

 **FUEL CYCLE**
State of
Market
Research
2021

Introduction

Businesses have spent the last year scrambling to adapt to unexamined circumstances. With a post-COVID reality in sight, 2021 is poised to be a year of transition. Businesses can finally start to work on shaping their futures, but they must work with agility to position themselves for an altered world. In order to do so, organizations have increased their reliance on customer insights when making strategic decisions.

In December 2020, we surveyed 275 market researchers about their jobs and their industry. We found that in a time of great change, market researchers are looking to new technologies to solve their challenges.

Executive Summary

THE JOB OF THE MARKET RESEARCHER HAS GROWN MORE CHALLENGING, BUT THEY STILL LOVE IT

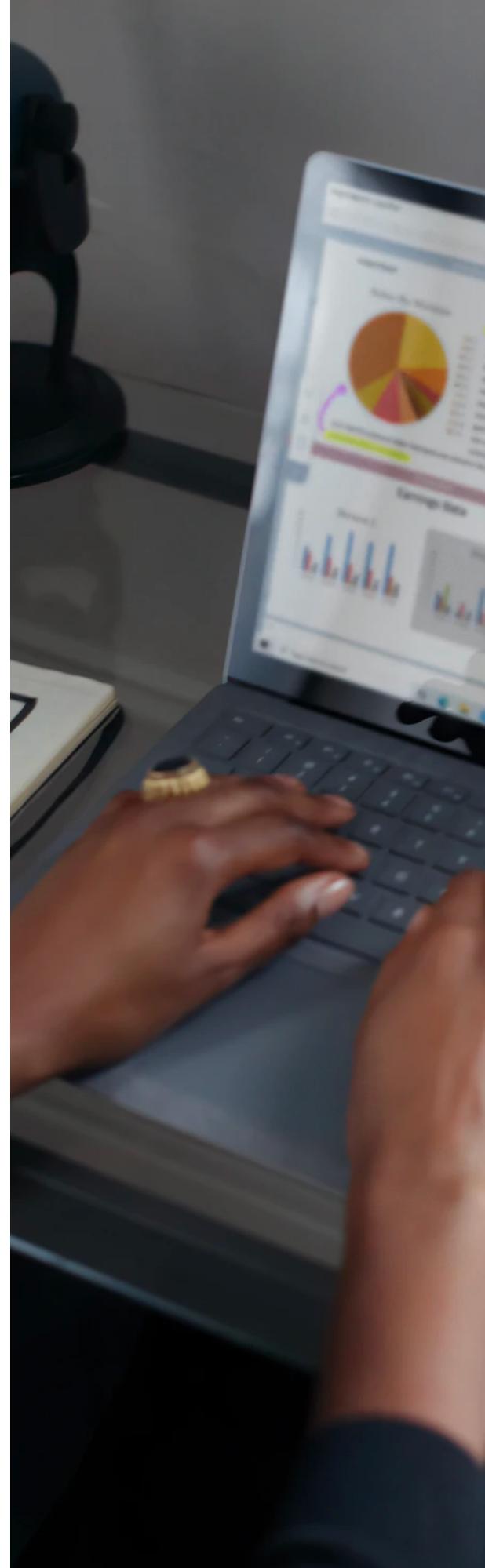
Covid-19 has changed a lot for research professionals this year: methodologies, research focus, and even the tools used. They're also spending more time on tasks they historically don't like, such as vendor management. Despite this, more than 80% say they're happy with their jobs.

RESEARCHERS ARE WARMING TO THE POTENTIAL OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

As new technology offerings flood the market, researchers are starting to see how business intelligence software can save them from programming surveys and cleaning data, as well as how DIY research tools can rescue them from time spent managing vendors. Now they just need to find the time during their day to investigate these new technologies.

ONLINE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES HAVE COME TO THE FOREFRONT

In 2020, 37% of market researchers surveyed used online communities to generate new product ideas, test marketing campaigns, and uncover industry insights. And fully two-thirds say they're satisfied with the value those communities deliver. That explains why the trend has gained so much steam: More than half of research communities were launched within the past two years.



