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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### QUANLITATIVE RESEARCH OF PUBLIX CUSTOMERS

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#### Abstract

Exploring people's intentions when purchasing is important for making strategic plans for promoting products in the supermarket. The author will conduct qualitative phenomenological research to explain why the customers in Publix chose certain products and their behaviors of shopping. The research questions include: Is the development of Publix's private products a way to gain win-win benefits? What are the feelings of customers when they choose products? Participant observation will help the author describe customers' behaviors and thoughts. The phenomenological study will help in understanding participants' concerns and needs. This research will give ideas of improving marketing strategies and explore interests.

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#### Introduction:-

##### Quantitative Research of Publix Customers:

The author tried to discover the influencing factors of consumption. The author sought to determine the original feelings and experiences of participants in Publix. The author tried to find the cultural differences of participants and illustrated how Publix could improve customer service and the quality of products. Selecting a natural context for this research was important. The author tried to find an area where she could seek participants. Miami is an international city with deep cultural and historical backgrounds. The author believed that interesting findings would occur in a Publix in Miami. So, the author chose a Publix at 9400 Harding Avenue, Surfside, North Miami, as a targeted place to do this research.

Before the observation, the author designed appropriate surveys. The author chose a small-scale sample and observed 15 people in the Publix. The author discovered the viewpoints of customers and systematically summarized the influential factors on the purchase of products. In addition, the author used the phenomenological research method to discover the conversations in order to reveal the experiences of participants (Finlay, 2009). The author tried to understand "why" and "what" the participants had experienced, and "how" they felt about it.

##### Data Analysis:

Analyzing data and transcripts helped the author understand the opinions of Publix customers. The author evaluated the credibility of data. Taking notes helped the author organize the information and capture ideas in different conversations. The author analyzed quantitative data to understand the market of Publix. What the author needed was multi-dimensional pictures of the specific participants. This included perceived responsibilities of customers, services, and goods.

In this research observation, the participants were 40% male and 60% female. In the age structures, most participants' ages were from 20 to 35. 70% of the participants had high school certificates or higher education. 40%

of participants believed that the private brands are sub-par. 55% of participants were satisfied with what they bought. Through observation, the most popular Publix private brand item is Publix purified water.

There were several tasks in the author's research, which could have been a challenge for the author. The author needed to choose a natural setting with various participants and have reliable resources to build rapport, and needed to choose appropriate field methods to be able to support ideas (Heidegger, 1988). The author has chosen the phenomenology method to help the author better understand individuals' ideas and common experiences (Mearns, 1985). They could be teachers, retired seniors, housewives, or businessmen. The author needed to carefully choose individuals to analyze personal experiences.

Other challenges included how to identify participants' experiences and to pose clear solutions to these challenges. The author needed to recognize that they might be possible participants and are worthy for the study. The author needed to use qualitative research methods to clarify the reliability of the interpretation and representation of the participant survey. The author has learned that the purpose of interpreting data is to understand a situation. It must be objective research on human behaviors and thinking. Then the author checked the reliability and validity to make sure they were suitable for this quantitative research to find out if they had any similarities or differences and confirm research data.

#### **Assessments of Customer Consciousness:**

The fundamental goal of cooperative inquiry is to develop a goal, learn how to interact with others, and gain their trust (Saldaña, 2009). Some customers indicated that they preferred to choose the self-developed products if the supermarket had a promotion on its own private products. They said they also believe there was no big differences between private brands and other companies' brands. More than half of participants said that they felt good about the self-developed products, and around one-third of participants implied that they were willing to recommend the private brand to their friends or families. Through distance observation, the author found that people would like to choose Publix purified water, chicken, and hamburgers.

#### **Price Factor:**

The author noticed that building friendly relationships would help in improving the research process. The author tried to be close to these participants, carefully observe their behaviors of shopping, and let them provide ideas of how to choose a good private brand. The author identified a phenomenon and described that all participants have a common opinion toward choosing a lower price in Publix. What the author found was that the price effect provides insights on the impact of market business choices, which would also affect profits in Publix. The more details about the customers' preferences the author could find were helpful in understanding the business model and in learning how to gain higher profits for Publix.

