products and identify the types of marketing activities that can attract these audiences ³. By observing demographic trends and competitor strategies, companies can gain valuable insights to promote product innovation and expand product lines ³. In essence, research-based marketing allows decision makers to base their decisions, predictions and expectations on reliable information rather than relying solely on intuition or past experience ⁴. This methodology can systematically identify market opportunities and challenges, providing solid data support and deep insights for formulating effective marketing strategies [1].

1.3. Comparison of "Research-Based" and "Data-Driven" Marketing

"Research-based" and "data-driven" marketing both rely on data but differ in approach. Traditional market research, based on direct consumer interactions, offers deep

insights into consumer behavior but is time-consuming, costly, and may produce outdated results [2]. Data-driven marketing, on the other hand, uses tools to analyze large datasets, such as purchase history and social media engagement, enabling precise targeting and automation. However, it may overlook human factors and emotional context, requiring expensive tools and expertise.

The "data-informed" approach blends these methods, recognizing the importance of both data and human insights. It uses data to guide decisions but also incorporates customer feedback and broader factors like brand characteristics and experience. This approach is flexible and adaptable to real-time feedback. In summary, data-driven marketing suits companies with complex needs and resources, while the data-informed method combines data with human judgment for a more balanced decision-making process [3].

2. Brand Building Strategies and Practices

2.1. Service Branding: Application and Enlightenment of SERVQUAL Model

Brand building is a key aspect of marketing, influencing consumer perception and emotional connection with a brand. Service quality, in particular, plays a critical role in shaping brand perception, especially for service-oriented businesses. The SERVQUAL model, introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988, is a widely-used tool for measuring service quality by assessing the gap between customer expectations and actual perceptions. The model identifies five dimensions — reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness — that reflect different aspects of the customer's experience, allowing companies to pinpoint areas for improvement.

SERVQUAL is not only useful for diagnosing service quality gaps but also for conducting industry benchmarking, developing employee training, and evaluating service improvements. It highlights five key gaps, including managers' misperceptions of customer expectations, standard setting deviations, inadequate service delivery, and discrepancies between communication and actual performance. Identifying these gaps enables businesses to optimize their services effectively. In the B2B service sector, SERVQUAL proves valuable for understanding customer satisfaction and improving long-term relationships, with case studies like Malaysia Post Express and high-end hotels demonstrating its practical applications in process optimization and employee training.

However, some scholars have questioned the concept of "expectations" in the SERVQUAL model, suggesting that customers may use different reference standards to evaluate service quality in various contexts. For instance, in B2B environments, contract terms often serve as the benchmark for measuring service performance. To address these concerns, some research proposes replacing "expectations" with "comparison standards" to enhance the model's accuracy and adaptability across different industries.

2.2. Influencer Marketing: Research Insights and Practical Strategies

SERVQUAL, despite controversy, remains a useful analytical framework for service branding. Companies aiming to build a strong service brand need to foster service awareness, hire suitable employees, offer effective training, and continually exceed customer expectations. This comprehensive approach ensures the delivery of high-quality service, which is essential for building long-term brand loyalty.

Influencer marketing has gained significant importance in recent years as a tool for brand building. Unlike traditional advertising, influencers have the ability to directly connect with target audiences, but their effectiveness isn't determined solely by the number of followers. Studies show an "inverted U-shaped" relationship between follower count and interaction rate, meaning that while moderate fan numbers foster engagement, an excess of followers can reduce interaction. This highlights the importance of authenticity and the quality of interactions over sheer fan count.

Nano-influencers (1000-10,000 followers) and micro-influencers often outperform larger influencers in terms of engagement, trust, and content relevance. Their stronger

community connections make them more influential, and their lower operating costs are advantageous for small and medium-sized brands. However, influencer marketing does come with risks, such as misalignment between the brand and influencer, lack of transparency, or misleading content. These risks can harm brand reputation, as seen in cases like EA's failed partnership with a non-gaming celebrity. Success in influencer marketing depends on a balance of authenticity, relevance, and transparency, with a focus on strategic, measurable influence and long-term trust (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Influencer Marketing Strategies at Different Levels.

