

## **Qualitative Research: Aldi**

Nancy X. Huang, John DeAngelis, Kate Wollerton, and Camille Crawford

Flagler College

COM 303: Public Relations Research

Professor Hammick

March 14, 2025

## Contents

<a href="#">Executive Summary</a>	3
<a href="#">Introduction</a>	4
<a href="#">Problem Statement</a>	5
<a href="#">Research Objectives</a>	6
<a href="#">Research Methods</a>	7
<a href="#">Findings</a>	10
<a href="#">Future Research</a>	13
<a href="#">Appendices</a>	15

## **Qualitative Research: Aldi**

Considering all the research and data, Aldi needs to pivot its focus toward the 18-24 age group, a demographic emerging as significant spenders amid inflation. This group values convenience over cost, increasing their engagement in online grocery shopping. However, Aldi's limited store presence in local areas has led these consumers to explore alternative options, potentially impacting Aldi's ability to capture this market. The challenge lies in understanding how this group's preference for convenience and digital shopping habits influences their choice of grocery stores, particularly where Aldi's accessibility is limited.

To address this, further research is needed, combining qualitative methods like focus groups and interviews with quantitative data collection. This approach will provide deeper insights into the shopping behaviors of this demographic and guide Aldi in adapting its strategies. Through the steps of qualitative analysis; reviewing the problem, examining data, defining the theme, and organizing the results, the following was analyzed. Key findings reveal that convenience, cost efficiency, and brand trust are significant factors influencing grocery shopping decisions. Proximity and ease of access are critical, as shoppers prioritize stores that are nearby and easy to reach. Familiarity with stores or brands also play a role in decision-making. Advertising efforts actually have a limited impact when it comes to groceries. Specific to Aldi, the brand is perceived as affordable and community-oriented, though its store ambiance receives mixed reviews. Its low prices appeal to many consumers but may not fully align with the younger demographic's preference for convenience-driven shopping experiences. By addressing these consumer priorities—convenience, cost efficiency, and trust—Aldi can refine its branding and operational strategies to better connect with this target audience.

## **Introduction**

Going on further, the chosen targeted demographic for the focus group are younger college students, ages 18-21, living in the St. Augustine area. This age range is the current rising top spender, making them a key demographic for Aldi. However, Aldi has a limited number of locations in comparison to other grocery stores, causing many individuals within this demographic to shop at competitor stores due to convenience. To get a deeper understanding of this problem, qualitative research was conducted to understand the shopping habits, preferences, and motivations of this target demographic.

Specific informational needs include first-hand accounts from 18-24-year-olds about their shopping trends, perceptions of Aldi, and their preferences for convenience in grocery shopping. A combination of qualitative research methods, such as focus groups or interviews, alongside quantitative data collection, will offer a comprehensive understanding of this audience's shopping behaviors and how Aldi can adjust its strategies to better align with their expectations. Our previous research has also found that the opportunity most worthy of marketing research is the potential for Aldi to increase its advertising. This research would focus on the target demographic, consumers aged 18-24. Conducting research on the target demographic, and why they choose the grocery stores they currently shop at, will help the brand resolve any current issues and better strategize in the future.

## **Problem Statement**

Aldi's motivating factors for this qualitative research is to understand consumer shopping habits of college students, ages 18-24, in regards to grocery store shopping. The client is interested in consumer lifestyle and attitudinal trends that may influence shopping decisions amongst the audience. The target audience is of interest to the client, as this group is the rising top spenders in the market. Primary research is justified in attempting to understand the brand and its current audience. Qualitative research is justified in attempting to understand the target audience, college students, lifestyle and attitudinal trends through focus group research responses. Research of the target audience is recommended and will be used to further understand the habits that influence grocery shopping decisions, in turn, the client will be able to better market towards this audience to gain them as consumers.

## **Research Objectives**

The objective of this qualitative research study is to better understand the sample, college aged students ages 18-24, attitudes towards the client, Aldi, and other competitors in the grocery store market. This research aims to better understand patterns and habits of shoppers in this target audience. Through conducting and analyzing a focus group, we expect to learn more about consumer perceptions towards Aldi, specifically, its pricing, products, marketing and convenience within the grocery store market. Through qualitative research, we plan to learn more about the current shopping experience of college age shoppers, as well as the ideal shopping experience, with factors of price, convenience, availability of product, ideal amount spent and advertising being considered.

