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Market Research

Part III: Market Research Plan

Introduction

Costco is rapidly expanding its digital capabilities through improved e-commerce infrastructure, delivery partnerships, and online exclusive offerings. As more members shop through the website and app, the company faces an important challenge of how to convey the trust, value, and discovery that traditionally come from the in-store treasure hunt experience in a digital format. This shift is especially important for Kirkland Signature, a brand whose reputation has been built on consistent quality and strong member loyalty. As private label growth accelerates across the industry and competition intensifies, understanding how digital merchandising shapes member perceptions has become essential for sustaining trust and encouraging trial of new Kirkland offerings.

Research Question

This project ultimately focuses on two interconnected objectives: understanding how digital design elements reshape consumer perceptions and determining whether those perceptual shifts influence the likelihood to convert online. Building on insights from the qualitative phase, which revealed that members evaluate Kirkland products through cues related to trust, quality, sustainability, and premium value, the quantitative study is designed to measure how these constructs respond to specific landing page variations.

The final research question guiding the study is: ***“How do different versions of a “Kirkland Premium” landing page featuring limited time drops of dried fruits and nuts shape consumers’ perceptions of trust, quality, sustainability, and premium value, and how do these perceptions translate into stated likelihood to convert online?”***

Rationale

Dried fruits and nuts were chosen deliberately, not incidentally. As a methodological control, this category allows the study to isolate the impact of digital merchandising cues—trust signals, sustainability framing, scarcity messaging, and premium packaging—without introducing category-level noise. High-volatility categories such as electronics or apparel carry inherent confounds (price sensitivity, fit anxiety, brand switching costs) that would obscure the signal we are trying to measure. By anchoring the experiment in a category where Kirkland already holds strong, established credibility, shifts in perception can be attributed to design and messaging choices rather than to baseline uncertainty about the product category itself.

This is also one of Costco's most commercially significant categories. Costco's Foods and Sundries segment accounted for approximately 41 percent of merchandise sales in fiscal year 2024, making it central to the company's business model. Kirkland Signature has built deep credibility here through associations with quality ingredients, freshness, and strong value relative to national brands. The category is therefore not merely a convenient test bed; it is a strategically important one where insights will translate directly into high-impact decisions.

Operationally, dried fruits and nuts are well suited for limited-time drops. They can be rotated seasonally, support flavor experimentation, and carry long shelf lives, making them feasible for digital promotion and cost-efficient to ship. Their health relevance and natural alignment with premium and sustainability cues allow the Kirkland Premium landing page concept to feel realistic and strategically meaningful, rather than contrived.

Implementation Plan & Methodology

Implementing the individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) requires practical decisions about recruitment, facilitation, and analysis that balance realism with resource limitations. Because this phase relies on exploratory conversations rather than large samples, recruitment would take place through screening posts on local community groups and social networks such as Reddit and Facebook group chats to identify a diverse set of Costco members who shop both online and in store. Conducting the interviews over Zoom reduces travel costs and expands geographic reach while still preserving the depth needed for exploratory work. With a single researcher, a feasible plan would include completing 12 to 15 interviews over a two week period. Tradeoffs in this phase include the potential for self selection bias and the time required for careful coding. However, these are consistent with qualitative research and justified by the need to surface underlying perceptions and language that guide the development of the quantitative instrument.

The quantitative phase requires additional considerations related to platform choice, respondent recruitment, and analytical feasibility. Building the experiment in Qualtrics not only ensures randomization and data privacy but also provides the convenience for mobilization and exporting data. Since direct access to Costco member lists is not available, recruiting through an online panel provider such as Prolific or Dynata represents the most realistic and efficient “buy” decision for obtaining a large, diverse sample of online grocery shoppers. A four week timeline is appropriate for this phase, with one week for programming, one week for a soft launch and revisions, one week for full fielding, and one week for cleaning and analysis. Tradeoffs include the reliance on stated rather than observed behavior and variability in panel respondent quality. However, these limitations are balanced by the ability to systematically compare landing page cues and quantify how shifts in perception relate to conversion likelihood.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity is foundational to the research. All in depth interview participants will be required to sign a nondisclosure agreement (NDA) prior to participation. Survey respondents will receive clear informed consent language explaining the study purpose, data usage, and the voluntary nature of participation. No personally identifiable information will be collected. Respondents may withdraw at any point without consequence.