SECTION 1

Even in Unsettling Times, Researchers Love Their Work

Our annual survey of market research professionals yielded a key finding: Most market researchers love what they do, even as COVID-19 has created sudden and unexpected change.

COVID-19 HAS SHAKEN UP THE INDUSTRY

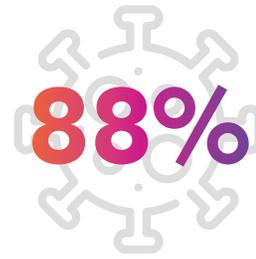
It's no surprise what drove the most change to market research in 2020: 88% of researchers report that the pandemic has had a significant impact on methodologies, research focus, and the tools they use. COVID-19 forced most researchers to use online-only methodologies. Many say that fielding qualitative studies has gotten harder. And several reported that staff turnover has increased — in some cases, due to layoffs.

THEY'RE SPENDING MORE TIME ON LESS-DESIRABLE TASKS

One thing the pandemic hasn't changed: Almost half of researchers say they have too much work to do and not enough time to do it. Unfortunately, loss of staffing and resources have pulled market researchers back into manual tasks they don't enjoy. The amount of time they spend managing vendors, programming surveys, and cleaning data has gone up this year. As a result, the amount of time they spend on their favorite tasks — like analyzing data, writing reports, and working with clients — has gone down.

BUT THEY'RE STILL SECURE AND HAPPY WITH THEIR WORK

One small benefit of the pandemic: Working from home means working slightly fewer hours. For several years, researchers have reported putting in an average of 45 hours per week; this year that number ticked down to 42 hours per week. And while some companies laid off researchers this year, less than one-in-five of those surveyed are worried about job security — the same number as last year. The result: 82% of researchers say they're satisfied with their jobs.



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UNFAVORABLE TASKS



FAVORABLE TASKS



of market researchers are happy with their job

AVERAGE HOURS WORKED / WEEK



SECTION 2

Researchers are Ready for Technology's Value & Impact

Market researchers haven't always been fans of new technology, but their perception has changed. Over 40% of researchers cite automated or self-service tools as the trends that will have the biggest impact on the industry this year.

THEY'RE BEGINNING TO SEE HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN LEAD TO FREEDOM

Most researchers have never liked programming surveys and cleaning data. So it's little surprise that they selected artificial intelligence and machine learning — technologies that can handle these tasks — as the trend that will have the biggest impact on the MR industry in the next five years. Many researchers think technology can save them from working with vendors, too: Nearly as many selected DIY market research as the biggest coming trend.

RESEARCH TECHNOLOGIES ARE FLOODING THE MARKET

Alongside researchers' newfound positivity about technology, new vendors are springing up left and right. This year, the average market researcher said they were aware of 10 different research technologies — a 25% increase from last year. They said they are familiar with about 7 quantitative research tools, such as SurveyMonkey, Microsoft Excel, and Google Analytics. And they said they are aware of roughly 3 qualitative research technologies, including VoxPopMe, Discuss.io, Remesh, and Live by Fuel Cycle.

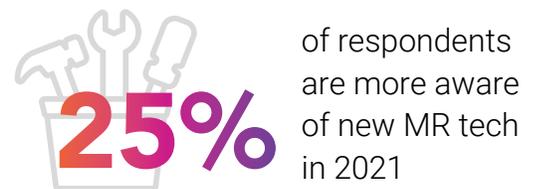
BUT THEY NEED MORE TIME TO INVESTIGATE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Almost half of market researchers say they don't have enough time to research industry trends. (In fact, they want time to study industry trends more than they want time to conduct even favorite tasks like working with clients or writing reports.) The result of this time crunch? Most market researchers simply stumble upon new technologies by receiving an email, seeing a social media post, or talking to a colleague.

TOP TECH TRENDS



KNOWLEDGE OF NEW TECH TOOLS



HOW THEY LEARN ABOUT NEW TOOLS



SECTION 3

Market Researchers are Increasingly Reliant on Online Communities

Not only do 9 out of 10 market researchers rely on qualitative data — but last year, most of them said they planned to increase their use of digital qualitative research in 2020. When the pandemic hit, interest in and use of online research communities increased even further.