## **Research Method**

For Aldi to carefully and accurately analyze the best tactics for attracting the desired demographic, qualitative research was needed to discover this target audience's shopping habits further. From secondary research, Aldi discovered the market shopping trends within the desired target market; however, as the desired demographic is a rising top spender, their habits are still not measured enough from secondary sources, leading to further investigation of their trends as a whole. Similarly, Aldi chose to conduct this qualitative research through a focus group setting better to understand the desired demographic in a peer-like setting. For focus groups, Aldi can see the trends this demographic may reveal and the reliability of these patterns throughout the group.

The focus group form of qualitative research occurred at 11 am on Friday, February 28th, during our class's usual meeting time. To create a familiar and comfortable environment, we conducted this focus group meeting in the same classroom we used to conduct our regular class. Since peer interaction can easily affect focus groups, performing it in familiar scenery can welcome honest comments and opinions for the best possible responses in our qualitative research. Also, conducting it at a familiar time can cancel out the possibility of fatigue since the focus group subjects have been used to being in a learning environment on that day for weeks. This focus group discussion lasted around a half hour, shorter than the allotted time slot of 50 minutes. This means that our qualitative research team could move seamlessly throughout the discussion without skewing responses to some topics and not others. As hinted by the duration, this focus group started with a formal yet serious atmosphere. Since the members of the focus group are classmates and school peers, it makes sense that the atmosphere did not stay as stagnant and instead grew to a more conversational environment. This transition was anticipated

in our questioning format, making the more surface-level questions stay toward the beginning of the discussion. In contrast, the more in-depth ones arrive once the focus group members have become comfortable. From this preparation, the primary debate proceeded effortlessly, giving the members sufficient time to answer each question to the best of their abilities and giving us a more vivid picture of the target audience.

The instruments used to conduct this focus group stayed among the usual tools commonly used to record the most information from the focus group members. To standardly record the responses from the focus group discussion, team members brought their own devices, one or each aspect of the record. A computer was used to first account for each of the focus group members and write down either direct quotes or summaries of the responses for each member. The advantage of using a computer to record these responses is that it can account for quick shifts in topics or off-script questions that our moderator feels would boost our research, along with effortlessly assigning each response to the correct focus group member, not to confuse later analysis. Besides the computer, our team also used the voice memo application on our phone to account for the responses drawn from the conversation accurately. This allows our team to pull direct quotes from the research that our computer or team members may have been unable to write down or remember. Finally, to optimize the success of this focus group, our team used a moderator guide and visual examples to aid in the discussion process. The moderator guide helped our moderator stay on topic throughout the discussion and ensured that no portion stayed on too long or not touched on enough. With the moderator guide, bringing our visual examples for response reaction allows us to better understand the broad emotions tied to their responses.



The participants of this focus share many factors that make a part of the target audience in our research. Still, we identified the key differences between each participant to account for extenuating factors that may affect their responses to each question. Each one of these participants is a member of the Communication department at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida. As a group, this exposes them to the same forms of marketing in their daily life and the same businesses they may shop at. Similarly, they are all peers as college students within the same age bracket of 18-24 year olds. This can mean that they are all at a point in their lives where some forms of transportation, payment, and communication are used much more than others. Alternatively, each individual may not share the same spending capabilities. Although our members gave similar responses when asked about spending habits, there were one or two that gave specific insight into how they budget their expenses or account for their wealth. Furthermore, as individuals, each participant may have different feelings toward their spending habits, each one other than the next. On the surface, the profile of our participants can be boiled down to a group of college students within our target age group who share different levels of spending habits and emotions toward them.

## **Findings**

### **Overall Findings**

This qualitative research study provided valuable insights into the grocery shopping habits, preferences, and perceptions of Aldi among college students, aged 18-24 in the St. Augustine area. The findings of the research suggest that convenience, cost efficiency, and brand familiarity are the most significant factors that have an influence on this demographics' grocery shopping behaviors. While Aldi is generally perceived as affordable and high-quality, the limited number of locations and inconsistency in the store's environment create challenges in terms of appealing to the target audience. Additionally, it was found that traditional grocery store advertising has a very minimal effect on swaying this demographics' opinions regarding grocery store preferences, however social media was more influential.

### **Aldi and Convenience**

Convenience was found to be the primary factor that influenced this demographic's decision when choosing a grocery store. For the purposes of this focus group, convenience was defined in terms of geographic proximity. The majority of the focus group participants indicated that proximity of a grocery store in regards to their home did influence their grocery store selection. While several participants stated that price or brand loyalty played into their decision, the group ultimately agreed that they most frequently choose the most convenient and closest option.

“Depends on the day. If I was in a rush, I would go wherever is closer.” (C)

Additionally, participants preferred to limit the number of stores they visited while grocery shopping as much as possible, preferring a one-stop shop whenever the option is

presented. Participants felt it was more convenient to only have to travel to one location for their shopping needs, rather than multiple.

