

# European Union Government Open Data in Market Research: Exploring Current Discussion among Stakeholders on Opportunity, Accessibility, Usability and Desired Outcomes

Olga Tregubova<sup>1</sup>, Justin O'Brien<sup>1</sup> & Martin Bellingham<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Royal Holloway School of Management, <sup>2</sup>AXA PPP Healthcare Ltd

Businesses navigating European markets are enriched by new ways open government data can create new opportunities and improve existing processes. Open data feed key insights for market segmentation, the creation of new markets and improvements in productivity. Similarly, government services can be improved with the input of proprietary data, which can provide honest and instantaneous feedback of success in government campaigns and demand for public services. Opening data encourages the growth of new services and products, thereby innovatively increasing profitability and creating value for not only government but also business and the wider economy.

The European Union is experiencing steady population growth, both organically and via accession of new member countries. Diversity within European populations, in terms of demographics, economic power, business practices and consumer culture, means that optimal strategy for organisations wishing to operate in these countries will likewise differ. Despite common trends in socio-economic and political thought, the EU is not homogenous with respect to consumer behaviour and shopping patterns. It follows that there are diverse markets therein, of varying size and market potential. To illustrate this point, these markets have individual purchasing powers ranging from 40% above to 60% below the European average.

In addition to varying economic and wealth indicators, markets within Europe possess differing societal and social contexts that must be considered when looking at the rapidly evolving demographics and their effect on retailing. Furthermore, distinctive national behaviours—rules, norms and beliefs surrounding economic activity that define or enforce socially accepted economic behaviour—contribute to differences in values surrounding governance and bureaucratic inertia, privacy risks, intellectual property rights, data quality, standards in collection and dissemination of data, as well as investment in data analysis.

A picture of these markets can be painted with the emergent tools of the open data movement. Open data originate from myriad sources including individuals, government, business and other institutions. More data

is being used and reused for purposes other than those they were originally intended, and this paper focuses on public sector information (PSI) that governments collect, produce and ideally release in performing their public task. PSI can be used in synthesis with other types of data for innumerable purposes, most relevantly strategic decision-making and market research.

To understand the role of open data as a source of competitive advantage, this essay explores its use in market research, location decisions, market segmentation, merchandising and post-sales interaction. By interviewing stakeholders in a variety of roles in government, business and data environments, as well as reviewing various country progress reports and attempting to collate comparable data sets, this research begins to identify barriers to the realisation of value from open data within the EU.

This data is an asset with the potential to revolutionise business, government, research, crisis response and day to day activities, but it demands innovative processing before it can be useful as 'value-added' or 'derived' data. Already, companies are using complex algorithms in business flows to strategically expand into new markets, create insights, perform market research and detect fraud, among other uses. As the availability of data grows, so does the impetus to harness its power, and all parties must make difficult and responsible choices about how much and which data should be released.

In the dawn of the 'data deluge', the wealth of information is in the hands of the private sector. The shoe will soon be on the other foot—the historic exclusion of profit-making organisations from public data may backfire. Future research could explore the potential framework for sharing of information between the public and private sectors that takes into account due diligence to privacy, economic growth and the greater public interest and also factors in governments' strategic view of the future of open data. Such an exchange is less likely to be successful if NSIs continue to upset and exclude other data using communities and more likely if the parties enter into a partnership early.