

# Maximizing Research Dollars

## Qualitative before Quantitative

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Karen King  
Vice President

There is a trend in many companies to place more emphasis and budget on quantitative studies rather than qualitative. Clearly, there is comfort in the numbers, and confidence in projecting behaviors or attitudes based on large, national or global sample sizes.

Quantitative is founded on the idea of asking each respondent the same battery of questions, typically “closed end” with multiple choice answers or defined scaling – in other words, pre-defined answers.

But how many times have you read the findings from a quantitative study and found yourself asking “WHY”? Why did consumers say that about my brand? Why exactly does this concept resonate with 54.7% of my target audience? Why do customers feel so strongly about my competitor? Why do I have this unsettling feeling that we’re missing critical insights into how our consumers or customers think?

And that’s the issue. While quantitative research is a powerful tool and comes in a variety of forms, it is not easy to do in a vacuum. A well-crafted quantitative study requires solid knowledge of your consumers so that a questionnaire can be crafted knowing what those pre-defined answers, or attributes, or need states might be.

Thus, I counsel my clients to think long and hard before launching big, strategically important quantitative studies without first fielding qualitative insight research. Quantitative is only as good as the questions it asks and the

answers it offers. Despite the ability to capture the voice of the respondent with a few well-placed open ends, these answers are never as rich and as thoughtful as what you find in qualitative, where the opportunity to ask “why” and to probe and clarify thoughts, feelings, perceptions and emotional drivers is interactive and “in the moment”.

The power of qualitative research is in its ability to explore – to explore hypotheses, to explore possibilities, to explore needs and values and deeply held beliefs. While quantitative research might tell you what your brand’s problem or opportunity is, it’s the qualitative insights that tell you why that is so.

How many times have you read the findings from a quantitative study and found yourself asking “WHY”?

Think of qualitative as the springboard, a powerful way to dive deeply into a problem, opportunity, segment or mindset. It’s also a great way to see consumers and customers in their natural “habitat”, e.g., in the store or at home using a product, hear how they talk about brands, products and services in their own language. It’s extremely flexible, interactive and offers essential grounding prior to focusing on the numbers and the size of a segment or opportunity for quantitative research.

For your next project, think about the importance of “Qualitative First”, and use those insights to craft the most effective quantitative study. This type of approach is very powerful and closes the circle in terms of both “Why” and “What”.