Business Goals

Costco's long-term growth strategy increasingly depends on strengthening its digital ecosystem and maintaining the relevance of the Kirkland Signature brand in online environments. Unlike the warehouse setting where product discovery and treasure hunt dynamics drive engagement, the website potentially lacks intuitive pathways for showcasing premium or limited edition offerings. Insights into how digital first shoppers interpret sustainability, premium quality, and scarcity cues will help Costco design landing pages that replicate elements of its in store experience. Understanding the perceptual drivers of conversion also supports broader strategic goals, including increasing basket size, deepening loyalty toward Kirkland Signature, and improving the economics of Costco's rapidly expanding e-commerce channel.

Conclusion

This Market Research Plan outlines a rigorous, ethically sound, and strategically grounded approach to determining how design elements of a "Kirkland Premium" landing page influence both perceptions and conversion intent. By integrating qualitative findings, responding thoughtfully to stakeholder feedback, and aligning with Costco's broader business objectives, the study will produce actionable insights that guide future digital merchandising, creative testing, and private-label strategy.

Word Count: 1,017

Appendix

1. Qualitative Research Instrument Part 1 – Costco Member Guided Interview

Objective

To understand how Costco members perceive, evaluate, and respond to the “Kirkland Premium” concept. More specifically, this interview is designed to get detailed opinions on perceptions of having a curated online landing page featuring limited-time drops of dried fruits and nuts compared with their in-store experiences. The goal is to uncover what drives purchase intent, trust, and perceived value for Kirkland’s sustainable and premium products.

Estimated Interview Length: 30–40 minutes

Format: Semi-structured, one-on-one interview (virtual or in-person)

Participants: Costco members aged 25–65, with a mix of in-store regulars, hybrid shoppers, and online-first members.

Introduction

Hi, my name is _____, and I’m conducting a short research interview to better understand how Costco members experience and think about Kirkland products, especially in newer, premium categories like dried fruits and nuts.

This conversation should take about 30–40 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers. We’re just interested in your honest opinions and experiences. Your responses will be used only for research purposes, and your name won’t be shared in any report. I’ll be recording this session only for note-taking accuracy. You can skip any question you don’t feel comfortable answering.

Demographics

- What is your age range? (25–34 / 35–44 / 45–54 / 55–65)
- Which country do you live in?
- How long have you been a Costco member?
- What are the main reasons you shop at Costco? (e.g., price, quality, convenience, trust, specific products)

Category and Product Perceptions

- When you think of the Kirkland brand, what words or phrases come to mind?
- What kinds of Kirkland Signature products do you usually buy?
- Do you currently buy dried fruits or nuts? If so, how often and from where?
- Have you ever purchased Kirkland’s dried fruits or nuts? If yes, what stood out about them?
- When you see words like “organic,” “premium,” or “sustainably packaged” on a Kirkland item, what comes to mind?
- How do you usually decide between a Kirkland product and a national brand?

- In your experience, what makes a snack or grocery product feel “premium”?
- Are there times when a Kirkland product has surprised you with its quality? It could be good or bad. What happened?

Online vs. In-Store Experience

- How would you describe your typical Costco in-store experience? What makes it enjoyable or frustrating?
- How often do you typically shop at Costco in-store versus online?
- If yes, what comes to mind when you think of Costco’s website or app experience?
- Do you feel the same level of excitement or discovery when shopping online as you do in the warehouse? Why or why not?
- If Costco created a “Kirkland Premium” landing page online that featured limited-time product drops, for example, special editions of dried fruits and nuts, what would attract your attention the most? Product quality, storytelling, scarcity, or something else?
- How would you expect such a page to look or feel in order to make you want to purchase?
- Would you be more likely to add those items to your cart, try them once, or reorder them later?

Value, Trust, and Sustainability

- How much do you trust Kirkland products compared to other brands? What builds that trust for you?
- How important is sustainability to you when buying food items like dried fruits and nuts? Would sustainable packaging or sourcing influence your decision to pay a bit more? Why or why not?
- When you see claims like “organic” or “ethically sourced,” do you usually believe them? What helps you decide if they feel genuine?
- How do you feel about Costco promoting premium or sustainable products under the Kirkland label?

Closing and Reflection

- What could Costco do to make shopping for Kirkland products online more enjoyable or trustworthy?
- Is there anything else you’d like to share about your experience with Kirkland or Costco’s online platform?
- If you could give Costco one piece of advice for improving Kirkland’s premium product line, what would it be?

2. Qualitative Research Instrument Part 2 – Costco Member Guided Interview

Objective

To understand Costco employees' and managers' perspectives on the “Kirkland Premium” concept, particularly the idea of a curated online landing page featuring limited-time drops of dried fruits and nuts. This interview aims to explore staff views on customer behavior, product positioning, and operational feasibility to complement the member interviews.

