

Where is marketing research going?

 By [mike broom](#)

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The question is provoked by the weak economy, budget cuts and greater complexity.

But only partly. It's much more important to contemplate the complexity of modern life in general.

Sometimes it's hard to remember that the internet was considered a fad 10 short years ago. In those days, you talked into mobile phones – and that's all you did with them, other than use them as a paperweight.

To start answering the question about marketing research, one needs to think about where it's been, even what it does and then evaluate whether it has a future, and if so... what that might be.



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Marketing research started in the US during the Second World War, when the US joined the war. The military were faced with the problem of thousands of people per day wanting to join up, and with the challenge of assigning them to roles that would enable them to be more effective. The research done as a result also provided the impetus for dramatic growth and popularity of psychology, which had already grown in acceptance in the two decades leading up to the war.

As peace approached, those who had worked in this field and had been demobbed, looked for ways of earning a living and found rapid acceptance by manufacturers who had to find new ways of utilising their capacity and were increasingly intrigued by the new notion of marketing.

Understand consumers better

In short, marketing research evolved to enable decision makers to understand their customers better – with psychologists, sociologists and statisticians finding it a comfortable professional home.

With the stellar growth of advertising, marketing research enjoyed halcyon times. Yet there were changes due to various economic, social, political and technological factors, with change happening ever faster as communication channels evolved to change the way people talked to one another, conducted their daily business and gathered information. Keeping track with the trends and changes was not that simple.

One major milestone occurred in 2008, when the economic hammer came down, hard, in 2008! There was an astonishing vaporisation – literally within days – of huge multiples of entire countries' wealth. At the same time, there was the ascent of mobile phones as indispensable personal accessories, and the explosion of the internet and its importance for communication. Many marketers, retailers and manufacturers were caught unawares because they had not – or could not – foresee how events would overtake the traditional way of doing things. They were put into a state of confusion.

And the dramatic effects did not stop there. Worth remembering is that, in 2008 internet penetration was about 5% of the SA adult population according to AMPS, while the last similar measure for the beginning of 2016 is over 50%. This in itself shows that the tsunami of the new marketing environment is still washing over the shores of traditional thinking.

The most significant sign of trouble in modern marketing research has been the virtual demise of All Media and Products Study (AMPS) after 40 years of (often acrimonious) success.

In the months ahead we will discuss among others the factors that are driving change in marketing and marketing research, as well as some current topics and debates on the topic. However, one factor that has not changed, is the fact that business decision makers still have to motivate their marketing budgets, including research. How they do this and some other future topics will include:

- The convergence of qualitative and quantitative research (as though it ever mattered!)
- Technologists as leaders in the industry
- Automation in marketing and market research
- Digital research (what on earth is it?)
- Big data (do big numbers make big sense?)
- The impending death of probability sampling (do you really need to know how wrong you are?)

ABOUT MIKE BROOM

I have been involved in marketing research for over 40 years, across all spheres. I started Marketing Science in 1992, Infosense (aka Infotools) in 1995 and Panel Services Africa in 2005. For more information on Ad-Audit, please contact me at infoQuest (formerly PSA) on 083 255 2668 or [click here](#) to send an email.

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