“Ideally I would want one or two, but not in the same day.” (C)

While online grocery shopping and delivery services are gaining popularity, most participants expressed disinterest or reluctance towards these services. Participants expressed that while not having to travel was appealing, the increased price points of these services in comparison to traditional grocery shopping outweighed this appeal.

“No, it’s expensive. The fees and charges are way too high.” (Ja)

### **Aldi and Pricing/Products**

This research found that college students are generally cost conscious in their grocery shopping behaviors. The majority of participants reported that their ideal budget for a weekly grocery shopping trip. Additionally, several participants stated that their grocery shopping budget and spending changes depending on the week, as their personal finances are inconsistent.

“Ideally, I would like to only spend \$60 per trip.” (K)

“Depends how much I have that week.” (C)

Names brands were found to not be a primary consideration for the majority of participants. Instead product quality was higher prioritized by the participants. Additionally, participants expressed that they would be more willing to pay more money for higher quality food items, in comparison to non-food items.

“I’m willing to spend more on food.” (M)

“For toilet paper, I might choose the second cheapest option.” (Ja)

Competitive pricing was found to have a variable impact on participants choices. Participants expressed that competitive pricing had minimal influence on their shopping habits

when purchasing essential items. However, participants stated that competitive pricing was fairly influential when purchasing non-essential items.

### **Aldi and Advertising**

Brand familiarity was found to have a significant influence on participants' grocery shopping choices. Many participants reported that they preferred to shop at stores that they were previously familiar with and trusted, rather than considering other factors.

“I only choose what I know and what I’m comfortable with. I choose the same brands that I know and trust.” (J)

When considering advertising, most participants reported that traditional grocery store advertisements had little impact on their personal shopping habits and behaviors. Many participants stated that they felt they generally did not encounter these forms of advertisements. However, several participants reported that the majority of grocery store marketing that they encountered was found on social media platforms, like TikTok.

“I see a lot on TikTok: mukbangs, the Walmart bakery section, Good and Gather at Target.” (K)

Additionally, several participants stated that logos and overall store branding were more influential and memorable than advertising campaigns.

“I don’t go on social media for groceries or see advertisements for them. Logos play a role.” (K)

### **Conclusion**

This research concluded that convenience, cost efficiency, product quality, and brand familiarity are the primary factors that influence the grocery shopping habits and behaviors of the

identified demographic. These findings, and the connections between each factor, have been further elaborated in the cognitive map in Appendix B. Additionally, the research identified behavioral trends, including the demographic's preference for one-stop shopping, a lack of responsiveness to traditional advertising, and a lack of interest in online grocery shopping/delivery services. This research found that while Aldi is generally seen as an affordable and high quality grocery store, they face challenges in regards to store accessibility, the range of their product offerings, and brand familiarity among younger consumers. The company's low prices are attractive to this demographic, however they lack the convenience in terms of their limited number of locations and their smaller scale of product offerings.

### **Future Research**

Based on the qualitative research findings, several opportunities are laid out for continuing quantitative investigations to deepen understanding and refine strategies using specific numbers and statistics. Quantitative findings provide a more objective side and reliable calculation of consumer behavior in grocery shopping. By quantifying the importance of convenience/distance affecting factors for store locations and accessibility improvements, Aldi can make data-driven decisions about store placements and service offerings. This can be achieved through methods like surveys with Likert scales or conjoint analysis, which measure the relative importance of various convenience attributes and their impact on store choice.

Quantitative studies can also help analyze the trade-offs consumers make between convenience and cost efficiency. Techniques such as choice experiments or discrete choice modeling can reveal the monetary value consumers place on convenience features, enabling Aldi to optimize its pricing and service strategies. A large-scale survey can assess consumer attitudes toward online grocery shopping, identifying specific barriers and preferences. By analyzing

demographic data alongside usage patterns, Aldi can tailor its digital offerings to meet the needs of younger shoppers and improve adoption rates.

Further on, quantitative research can measure how familiarity with Aldi's brand impacts loyalty and purchasing decisions using brand equity metrics. This data can provide new ideas and strategies that can strengthen Aldi's community-oriented image and address concerns about store ambiance. Methods can also quantify how distance and travel time affect shopping decisions relative to cost savings. By combining geospatial analysis with consumer survey data, researchers can help Aldi optimize its store network and pricing strategies.

A large-scale brand perception study across different age groups can provide statistically significant data on how Aldi's affordability and exclusivity are perceived, informing targeted branding efforts for the 18-24 age group. By incorporating these quantitative research methods, Aldi can validate and expand their overall reach, leading to more confident decision-making and strategy refinement. This will provide a solid foundation for attracting and retaining the target age demographic, balancing convenience, affordability, and digital engagement in both physical and online grocery spaces.

