WHITE PAPER

Introducing The Modern Family Report: Melding Quant and Qual to Reframe our Understanding of Modern Families

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Background and Objective
It’s no secret that families have changed drastically over the last few decades. The changing demographics, family composition and rise of Millennials into the ranks of America’s parents have all been well documented in our industry and trumpeted in the press. But what is not as well understood is how these enormous changes will affect modern family consumer habits: how families choose brands and how product marketers should be communicating with them.

FocusVision, The Family Room LLC and Lightspeed GMI recently collaborated on a research project, The Modern Family Report, to understand the drivers and dynamics of the new modern family. We wanted to understand how consumer decision-making occurred within today’s families.

• How do modern families make consumer decisions?
• What does the modern family look like?
• What generational differences exist between Millennials and Gen X?
• What cultural differences exist between Hispanic, African American and Gen Pop?

Results of this fascinating peek under the hood of modern families will be shared through two white papers and a series of individual releases outlining some of the most notable findings we uncovered. In the this first white paper, we will provide an overview of the methodological challenges of this study—and the inventive solution we created—along with some initial headline findings that will give a preview of just how different modern families have become.

In the second white paper, to be released later this summer, we will provide even more findings from The Modern Family Report and ideas on do-differents for marketers seeking to build existing brands or create ones better aligned with the modern family decision-making dynamics. Across both papers, one thing will be abundantly clear: modern families have changed beyond recognition, requiring a fundamentally different approach to insight gathering and brand building.
A New Methodology

It was immediately apparent that capturing the narrative and interplay of today’s family would require a novel approach to research, as a complex web of interaction takes place between parent and child when making purchase decisions. Our hypothesis was that understanding the modern family required an understanding of the family as an ecosystem in which decisions are made collaboratively. In other words, the investigation needed to center around how and what the family agrees upon as a whole—not just what individuals in the family want. The FocusVision suite of products was uniquely positioned to provide a set of research tools that would:

1. Provide a full family view including mom, dad, kids, tweens and teens—observations among all family members would be necessary to uncover interactions
2. Fuse the robust quantitative data with the rich insights from qualitative research
3. Provide families with the tools for expression: to show us how they feel vs. what they think
4. Engage families in a natural way—participants tend to be less expressive or frank in the presence of a researcher or controlled environment

Getting the full family view

For our quantitative data, the study started with a 10-minute online survey. Getting the full family view required a rigorous sample frame, and this was found through the support of Lightspeed GMI. The study interviewed 600 Millennial and 600 Gen X families. Quotas were in place to be balanced on ethnicity, gender and age. In the survey, we asked participants about family dynamics and decision-making for a variety of categories including meals, vacation, personal care items and electronic purchases. Parents were interviewed first, followed by a child (6 to 17 year olds) to get the full family view.

Furthermore, the study utilized FocusVision’s Decipher software’s responsive survey design. Once a respondent came through the online survey, device and screen size were detected. The survey automatically rendered to optimal usability whether the user was on a PC, tablet or smartphone. This ensured proper sample representation, especially among high mobile-use populations like youths and ethnic groups that were a part of our study.

Video Testimonials—Fusing quantitative and qualitative methods

Traditionally, online surveys have employed open-end text questions to elaborate on answers to previous questions. The Decipher technology and survey platform enables respondents to submit video open ends. This is essentially a video capture via a webcam or mobile video camera (see Figure 1, next page). The idea here is to provide a platform for the respondents to express themselves and offer a human story around the numbers. In our experience, these sorts of videos provide stakeholders with audio-visual testimonials that resonate much more powerfully than tables and charts. Marketers can build insights and create campaigns around human stories.
Video testimonials: how it works

1. Instruction text
2. Click on “Upload” button
3. Respondent records a video using built-in video function
4. Once the file has been uploaded, respondent hits continue

Figure 1: Video testimonial capture in an online survey

A video open end was included in our survey as a follow up to a prior question. Responses were quite rich in detail and color and allowed us to connect a person’s rating scale response with a story on a more emotional level (Figure 2).

Do you believe education is more about: getting good grades OR developing life skills?

• “Although it would be nice for my son to be able to develop his own social network, and probably make him a whole lot of money.

• But if he’s a blithering idiot without an education, I’m sure that money will dwindle away fast and he’ll be left with nothing.