Estimated Length: 25–30 minutes

Format: Semi-structured, one-on-one interview (virtual or in-person)

Participants: Costco employees or managers involved in merchandising, e-commerce, marketing, or category management.

Introduction

Hi, my name is _____, and I'm conducting a short research interview about Costco's Kirkland Signature brand to understand how members and staff perceive the potential for premium and sustainable Kirkland products like dried fruits and nuts.

This conversation should take about 25–30 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers. I'm simply interested in your professional insights and observations based on your experience working with Costco members and products. Your responses will remain confidential, and no individual names or store locations will be included in any report.

Demographics

- What is your age range? (25–34 / 35–44 / 45–54 / 55–65)
- Which country do you live in?
- How long have you worked at Costco?
- Can you tell me a bit about your role? What are your main responsibilities related to merchandising, operations, or customer engagement?

Kirkland Brand and Product Strategy

- How would you describe the Kirkland Signature brand in your own words?
- What factors do you think make Kirkland successful compared to national brands?
- How do you see sustainability and “premium” positioning fitting into Kirkland's brand image?
- From your perspective, what do customers value most about Costco and the Kirkland brand?

- Have you noticed increased interest or demand for organic, plant-based, or sustainable food products, especially snacks like dried fruits and nuts?

Online vs. In-Store Member Behavior

- What differences do you observe between how customers shop for Kirkland products in-store versus online, if there's any?
- Warehouse wholesalers like Costco are known to give customers the “treasure-hunt” feel. In your experience, what makes in person shopping at Costco stand out?
- If Costco were to launch a “Kirkland Premium” landing page featuring limited-time product drops, what do you think would make it appealing or effective?
- What challenges might arise when promoting premium Kirkland products online?

Closing Reflection

- What advice would you give Costco's marketing or merchandising teams about balancing affordability, quality, and sustainability in the Kirkland brand?
- If you could make one change to how Kirkland products are presented online, what would it be?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about member behavior, product performance, or ideas for evolving the Kirkland brand?

3. Qualitative Research Instrument

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this short survey. This study explores how Costco members like you perceive a new digital landing page concept for Kirkland Signature products. You will be shown a sample version of this online page and asked a few questions about your impressions. The survey should take approximately 3–5 minutes, and your responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

Demographics

1. What is your age?
 - a. Fill in the blank
2. How do you typically shop at Costco?
 - a. Primarily online
 - b. Primarily in store
 - c. A mix of both
3. How familiar are you with the Kirkland Signature brand?
 - a. I regularly purchase Kirkland products
 - b. I am familiar but rarely purchase
 - c. I am not familiar
4. How often do you purchase dried fruits and/or nuts?
 - a. Weekly
 - b. 2-3 times per month
 - c. Rarely or never

Landing Page Concept & Conversion Likelihood

You will be shown three mock-ups of a landing page featuring limited time offering of Kirkland Premium dried fruits and nuts. After viewing each version, you will be asked to rate on a few statements.

5. Respondents are randomly assigned to view one landing page version:
 - a. Version A: Sustainability focused design
 - b. Version B: Limited time and scarcity focused design
 - c. Version C: Premium packaging and quality focused design
6. How likely are you to purchase one or more products from this page? 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.
 - a. **Conversion Likelihood**
 - i. I am likely to purchase one or more products from this page.
 - b. **Conversion Likelihood**
 - i. I am likely to purchase one or more products from this page.
 - ii. The design of this page makes the products feel trustworthy.

- iii. This page makes the products feel more premium than typical Costco offerings.
- iv. The sustainability information on this page increases my interest in trying the product.
- v. The limited time messaging on this page creates a sense of urgency to buy.

Attitudes Toward Kirkland and Online Shopping

- 7. Please rate the following on the same scale. 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.
 - a. When shopping online, I trust Kirkland Signature products.
 - b. I am more likely to try new Kirkland products when they are marketed as limited time or seasonal.
 - c. A premium landing page design increases my confidence in product quality when shopping online.

Consumer Preference

- 8. Which elements would most increase your likelihood of trying a new Kirkland product online? Please rate each from 1 = Not influential to 5 = Very influential.
 - a. Sustainability certification
 - b. Premium packaging design
 - c. Limited time availability
 - d. Customer reviews or testimonials

Conclusion Question

- 9. In your own words, what stood out most about the page you just saw?
 - a. Fill in the blank