

Using Quantitative Research Effectively

by Maya Levinson

Last month, we talked about the 10 rules of conducting focus groups with children. One of the biggest benefits of focus groups is that, since they occur in real time, they can accommodate quite a bit of flexibility. The moderator can adjust the flow of the conversation to delve deeper into kids' responses or unanticipated issues raised during the course of the group. Focus groups, the most commonly used type of qualitative research, are great when you need to get a general understanding of a certain topic or understand why kids say what they do. However, although they yield a plethora of information, the number of kids participating in a set of focus groups is usually not enough to provide reliable data that can be quantified, such as what percentage of kids prefer one concept over another.

When you're just looking to identify kids' preferences, quantitative research makes more sense. Quantitative research involves asking a standardized set of questions to a large sample of children with the goal of getting definitive answers about their preferences. Quantitative research can be used in conjunction with qualitative research or by itself.

For example, a toy company plans to enter into the activity toys arena and wants to understand what motivates children. Is it the process, the materials, or the end result that appeals to them? To understand what emotional needs these toys fulfill, focus groups would be appropriate. But then, when the company has incorporated this feedback into product concepts or prototypes and wants to measure the strength of each concept relative to the others and to the competition, quantitative research is necessary. The data garnered from quantitative feedback will numerically rank the concepts, enabling the company to decide which products to launch. The relative strength of a given concept against a known competitor will also give the toy company some powerful sales ammunition.

Another company wants to identify the target market and the age "sweet spot" for a particular product category. It would conduct a quantitative study among a wide range of consumers, delving into their current pur-

chase and usage behavior. The company can then identify which age group, gender, or any other demographic group is most likely to be interested in this type of product. If it is later interested in probing more in depth into what drives the interest in this category, the company might follow up with focus groups.

The majority of quantitative research is done in person, with respondents either pre-recruited to come to a research facility or intercepted at a mall or online. Some considerations to keep in mind are:

- Be specific about your objective. Are you trying to rank the appeal of specific concepts? Determine the importance of various attributes (color, size, functionality, packaging). Make your questions specific and be sure the answers you get will give you actionable, decision-making data.

- In order to get statistically significant, reliable, and valid results, you have to use a reasonably large sample. The sub-groups you want to look at will often determine the size of your group. Do you want to gauge differences between boys and girls? Between 6–8 year olds or 9–11 year olds? As a rough rule of thumb, each sub-group should consist of approximately 100 respondents.

- The concepts being tested can be presented via photos, drawings, or video, but should look as much like the actual product as possible. Each concept being tested, as well as the controls, should be shown in the same medium and with the same degree of finish. If one concept is shown as a line drawing and the other as a color photo, obviously the results will be biased.

- In order to measure how appealing new toy concepts are, they should be compared to a known product or control. If they are merely compared to each other, the best of the bunch may still be a weak concept. However, if you have a benchmark with a proven marketplace performance, you can determine how strong your best concepts are by comparison and then be able to predict their marketplace performance. Since children, especially young ones, are not aware of prices, the control and test products should all be of a similar price range.

- If you are using a rating scale, it should be meaningful to kids. Using an adult scale, such as "would definitely buy" or "would probably buy," is not as relevant to your target as "really cool" or "sort of cool."

Types of Quantitative Studies:

CONCEPT TESTING: Several concepts have been developed and the company wants to identify the strongest one(s). Quantitative testing will help identify who these concepts appeal to (by age) and can provide insight into what drives the appeal by having children compare concept attributes such as "most fun to play with" or "coolest looking."

ATTITUDE AND USAGE STUDY: These can be done for a product category and/or a brand. It measures consumers' awareness of a brand, their perception of the brand, their purchase behavior (who influences the decision, is it planned or impulse, etc.), and their usage.

TRACKING STUDY: Similar to an attitude and usage study, a tracking study is repeated over time to measure changes in awareness and attitudes toward brands over time. These studies can foreshadow a brand's increasing or decreasing marketplace performance.

ADVERTISING TESTING: This research can measure an ad's capability of breaking through the clutter and how memorable it will be to children. The results are then compared to norms established by testing hundreds of toy commercials with a proven success or failure record.

Both qualitative and quantitative studies play an important role in toy research and often complement each other. It is important to understand both types so that you can make an educated decision about which to pursue in the various stages of product development in order to garner the most actionable results. ■

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