Influencer Tier	Typical Follower Range	Key Advantages	Key Disadvantages	Typical Cost Impact	Best Application Scenarios / Strategic Fit
Nano	1K–10K	Extremely high engagement rate, strong trust and authenticity, tight-knit community, highly cost-effective	Very limited reach and influence	Low	Penetrating niche markets, activating specific communities, driving deep engagement and word-of-mouth, ideal for SMEs with limited budgets
Micro	10K–100K	High engagement, good authenticity and credibility, expertise in niche domains, strong cost efficiency	Reach still limited, often requires multi-influencer collaboration	Low to Medium	Building brand presence in subcultures or niche sectors, balancing engagement and coverage
Macro	100K–1M	Broad reach, moderate brand recognition, relatively professional content	Declining engagement, reduced perceived authenticity, rising costs	Medium to High	Enhancing brand visibility, expanding market reach, promoting general consumption products or large-scale campaigns
Mega	1M+	Massive exposure, centrality in online networks, celebrity-like influence, effective for viral buzz	Low engagement, weak authenticity, low audience intimacy, very high cost	High	Major brand launches, product debuts, rapid awareness building and maximum reach (with trade-offs on cost and engagement)

This table provides a structured framework for marketers to decide which influencer type or types best fit their needs based on their specific campaign goals, target audience, and budget, moving beyond the simplistic mindset of "the more followers the better".

2.3. Visual Identity Design: Shaping the Brand's First Impression

The Visual Identity System (VIS) is crucial in establishing a brand's first and lasting impression on consumers. It consists of various visual elements — such as logos, typography, color schemes, imagery, and layout styles — that together create a cohesive brand experience across all touchpoints. In the digital age, where visual identity is often the consumer's first encounter with a brand, it is essential for these elements to align with the brand's values and resonate with its target audience. Studies show that consumers make visual judgments within 0.05 seconds, with 94% of first impressions based on design.

Color plays a pivotal role in shaping brand perception by influencing emotions and behaviors. Research reveals that color can increase brand recognition by up to 80%, and iconic brands like McDonald's and Coca-Cola leverage distinctive color choices, such as

red, to reinforce their brand identity. Different colors evoke various emotional responses – blue suggests trust, red conveys excitement, and orange represents energy, for example. Additionally, cultural differences affect color meanings, making it crucial for brands to understand these nuances when crafting global strategies. Color not only impacts perceptions but also purchasing decisions, with 90% of product assessments made within the first 90 seconds based on color.

Typography is another key visual element that communicates emotions and brand personality. Fonts can influence how consumers perceive a brand, with sans-serif fonts representing modernity, serif fonts indicating tradition, and script fonts evoking warmth. Consistent, clear typography enhances readability and professionalism, while inconsistency can lead to confusion and a loss of trust. Ultimately, visual identity relies on consistency across all brand materials. Inconsistent use of colors, typography, or logos can undermine trust and reduce conversion rates. Research shows that consistent branding can increase revenue by 23%, highlighting its importance in creating a credible and memorable brand presence [4,5].

3. Digital Marketing and Customer Acquisition

In the digital age, how companies can effectively attract and convert potential customers has become the core of marketing. This chapter focuses on strategies such as improving online visibility, optimizing user experience, using crowdfunding models, precise advertising and efficient email marketing. Combining a large number of research results and data insights, it explores how these strategies can help companies convert potential customers into loyal users [6].

3.1. Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Improving Natural Search Visibility

SEO uses a series of technical optimizations to make corporate websites rank higher in search engine results pages, thereby obtaining more natural traffic. Studies have shown that high-quality content, precise keyword strategies and authoritative backlinks are the key to influencing SEO effectiveness. Compared with paid search advertising (SEM), SEO is more cost-effective in the long run, and users have higher trust in natural search results [7]. Modern SEO not only focuses on technology, but also emphasizes user experience and content value, combined with big data analysis, and continuous optimization to achieve higher conversion and brand reputation.

3.2. Practical Application of Market Research Methodology

Market research is the basis for identifying and analyzing customer needs, market environment and competitive situation. It supports scientific marketing decisions through systematic collection and interpretation of data [6]. In the aspects of visual design, influencer selection, e-commerce website planning, advertising strategy formulation and email marketing, research helps companies understand the characteristics and preferences of the target audience, achieve precise positioning and personalized services. Market research converts data into executable intelligence, is a bridge for the effective implementation of marketing strategies, and promotes companies to build customer-centric agile organizations [3].

