

Using mixed method: both qualitative and quantitative research

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Background

Once upon a time there was a successful line of convenience stores. We'll call this group of stores " QuickStop". At some point a staff-member realised that QuickStop seemed to be patronised by many more men than women. This was passed along to the management team and they asked the store tellers to informally keep track of the proportions of men to women who came into their stores. It turned out that the theory seemed to hold true, and in fact far more men patronized QuickStop than did women.

This information was passed along to the other managers at other QuickStop stores and they found the same trend. This received some higher level management attention and they began to wonder why this was occurring. Eventually management made the decision that this was too large a group of potential customers to lose, and a decision was eventually made to study this phenomenon and to understand why it was taking place, and if anything could be done about it.

Research Objective

A research project was designed to understand how women felt about shopping at QuickStop stores and why. It was decided that this research should be qualitative and the specific methodology would be In-depth-Interviews (this is research with one professional interviewer and one respondent at a time - in this case the decision was made because there were suspicions that there could be sensitive issues that wouldn't be discussed as candidly in a group setting).

Qualitative Research

About two dozen current or potential female customers were paid to come into a research facility to discuss the use of convenience stores in general, and later in the interviews the discussion was directed specifically to QuickStop convenience stores, in particular. The results were very surprising to the management team. The major qualitative findings included the following:

- i. Women viewed convenience stores to be primarily designed for men, with little or no consideration for women,
- ii. The bathrooms at convenience stores were believed to be the dirtiest that could be found in a city - " gross" was the most common description - and that perception permeated everything that women felt about convenience stores in general
- iii. QuickStop was seen as one of the worst of convenience stores " kind of the place for a man to buy gas, get a six-pack of cheap beer and cigarettes, but not the kind of place I want to go".

Quantitative Research

Once the management team had an understanding of what issues they faced with female customers, they felt that they needed to understand how broadly these beliefs were held. Now they needed to get some hard numbers, and that meant that they needed to conduct quantitative market research. The research objective for this phase of research were:

- i. Understand how female customers of QuickStop differ from those that don't regularly visit these stores.
- ii. Understand whether or not a renovation of QuickStop could entice each group to visit more frequently (or at all depending on whether the respondent currently avoided QuickStop entirely).

For the quantitative phase of research they decided to conduct 250 telephone interviews with a combination of female respondents. The requirements to participate in this phase of research were that: half of the respondents stated that they had used QuickStop at least five times in the last year, and the other half admitted to intentionally avoiding QuickStop altogether, although they did use other brands of convenience stores. The major results from the quantitative phase indicated that:

- a. Over 76% of all female QuickStop customers were women under 30 years old, without children, while women with children and with higher incomes were 5 times less likely to shop at QuickStop
- b. The good news was that of the women who didn't currently use QuickStop, 64% said that if these stores were to update their color schemes, clean up their bathrooms and update their health and feminine products that they would be willing to try QuickStop again.

The two phases of research (qualitative + quantitative) gave the QuickStop management team a very good understanding of where they currently stood with female customers and why. Their quantitative research also indicated that those women who were not currently using their stores would "forgive"

them if they changed their ways. Their decision now was to decide if gaining more middle-aged women as customers was worth the cost of updating their stores and spending more money to keep them clean and neat, and better stocked with the types of products that middle-aged women with children needed.

Research note: in general when conducting two phases of research (in this case qualitative and quantitative market research) it's most often the case that the first phase (qualitative research) is conducted first as a "lead-in". Qualitative research tends to help the management team understand the underlying issues, and the second phase (quantitative in this case) helps to understand how pervasive/wide spread these feelings/attitudes are among a certain target audience.