After interviewing several customers, the author noticed that their educational background and income level might impact their purchase and choices of self-developed products. The more income and higher education they had, the more focus they had on the quality of self-developed products. However, people with medium and low incomes preferred to choose self-developed products of a lower price when it came to a discount. In addition, the quality might not be the priority for them to choose products.

#### **Product Placement:**

The author observed that customers automatically picked the products that were close to them. It means that the placement of the products is important to promote self-developed products. Recommendations for Publix include focusing on specific customer groups, making sure the placement of self-developed products is obvious for people, and keeping a reasonable price to attract customers and stimulate consumption.

The author chose open-ended questions on participants' opinions and attitudes and asked them to explain how they would like to protect their interests and values (Barbara & Benjamin, 2006). The author asked several participants about their ideas of what their thoughts were with regard to the importance of the packs of products. Their answers mentioned that if they saw a nice pack, they would assume that it might be good quality. However, the author observed few people staring at the expiration date in milk products, instead of looking and comparing the different brands between Publix and others. This means the quality of products are more important than the package appearances.

**Personality Factor:**

The author encouraged participants to give full descriptions of their experiences, feelings, and memories. The people with introverted personalities tended to be slower when choosing, and they were sometimes hesitant to compare self-developed products with other brands. The people with outgoing personalities acted relatively quicker and made their shopping decisions faster than the people with introverted personalities.

**Age and Gender Factors:**

The author needed to be honest with participants and looked for key words in the conversations in order to have more sincere conversations. One of the considerations was to maintain an ethical manner, and let the participants know that the research purpose was to observe and document their shopping activities. The author tried to understand participants by observing their behaviors and wrote details of others' shopping habits from an outsider viewpoint.

The author observed the customers' age ranges from 15 to 50 and found that there was a trend that young people between age 15 to 35 prefer to choose Publix brand when it came to discount. For example, some of them felt the chips in Publix were good as compared to other brands. The participants with ages between 36 to 50 preferred to choose lower price first over the taste. Some of them told the author that they could not tell the differences between spring water of another brand with the purified water of Publix. In addition, the author found an interesting phenomenon that the more attention customers paid on the price, the more they would choose Publix private brand because they were sometimes on sale.

Most of participants said that they were confident with the self-developed products and they trust the quality and were willing to buy them. One lady in Publix said that she usually only chose to buy certain food in Publix because she trusted Publix. This led her to believe that most products in Publix, including self-developed products, might be a good option for her.

**Religious Factors:**

The author noticed that the religious people liked to choose certain Kosher food in Publix. The author walked to a lady with a kerchief on her head and saw that she was choosing Publix brand salad and carrots. The author tried to have conversation with her. She said she is Jewish, a single mother, and 36 years old. She told the author that she usually came to Publix twice a week. The reasons why she chose to buy food in Publix was because she trusted the quality of the food, and she liked their self-developed brands, such as Publix salads, Publix organic juices, and their discount Kosher products.

**Analytic Induction:**

Analytic induction is a research strategy aimed at systematically developing causal explanations for types of phenomena (Bernard, 2000). The author collected additional data to search for a negative case to disprove the hypothesis. The author interviewed customers and tried to gain their opinions. The research showed that most people want to choose products with lower price. The author tried to observe and investigate the reasons participants doubted the self-developed products, stating "the Publix did not advertise their self-developed products." "The pack of the Publix milk seems too simple and doubts its quality," "these low price self-developed products might be expired and that is why they have lower prices," "I get used to buying the same brand all the time," or "I will not buy something I am not familiar with." For example, when the author went to the chips section, one lady was choosing chips, and she chose the Publix brand. She told the author that she went to Publix five times per week, she chose Publix chips because they tasted nicer and she liked the toasted taste. She did not like the Publix salad and deli food, because she thought some of the colors of the products seemed uncomfortable to her, and she doubted their qualities and tastes. Also, when the author asked several people who did not choose the Publix brand products, the participants indicated that they preferred to choose other brands instead of choosing Publix's own brands due to their habits.