3.3. Independent Site User Experience Optimization to Improve Conversion Rate

The success of independent e-commerce websites depends largely on excellent user experience (UX) design. Simple and clear navigation, consistent visual style, good accessibility and responsiveness, and the establishment of trust all help to improve user satisfaction and conversion rate. Simplification of the checkout process, reasonable arrangement of account creation timing, diversified payment options and secondary value crea-

tion of order confirmation pages are also extremely critical. Through continuous A/B testing and data-driven optimization, companies can continuously reduce user friction, improve purchase completion rate, and create differentiated competitive advantages.

3.4. Crowdfunding: Psychological Mechanism of Collective Support and Success Factors

As an innovative financing method, the success of crowdfunding depends not only on the attractiveness of the project itself, but also on trust building and effective communication. Signals such as media coverage, project history, number of supporters, and funding progress significantly affect crowdfunding results. Supporters are usually early adopters, driven by risk appetite, reciprocity, social identity, and fear of missing out. Crowdfunding success is not only about raising funds, but also about market validation and on-time delivery. Initiators need to focus on community building and transparent communication to maintain a good reputation and sustained momentum.

3.5. Advertising and Email Marketing: Maximizing Return on Investment (ROI)

Advertising increases brand influence and sales conversion through precise positioning and diversified forms. Measuring advertising ROI is the key to optimizing investment. Digital advertising, especially social media platforms, has performed well in long-term ROI, emphasizing the sustained benefits of brand building. Email marketing relies on personalization and user segmentation to achieve efficient communication, and improves interaction rate and conversion through dynamic content and AI technology. Data privacy has become an important principle that marketing must abide by. Transparency and respect for user rights are the cornerstones of building trust. Reasonable balance between short-term activation and long-term brand building is the key to successful digital marketing [4].

4. Public Relations and Communication Strategy

Public relations (PR) play a key role in modern marketing in building brand image, managing reputation, and establishing good relations with various stakeholders. This section explores the synergy between PR and marketing, and how to measure the impact of PR and event marketing activities.

4.1. PR Marketing: Collaboratively Building Brand Value Integration of PR and Marketing

As early as 1978, Philip Kotler and William Mindak highlighted that marketing and public relations (PR) often work in isolation, forming a "silo" effect. This is due to differences in their educational backgrounds and focuses: PR professionals are trained in communication without a managerial economics perspective, while business schools rarely include PR courses. PR focuses on communication itself, while marketing views it as a tool for achieving commercial goals. By integrating mainstream theories, PR and marketing can function more effectively as partners.

In modern marketing, PR plays a crucial role in "earned media" by enhancing brand awareness, shaping reputation, and improving audience sentiment. These positive impacts reduce perceived buyer risk, simplify decision-making, and strengthen customer relationships, ultimately boosting sales and retention. Today, PR-driven brand communication is considered even more important than performance advertising for driving growth.

Quantifying the impact of digital PR is challenging, as values like brand awareness, reputation, and trust are difficult to measure in monetary terms, and the customer journey is complex. Proxy indicators such as brand search volume, media share, social media interactions, and customer loyalty provide insights into PR's influence. AI-driven data analysis helps integrate social media, customer feedback, and sales data for a comprehensive view of brand performance. While PR and marketing have traditionally had different focuses, in the digital age, their roles are increasingly interconnected. Earned media can

boost SEO, provide social proof, and drive conversions, making PR a valuable enabler for marketing. The challenge of quantifying PR ROI lies in its indirect, long-term value, requiring a mix of quantitative and qualitative evaluations to demonstrate PR's alignment with business goals. AI tools can help reveal these complex relationships and enhance strategic value.

4.2. Event Marketing: Measuring Impact and ROI

As an important form of online and offline interaction, the effectiveness of event marketing needs to be evaluated through systematic data tracking, analysis and evaluation to ensure that the input-output ratio meets expectations.

1) Key indicators of event marketing ROI

Registration and attendance: total number of registrants, attendance rate (actual attendance/registration number), and non-attendance rate are used to evaluate the attractiveness and execution effect of the event. Interaction indicators: participant voting participation, Q & A activity, check-in and stay time in specific sessions, reflecting the quality and influence of content.