NEARLY 40 PERCENT OF RESEARCHERS NOW USE ONLINE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

This year, 37% of market researchers report that their companies employ online research communities. And while this surge predates COVID-19, the pandemic only accelerated the trend: More than half of the researchers who use research communities say they launched their program within the past two years. Most commonly, they say their communities have between 1,000 and 10,000 members.

RESEARCHERS SAY COMMUNITIES DELIVER PRODUCT INNOVATIONS AND MARKETING IDEAS

Nearly 40% of market researchers who manage communities list product ideation and innovation as their primary goal. Another 23% report they started their communities for marketing campaign testing. Other top goals include customer acquisition and industry insights. The good news: 66% of researchers who use online communities say they've been satisfied or very satisfied with the results.

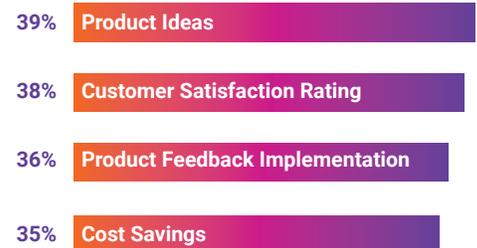
RESEARCHERS USE DIFFERENT METRICS TO MEASURE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SUCCESS

The market researchers who use online communities know they must build thriving communities before those communities can deliver value. That's why they tell us that they first measure the health of their communities using metrics like the number of active members, member participation, and completed activities. Only then do they gauge the value of their communities by tracking numbers like how many product ideas they generated, how satisfied with the product or brand their members are, and how much money they saved on research initiatives by leveraging the community.

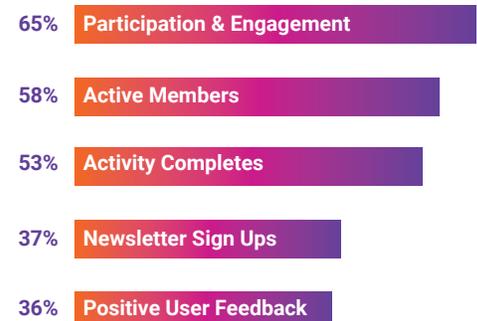
TOP RESEARCH COMMUNITY GOALS



TOP COMMUNITY SUCCESS METRICS



TOP COMMUNITY GOAL METRICS



CONCLUSION

Technology Can Help Researchers Navigate a Changing Landscape

The MR industry is evolving like never before. COVID-19 has forced market researchers to find new methodologies and often to do more work with fewer resources and in less time. The faster they adopt new technology, the better they'll be able to thrive in this environment.

TECHNOLOGY CAN GET RESEARCHERS BACK TO THE TASKS THEY LOVE

Many researchers say they're being asked to spend more of their time on manual tasks like programming surveys and cleaning data. Well, business intelligence and machine learning software can take these jobs off their plate. Their calendars are full of vendor management meetings, but DIY market research tools can help them achieve their research goals without spending so much time on vendor calls.

AN ONLINE-FIRST APPROACH TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IS HERE TO STAY

Most of the researchers surveyed have been forced to adopt online-only research methodologies this year — and many of them will continue to favor online approaches even after the pandemic ends. But that doesn't mean the end of qualitative research. Almost two-in-five market researchers use online communities to collect qualitative data. And it works.

This is Only the Beginning

2021 is the year of MR. Now more than ever, market research leaders are positioned to elevate their function as decision-makers begin to lean heavily on insights to strategize for a rapidly changing world. With Product, Sales, Marketing, and Customer Experience teams all requiring access to crucial data, researchers are being called upon to provide foresight, direction, and a single source of truth.

But they can't do it alone. In order to produce and democratize insights most effectively, market researchers need a centralized ecosystem of digital-first tools, methods, and processes. With this type of technology keeping all stakeholders in lockstep, insights professionals can fully step into their role as strategic leaders and remain indispensable within their organizations.

For more 2021 market research industry trends, keep an eye out for the State of Community and State of Qualitative Research reports, coming soon.



Discover how Fuel Cycle technology enables market research leaders to drive meaningful change with the power of an always-on insights engine.

Speak to an Expert