## **Appendices**

### *Appendix A*

#### **Focus Group Moderator Guide**

##### Part 1: Introduction

Hi Everyone! Thank you for attending this focus group today. We: John, Nancy, Camille and Kate are the facilitators of today's focus group. We are Flagler College students, conducting this research for a Public Relations research class. The purpose of today's study is to collect data regarding consumer opinions about Aldi and grocery shopping choices.

Before we begin, we would like to make sure you understand your part as a willing participant in this research study.

##### Participant Statement of Research and Their Rights

- The purpose of this study is to learn more about Aldi consumer's buying choices when it comes to shopping at Aldi and how *pricing, convenience and advertising* affect consumer behavior. This focus group should take only 20-30 minutes of your time.
- Your responses will be recorded for research purposes. Your name and personal information will not be a part of the audio recording, but your voice may be identifiable. Once the research study is complete, the audio recording will be discarded.
- Your responses in this research study are confidential. We will not ask for any information that would identify who the responses belong to. In the event we publish or

present any of the information obtained from this study, no personally identifiable information will be shared including your name.

- Your decision to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You may refrain from answering any questions or remove yourself from the study at any time.
- We ask that you do not share any details or responses of others from today's discussion outside of this focus group, in order to ensure confidentiality.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please do not hesitate to reach out to the moderator at 123-456-7890.

You should feel comfortable to express your honest opinions and feelings regarding your shopping experiences. We want to be aware of your responses to our questions, even if they differ from others in the group. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point, feel free to leave the discussion at any time without penalty. We do not want you to feel distressed by anything we will discuss.

In order to keep this discussion timely, we will have to keep responses to particular topics in their allotted time frame, and may need to move on from certain responses in order to ensure everyone's responses were recorded.

**Idealization, Specification, Hypothetical, Third-Person, Grand Tour, Structural**

**Word Association Sentence Completion Story Completion Personification Role Playing**

**Picture Projection Picture Sorts**

Part II: Aldi and Advertising



**First, we are going to talk about brand advertising, specifically for grocery shopping, and how company's advertising efforts affect consumers' shopping habits.**

1. Walk me through your process when choosing a grocery store.
2. Is a grocery store's marketing and advertising efforts important to you?
  - a. How often do you encounter a grocery's stores advertisements?
3. Walk me through the first time that you had heard of Aldi?
4. If you have been to Aldi, walk me through your first experience with this store.
5. What words would you associate with Aldi?
6. If Aldi were to turn into a celebrity, who would it be?
7. Why do you think someone would choose to shop at Aldi?

### Part III: Aldi & Convenience

**Now we're going to move into the topic of convenience when it comes to shopping choices. We'll think about convenience in this case as the shopping experience that takes the least amount of effort.**

1. If you had to choose between going to a store further in distance with competitive prices, versus a store that is closer with standard pricing, how would you make your decision?
2. If you were to forget something at the grocery store, what action would you take to get it?
3. Ideally, would you prefer going to one store for all your needs?

- a. How many stores do you realistically stop at when grocery shopping?
4. Younger generations have been known to turn to digital instacart and delivery options due to time constraint, what are your thoughts on this option?
  - a. Have you ever used this option?

#### Part IV: Aldi & Pricing/Products

**We'll start today with a few questions about how product availability and market pricing affects your decision as a consumer. For this research study, we'd like you to think of products and prices in regards to your attended grocery stores.**

1. What is the ideal amount you would spend on groceries?
  - a. What is the amount that you typically spend on groceries?
2. Ideally would you only shop name-brand products?
3. How much does competitive pricing influence your in-store shopping habits?
4. When shopping for necessities how much does pricing influence your choices?
  - a. If you need something immediately, do you consider the price?

#### Part V: Verbal Stimuli

1. Word Association: Among Grocery Stores, what is the first brand that comes to your mind when someone says "Cheap"/ "Organic" / "Quality" /"young & hip"/ "versatile"/ "modern"?

## Part VII: Picture Sorts

Here are some pictures of popular grocery stores. Please look at the pictures and sort them into groups in such a way that all the pictures in any group are similar to each other in some important way and different from those in the other groups.....



**Figure A**



**Figure B**



**Figure C**



Figure D



Figure E



**Figure F**



**Figure G**

Part VIII: Picture Projection:

Please look at these photos and tell me what you think the individuals in the photos are doing, their further actions, and what you think their thinking process is.





**Figure H**



**Figure I**

Thank you for your time today in participating in our research study focus group! We sincerely appreciate your responses.

## Appendix B

### Cognitive Map