The overall ROI of the event can be calculated using the following formula:

$$ROI = \frac{\text{Event Revenue} - \text{Event Costs}}{\text{Event Costs}} \times 100$$

Event Revenue: This could include potential customer value, sales growth, brand exposure, etc.

Event Costs: This includes expenses such as venue costs, promotional costs, staffing, etc.

2) Measurement framework

Based on the preset event goals (such as potential customer development, brand promotion, customer interaction), track relevant indicators, compare the value generated by the event (potential customer expected value, sales growth, etc.) with the total cost, and calculate ROI. Only focusing on the number of attendees is difficult to fully reflect the success of the event. High attendance but low interaction indicates that there are problems with the content or experience design. Interaction indicators can better measure the "quality" of participation [8]. High interaction indicates that the content is relevant and valuable, which helps to drive long-term ROI. Research shows that event planning should clarify goals and metrics from the beginning, and continuously collect and analyze data during and after the event, so that event marketing becomes a quantifiable strategic tool rather than a simple execution activity.

5. Social Media Marketing: Interaction, Sales and Crisis Management

Social media plays multiple roles in modern marketing. From directly affecting sales and user interaction, to the operation strategy of specific platforms, to how to deal with unexpected crises, and finally how to seamlessly integrate social media into the overall integrated marketing communication (IMC) system, these are the core contents to be discussed in this section.

5.1. Impact on Sales and Interaction: A Meta-Analysis Perspective

A meta-analysis on the impact of brand-owned social media (OSM) challenges some popular beliefs, revealing that social media has a greater effect on sales than on user interaction. The study showed that the average elasticity coefficient of OSM on sales was 0.353, while for interaction, it was only 0.137. This suggests that focusing solely on interaction metrics may underestimate the true value of social media for business.

The study also highlighted significant differences in content types' impact on interaction and sales. Emotional content that satisfies users' emotional needs drives more in-

teraction (likes, shares) than promotional content. For sales, content should focus on product benefits rather than emotional appeal. Informational content (e.g., product features) aids purchasing decisions, while promotional content has little effect on interaction [9].

Moreover, the study found that community size and product life cycle influence sales results. Building a large community isn't crucial for sales; smaller, more engaged fanbases are more effective. For new products, OSM is more successful in boosting sales than for mature ones, so brands can drive sales by promoting new products on social media.

Finally, the study emphasized cultural context, noting that social media is more effective in countries with high power distance. Brands should adapt their global social media strategies to cultural differences.

5.2. Social E-Commerce Conversion Strategies: China Case Study (TikTok and Xiaohongshu)

China's social e-commerce market is growing rapidly and is expected to reach US\$537.29 billion by 2025. Platforms such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu are leading in social interaction and online shopping, providing valuable experience for global social e-commerce. TikTok creates a seamless shopping experience by deeply integrating short videos with e-commerce functions. Users can not only discover products within the platform, but also complete purchases directly. Its personalized recommendation algorithm also effectively improves user engagement and purchase likelihood. TikTok also widely adopts influencer marketing, and brands such as Procter & Gamble have successfully increased their online market share by working with TikTok influencers [10].

Xiaohongshu has won the favor of consumers with user-generated content (UGC) and a strong trust community. The platform builds trust among users through product reviews and usage recommendations, attracting consumers who seek real product insights. Xiaohongshu is particularly favored by high-end brands. Brands such as L'Oréal and Hermès have successfully reached consumers with independent financial capabilities through influencer marketing on the platform.

There are several key factors for the success of these platforms: first, the deep integration of social interaction and commercial transactions makes the path from content discovery to purchase almost frictionless; second, trust and authenticity are the core of success [11]. User-generated content and recommendations from credible influencers can win consumer trust more than traditional advertising; third, the conversion rate of live streaming on the platform is usually much higher than traditional advertising and static content.

5.3. Social Media Crisis Management

In the age of social media, information spreads rapidly, and a brand's reputation can be severely damaged in a short time. Therefore, establishing an effective social media crisis management system is essential. Key principles of crisis communication include consistency of information, alignment between words and actions, speed and accuracy, and transparency. Brands should acknowledge problems quickly and provide clear, accurate updates once the facts are known, ensuring a timely and precise response [12].

