



# IS YOUR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH HELPFUL OR HARMFUL?

A GUIDE TO USING THE RIGHT  
RESOURCES TO ENSURE THE  
QUALITY OF YOUR INSIGHTS

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# INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is essential to gaining a thorough understanding of customer behavior. It offers an in-depth exploration of consumers, providing the ‘why?’ to quantitative research’s ‘what?’.

As qualitative experts, here at L&E we know that good quality qualitative research can only be conducted by companies whose panels are built by and for qualitative researchers. Of course we know this, but with this white paper we now have the data to prove it!

We brought together the thinking of three experts on qualitative and quantitative research to create a guide to conducting high quality qualitative research correctly. To do this, we looked at recent work by David F. Harris, President at Insight & Measurement, comparing different methods of recruitment. We included work by our own Renee Wyckoff, Research Design Engineer at L&E, into respondent motivation. And finally, we integrated an in-depth interview with Tia Maurer, Group Scientist at Procter & Gamble. We are indebted to all three of them in helping put this paper together.

This paper will provide a guide to completing qualitative research that allows you to get the best quality data for your time and money.

# THE QUALITATIVE PROBLEM

**Maintaining high quality qualitative research in a world where everything is faster and cheaper can be a challenge. But our research shows that this challenge can be overcome. Right now, there is a growing industry trend of using quantitative panels to recruit for qualitative research. The assumption is that tapping into a ready-made resource of respondents on a quantitative online panel will save money and time. However, getting good qualitative data requires a company that understands how to recruit respondents specifically for qualitative research and how to engage them during the research itself.**

At L&E, we have studied the most effective methods of recruiting qualitative research participants and have taken the time to learn panelists' motivations for completing research so that we can engage them better. We know that the best results come from qualitative panelists who are prepared for the tasks they will complete during a survey, and that it is critical to only use data from engaged and honest participants.

It's our view that companies that are not specialized in providing resources for qualitative research will cost more money, take longer and provide poorer quality data for clients.







# OPTIMIZING RECRUITMENT

**The first step to getting good quality qualitative data is ensuring that you are speaking to the right people in the first place. As previously mentioned, it is often assumed that tapping into a ready-made quantitative resource of respondents on a panel will save money and time. But, when the expectations of quantitative and qualitative panelists are so different, how effective is this method in reality?**

Earlier this year, David Harris completed a study comparing the results of recruiting 30 people from L&E’s own qualitative panel, to the responses of 30 people recruited from a quantitative panel. The project was for a two-day online study, and compared the quantitative and qualitative panels in terms

of quality and quantity of responses and the operational challenges of the recruitment process.

The activities were designed to see whether quantitative panelists could provide adequate answers to simple qualitative style questions; to compare the difference in the quantity and quality of content of the answers and to determine to what extent both groups could follow a set of specific guidelines.

## QUALITATIVE



## QUANTITATIVE



The research found that the project was much easier to complete using a qualitative panel, than the quantitative one. As you can see from the chart, it took three days to get 31 completions from the qualitative panel for day 1 and 30 completions for day 2, whereas using the quantitative panel it took three weeks to get 32 completed responses for day 1 and 29 for day 2. It was also concerning that 74% of those who took the screener to check suitability from the quantitative panel did not meet the demographics they had been noted down as having in the panel company’s database. For the qualitative panel, on the other hand, virtually all of the participants who did not qualify past the screening did not qualify due to availability during the time period.







# ENGAGING RESPONDENTS

**Recruiting the right people to optimize data quality is just the first step. The second step is understanding how to engage participants during the study. There are different reasons why respondents might lose engagement while taking a survey. Sometimes it's because they're distracted by their surroundings, but often it's because the survey itself is too long, poorly designed, or not optimized for specific platforms (such as mobile).**

Understanding the motivations of research participants is important in order to know how to treat them well and maintain engagement. This was the idea behind the research by L&E's Renee Wyckoff. She wanted to find out what motivates people to take part in qualitative market research in the first place, and therefore how studies can be optimized to maintain engagement.

Renee launched an emotion-based study which took 200 members of the L&E database through a series of fun qualitative exercises. These included asking participants to record themselves talking about how doing research makes them feel, choosing

images to help express their feelings towards participating in research and a rapid response imagery selection.\*

She found out that although monetary incentives are key and should definitely not be removed from market research, there are other motivating factors. People take part in research to feel a part of a larger community; they want to be 'in the know' about new products or services before anyone else; and they want to see the results of their responses in these products. Participants want to be heard and they want to have tangible evidence of their participation.

\* Special thanks to Aha!, LivingLens and Mindsight by Isobar, for graciously donating their technology solutions for this research.