**Customer Service:**

The Publix that the author had observed is big and has substantial goods there. The author observed that the business pattern, quality of service, and enterprise brands have a great impact on customers when they choose where to go shopping. When the author went to the cashier desk, it was observed that the cashier would ask people, "Would you like to double bag?" or showed politeness to customers by saying, "Have a good one." The author could tell they had earnest and enthusiastic service attitudes, which gave people a good impression. Also, the author noticed that the service staff had put on new products on the goods shelf to make sure they always provided fresh food. People

preferred to choose fresh vegetables and fruits in Publix. One of ways to improve the services in Publix is to cultivate and educate their staff, which might help to promote Publix's private products.

#### **Family Factor:**

When the author walked to the milk section, a 39-year-old lady said that she is from Miami, she has a master's degree, and works in a college. She carried around 10 bottles of Publix brand milks, without looking at other brands. The author was wondering why she made her purchase decision quickly. She responded that she has seven family members including several kids. She usually went to Publix three times per week, to make sure each kid had enough milk and food. She said that she usually only chose Publix brand milk because she believed they were fresh and clean. She also indicated that she likes the packs of the Publix milk because they are eye-catching to her. After choosing milk, she planned to choose some fresh Publix bread and eggs. She discussed that she did not care about the price, she just loves to choose Publix brands.

#### **Location Factor:**

This study showed that most participants would choose a Publix near their house because it would be convenient for them, especially for an older person who could not carry too many things. There was a customer who was over 60-years-old that said sometimes he wanted to buy a thing in Walmart, but Publix is closer to him, and compared to Walmart, Publix brand also has good deals, which encouraged him to think it was valuable to buy things from Publix. This case meant that choosing a location is an important factor when people purchase goods.

#### **Value Consciousness:**

It is important for the author to understand these common experiences of participants in order to develop a deeper understanding about a fact (Measor, 1985). The author noticed that male customers preferred to choose "value" goods for themselves. One participant said that that best value for him was comparing the benefits offered by different products and decided he was getting his money's worth from what he chose. For example, the author met a 68-year-old man from Iran, who worked in a university, while he was comparing prices between different brands. He tried to pick Publix brand ice cream. The author walked to him and asked why he chose a Publix brand. He told the author that he likes Publix ice cream rather than the ice cream in other supermarkets because they have better quality compared to the other brands and lower prices. This customer said that he could not tell the difference between the tastes of the different brands. Even so, he preferred to trust Publix's brand because he believed that the products in Publix are better, and the Publix's brand with a lower price was attractive to him and his children.

If the Publix company should provide good products and services, they need to manage product development. This qualitative research practice helped people gain insights on why customers take certain actions for shopping. This research aimed to gain a better understanding of business and help people understand how to make decisions for improving marketing brands.

#### **Conclusion:-**

Participant observation allowed the author to have deeper viewpoints about customers' cultures and customs. The qualitative research could help people understand the thoughts and feelings of participants and their experiences (Measor, 1985). This study showed that when people went shopping, not all their decisions are rational, which drives the final choice. Instead, evidence shows that consumers' emotions and personal preferences would impact their choices. In addition, this research revealed Publix could develop a long-term relationship with customers and make win-win marketing plans. One important factor is price consciousness. Most participants would choose something cheaper and of good quality. People are confident in the quality of products from Publix. Improving service quality is important in order to maintain competitive power with other supermarkets. Collecting information and receiving ideas from different customers would help the managers to determine their markets. It is important to consider the needs of customers and regularly gather information from surveys in order to improve the quality of products, as well as understand the preferences of customers.

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