For example, when Slack faced a service interruption, it promptly provided updates on social media, maintained transparency, and offered a sincere apology, which helped maintain user trust. Similarly, Johnson & Johnson responded decisively during a product poisoning crisis by halting advertising and recalling products, ultimately rebuilding brand trust. In contrast, brands like Cracker Barrel and Balenciaga exacerbated the situation by either remaining silent or responding too slowly. The key to managing a social media crisis is to act quickly, communicate honestly, and take concrete steps to resolve the issue while learning from the experience (Table 2).

Table 2. E-Commerce A/B Testing Best Practices Checklist.

Stage	Best Practices	Principle/Importance
Plan- ning	1. Define clear and measurable hypotheses	Provides direction and evaluation criteria for testing
	2. Define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Clearly defines the baseline and target for improvements
	3. Identify target audience (if applicable)	Ensures test results are meaningful for specific user groups
	4. Prioritize testing high-impact elements	Focus resources on optimization points most likely to yield significant returns
	5. Ensure correct setup of testing tools (run A/A tests)	Validates system reliability and eliminates tool errors
Setup	6. Test one variable at a time	Accurately identifies which changes caused result changes
	7. Ensure sufficient and representative sample size	Ensures statistical significance and generalizability of results
	8. Randomly assign traffic to different versions	Eliminates selection bias and ensures comparability between groups
Exe- cution	9. Run tests for a sufficient length of time	Covers different user behavior cycles to avoid premature conclusions (at least 2 weeks, up to 6 weeks)
	10. Avoid testing during atypical periods	Ensures test data reflects normal user behavior
	11. Correctly analyze and interpret results (focus on statistical significance)	Avoids making incorrect decisions based on random error
Analysis	12. Consider the potential impact of external factors	Ensures the robustness of conclusions
Fol- low- up	13. Iterate and improve	Roll out the winning version and conduct the next round of tests based on learning for continuous optimization
	14. Document all test processes and results	Facilitates knowledge sharing, future reference, and avoids redundant ineffective tests

5.4. Integrate Social Media into the Overall Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Strategy

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is a strategic approach that aims to ensure that all marketing channels work together to deliver a consistent brand message and experience to the target audience [13]. In the IMC framework, social media plays a vital role. Social media advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotions, and digital marketing can all be effectively integrated through social media channels. Brands' communications on social media must be consistent with other marketing channels, otherwise it may lead to consumer confusion and trust crisis.

When implementing an IMC strategy, brands need to set clear social media goals, deeply understand the needs and behaviors of the target audience, and build relationships between brands and consumers through real interactions. In addition, brands should measure the effectiveness of social media, track key indicators such as reach, interaction rate, conversion rate, and constantly adjust strategies based on feedback. By effectively integrating social media with other marketing channels, brands can create a consistent user experience across multiple touchpoints, thereby increasing brand influence and customer loyalty [14].

6. Conclusion

This report highlights the importance of market research and practical methods in brand building, digital marketing, and social media marketing. Research, whether traditional or data-driven, provides essential insights for decision-making, reduces uncertainty,

and minimizes risks. Companies should prioritize research-based strategies to enhance marketing effectiveness. Key elements for brand building include service quality, measured using tools like the SERVQUAL model, and influencer marketing, where authenticity and cost-effective nano and micro influencers are key. Visual identity, including color and typography, is crucial in shaping brand perception.

Digital marketing and customer acquisition are closely linked, with SEO and content marketing boosting brand visibility and reputation. Optimizing user experience, particularly during the checkout process, increases conversion rates, while crowdfunding fosters community trust. Social media advertising must balance brand building with performance objectives, and email marketing benefits from personalized content. Public relations and integrated communication play a critical role in amplifying brand value. Event marketing success should be evaluated based on interaction and goal achievement, not just attendance. Practical recommendations include prioritizing authenticity, using data analysis for decisions, and optimizing long-term marketing strategies while staying flexible with emerging trends like AI in personalized marketing. Companies can gain a sustainable competitive edge by adopting research-based, customer-centric strategies.

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