The study also flagged some key reasons for disengagement. The number one reason is the frustration of being rejected or not chosen for studies. Potential participants receive calls and emails - and go through a long screener - but then don't get selected to participate in the study. These rejections put people off from applying to take part in future research. It is also felt that research asks a lot from people, and doesn't provide enough in return.

As we said, the study showed that respondents crave community, and like the feeling of being involved. So, qualitative panel communities should be strengthened, to emphasize a feeling of belonging among

participants. The impact of the research needs to be shared back to participants, so they see its value. People feel like they're asked a lot of, so they need to be asked less of and not irritated with long screeners and surveys. Researchers also need to find ways to soften the blow when people don't qualify for surveys.


By completing this research, we have been able to optimize our own participants' experience in qualitative research. By putting the emphasis on the people whose time and opinions we rely upon every day, we are able to achieve high quality data that clients can rely on.

**Participants want to be heard and they want to have tangible evidence of their participation.**



# WHY QUANT PANELS ARE BAD FOR QUAL

You may not realize you are making multi-million dollar business decisions using data from a click farm



With the rise of technology, we are increasingly surrounded by fake news and alternative facts that leave us questioning what is and isn't real. Unfortunately, with the increase in online panels and click farms, researchers also have to ask what is and isn't real when looking at consumer data. But this is a quantitative issue, so how does it impact qualitative? For qualitative researchers using quantitative panels these issues are very relevant. If they are not using specialist qualitative companies that follow best practices to generate their data, respondent fraud can still be a serious challenge.

We spoke to Tia Maurer, Group Scientist at Procter & Gamble about the problem of data quality. Tia cites a statistic from Jeff Miller's 2006 Research Conference Report, that between 8-25% of quantitative panelists are disengaged or frauds.\* However, Tia points out that it's not only individual liars that market research is trying to eliminate. You may not realize you are making multi-million dollar business decisions using data from a click farm, where hundreds of smart phones are wired up to complete the same surveys simultaneously, with no real person behind the data. Shockingly, Procter & Gamble used an online survey to

gather data from 1000 panelists and found that 30% of the resulting data was generated by a bot.

So what can be done to ensure high quality data?

- Complete good quality qualitative research prior to quantitative studies to verify results - investing in good quality qualitative research that uses qualitative recruitment and best practices for engagement is essential to understanding the full picture of consumer behavior and can help to flag suspicious responses in quantitative research.

\* <https://www.burke.com/Library/Articles/Jeff%20Miller%20RCR%20PDF.pdf>



- Avoid quantitative panel companies when completing any qualitative research – they’re slower, more expensive and participants’ lack of preparation for the tasks means poorer quality data.
- Conduct qualitative research with quality over quantity in mind – looking for low cost, speedy qualitative research will often produce the opposite results, with poorer quality data, too. You’re looking for in-depth gems of insight, so why rush?
- Use your common sense – often research will provide data that just seems unlikely. Tia provides the example of seeing a study where the data suggested that men use facemasks more than women, and eye treatments just as frequently(!). Tia used her judgement to assume this was bogus data.

‘We need to apply best practices which will help enable our consumer research to better inform our business decisions and give us less bias and less noise to make sure we’re getting the right decision,’ Tia says.

Avoiding best practices for any data collection method poses a threat to the client using that data. By conducting poor quality qualitative research, clients will be misinformed when making crucial decisions. Clients need insights to decrease risks in their decision making and researchers need to conduct research to the highest standard so that this is possible.





# CONCLUSION

**For the best quality qualitative research, researchers need to use companies whose panels are built specifically for qualitative research. Recruiting through companies who aren't specialized in qualitative means participants won't be prepared for the depth of answers, or length of surveys that qualitative studies require. Likewise, for the best results, qualitative research needs to be conducted by companies who understand consumer behavior, who know how to engage respondents to ensure research is optimized, and who abide by best practices for removing suspicious responses.**

Completing qualitative research without these processes can potentially waste time and money and is likely to leave companies uninformed about key business decisions such as product launches and campaigns that can cause top-line revenues to suffer.

By following our recommendations, researchers can ensure not only that their data is of the best quality, but that the insights they generate, and the decisions made based on them lead to success for their clients. In a digital, always on world, the voice of the consumer is needed now more than ever, and qualitative research is the best way to let that voice be heard - let's make sure that it is truly authentic.

**Special thanks** to our technology partners who volunteered their solutions towards this research:

- » Aha! Online Qualitative Research - Online Qualitative Board
- » LivingLens - Video Analytics Tool
- » Mindsight Direct by Isobar - Emotional Response Tool



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(877) 344-1574

[bidrequest@leresearch.com](mailto:bidrequest@leresearch.com)

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