• So I think it’d be better for him to get a quality education. He’ll be able to still make that social network and do all type of other positive things…”

Figure 2. Video open ends provide a visual/audio narrative on answers to a prior rating scale questions. These testimonials also serve as an audition to the qualitative phase.
To keep the quantitative and qualitative research intertwined, the online survey served as a recruiting ground for the qualitative phase. Here, the video testimonials acted as a unifying link. While the survey data profiled the appropriate mix of participants to recruit, the video testimonials helped find the most articulate and engaged participants as well as interesting insights for follow up. The content of the video—and willingness to submit one—essentially served as an audition for screening participants to the qualitative research to follow.

**Digital Qualitative—Providing the tools for expression**
Participants for the qualitative phase were screened and scheduled while in field with the online survey. This way we could begin the qualitative research immediately without a break in continuity. Participants could elaborate on the quantitative feedback they submitted.

FocusVision’s Revelation tool offered the means to engage families in a non-intrusive and natural way. Revelation is a digital mobile and web platform that allows consumers to participate in qualitative research activities, such as mobile diaries, insight communities and bulletin boards—all with the ease of a social media app.

The qualitative design centered around a series of passion points or themes. Daily online activities were provided for parents and kids to share and express their feelings about each of these themes, which included “Family First,” “Education” and “Living a Healthy Life.” The exercises involved recording video testimonials, letter writing, photo uploads and metaphor picture choice (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. A qualitative exercise: Metaphor picture choice.](image-url)
Through it all we were able to bring consumer experiences to life with more than 200 videos and 600 images. For the text comments and letter writing exercises, analytic visualizations such as word clouds and word trees helped quickly move the study from data to insights (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Text visualizations on the Revelation’s platform: Word cloud and word trees.

The Outcome

**Delivering Quantitative and Qualitative Results**

The research helped discover new insights into the realities of modern families. Today’s families have evolved from a top-down hierarchy, where the mom is the gatekeeper of all decisions, to a more complex web of collaborative decision-making among family members. Both quantitative and qualitative data were uniquely situated to drive and communicate this message.

The quantitative research provided confidence in the data with hard evidence. Half of Millennial parents view their child as a best friend, while just over a third of Gen X parents view their child as a best friend (see Figure 5, next page). And the number of moms today saying they have the “final say” on family decisions has fallen to one in four compared to previous generation of parents. Many family decisions today are, in fact, made with the parent seeking and weighing the child’s input first.
Meanwhile, the qualitative data connected the quantitative data to real stories and expanded on the insights. Figure 6 shows an example of how participants expressed themselves in the metaphor picture exercise. The newer generation of Millennial parents is driving the collaborative family dynamics and encouraging their kids to take leadership with decision-making. A Millennial child thought the elephant calf best represented his role in the family and reported: *My Mom and Dad help me a lot of what decision I need to take, support me and provide guidance.* In contrast, Gen X moms still dictate much of the decision-making. One Gen X child identified with the picture of the mother duck leading her ducklings and said: *My parents are very protective of me and my sister. We can’t really do anything without their permission.*

![Figure 5. Quantitative data provides the hard evidence that a shift in parent-child relationships has taken place.](image)

![Figure 6. Qualitative research enhances data with human stories.](image)
Other Modern Family discoveries will be explored in our next white paper on this topic, like the five frequently used family decision-making typologies. These range from one extreme where the parent assumes control (“Because I said so”) and the other extreme where kids “cut loose.” In between these extremes are various forms of family collaboration. Look for our next release, where we will describe how to determine which decision-making style best aligns with your brand. We will explore in-depth findings that fall into categories like these (for example):

- Parents As Peers
- The Abdication Of Parental Authority And “Gatekeeping”
- A New Millennial Approach To Parenting
- The Rise Of Collaborative Decision Making
- The New Millennial Mom Passion Points

By integrating both quantitative and qualitative information in The Modern Family Study, we are able to provide a unified narrative on the generational shift in parent/child relationships and how decision-making occurs in the family. Ultimately, the research insights should help companies understand the dynamic and purchase behavior process around their brand and how to target those of influence. This hybrid approach to research provides business managers not only with the hard analytics provided by robust data, but also deeper insights and inspiration from human-centered narratives. Quantitative and qualitative techniques don’t have to reside in silos, but can simultaneously work together in a seamless way.

Melding Qualitative and Quantitative to Reframe our Understanding of Modern Families

Interested in melding quantitative and qualitative research methods? Contact FocusVision at 800-433-8128, info@focusvision.com or visit www.focusvision.com.

You may also contact The Family Room, LLC, at info@familyroomllc.com and Lightspeed GMI at fkelly@lightspeedresearch.com.