Partitioned Grocery Carts: How Assortment Allocation Cues Can Increase Fruit and Vegetable Purchases

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How can distracted shoppers be prompted to develop healthier shopping habits that can be profitable to grocery stores? Building on social norm and mental accounting theories, we show that shoppers purchase fruits and vegetables in proportion to the size of the recommended partition. Further, these effects are exaggerated for large families and diminished when shoppers are distracted.

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offered by nature sounds helped reduce satiation more when participants thought of them as similar and related to the classical music.

Study 3 further tests our theoretical framework by demonstrating the U-shape relationship between similarity and satiation. Participants (n=304) rated a classical music piece twelve times, with an intervening sound clip after every third play. The study followed a 2 (intervening sound clip: pop song, nature sounds) x 2 (similarity: alike, dislike) design. The pop song (“With or Without You”) was chosen to be mildly similar to the classical music; the nature sounds to be highly dissimilar. After hearing both clips one time, similarity was manipulated by asking participants to write how the two clips were alike (alike condition), or dislike each other (dislike condition). Results indicate an interaction between the intervening sound clip and similarity. With unrelated nature sounds, participants satiated less when focused on how these were like the classical music. Participants apparently did not view the nature sounds as a form of variety unless explicitly encouraged to consider how they are related. In contrast, for the somewhat similar pop song, participants satiated more when asked to focus on how it was like the classical music. Participants presumably already saw the pop song as offering variety in the music so pointing out the similarities increased their satiation.

In conclusion, the prevailing notion in the literature is that variety reduces satiation, and variety largely depends on the similarity of the stimuli. We propose instead that perceived variety depends on how stimuli are categorized. When seen as largely unrelated (e.g., classic music and nature sounds), increasing perceived similarity helps consumers appreciate both of these stimuli as offering variety. This may explain why people often fail to appreciate the variety around them (Galak, Redden, and Kruger 2009). It also suggests a reason why time often is not enough to recover from satiation – people see the variety of intervening experiences as unrelated to what is currently being consumed.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Given increasing concerns over the growing obesity problem in the United States, large efforts have been initiated to encourage the purchase of healthier foods (Kessler 2009; Nestle 2002). Unfortunately, many attempts to encourage healthier shopping behavior – such as in-store education programs and soft drink taxes – have often been unsuccessful because they were ignored by consumers or ran counter to the incentives of supermarkets (Brownell and Frieden 2009). After these unsuccessful attempts, the question needs to be reframed: How can distracted shoppers be prompted to develop healthier shopping habits that can be profitable to grocery stores?

Two research questions are addressed: 1) How does partitioning influence purchase and assortment allocations when grocery shopping? 2) What shoppers are most influenced by partitioning? Because the use of partitioned carts could provide an inexpensive intervention which would not restrict or penalize choice, the answer to these questions would be of interest to a wide range of stakeholders:

• **Supermarkets**. Using modified shopping carts could shift the distribution of sales to higher-margin foods (such as perishable produce), and it may do so without decreasing total food sales.

• **Consumers**. A simple “half-cart” rule-of-thumb could subtly emphasize the tradeoffs between healthy and less healthy foods while grocery shopping.

• **Public Policy Officials**. Partitioned carts could be championed and more quickly accepted by supermarkets than common policy proposals that focus on nutrition information, taxation, or subsidies.

After providing an overview of decision making under nutritional uncertainty, the notion of social norms and mental accounting categorization is reviewed and related to this overlooked context of grocery shopping and grocery carts. In this context, the potentially moderating influences of the size of a shopper’s family, their experience as a grocery shopper, and the extent to which they are distracted are then discussed. Study 1 examines whether shoppers purchased fruit and vegetables in proportion to the size of a cart’s partition, and Study 2 examines who is most influenced by partitions.

Together, these results show that partitioning a shopping cart with colored inserts or a simple strip of yellow duct tape caused healthy choices to become salient, and it led customers to spend more money on fruit and vegetables while shopping. In Study 1, shoppers with partitioned carts purchased a combined total of 51% more fruit and vegetables than did those in the control condition ($17.54 vs. $11.61), and in Study 2, shoppers with partitioned carts purchased a combined total of 76% more ($18.81 vs. $11.61). The mere presence of these visual benchmarks increased choice set consideration and promoted purchase without any corresponding decrease of total sales per shopper.

Healthy foods are profitable foods for grocery stores to sell. There are often higher profit margins for these foods, and there are higher spoilage costs for not quickly selling them if they are perishable. Yet, the impact of partitioning is not only relevant to produce or to fruit and vegetables purchases. These were simply the operationalizations in the two studies. A retailer could just as easily use partitioning to suggest another categorization scheme, such as store brands versus national brands, or natural foods versus processed foods. Similarly, consumers could use a similar process with fat versus non-fat foods or low sodium and high sodium foods.

The Effect of Goal Specificity on Continued Consumer Goal Pursuit

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the effect of goal specificity on the interest in continued goal pursuit. For example, consumers might set a specific goal to lose 2 pounds; or, consumers might set a less specific goal to lose 1 to 3 pounds. Thus, when setting a goal, consumers may consider: should my goal be a single number (i.e., a number goal) or a range (i.e., a range goal)? We examine if one type of goal is superior to the other in terms of increasing motivation to continue pursuing the goal. For example, would a consumer be more likely to stick to a weight loss goal if the goal was a specific number or if the goal could fall within a range of outcomes?

Individuals pursuing relatively more difficult and specific goals (e.g., a number goal) tend to experience greater performance levels, but lower success rates, compared to people pursuing easier and non-quantitative goals (e.g., work at a moderate pace). This phenomenon has been termed the “performance-success dilemma” (Locke and Latham 1990) since it may be easier to succeed with an unspecific goal (“just do your best”) yet this can lead to lower overall performance. Prior research shows that as goals increase in specificity, performance variance decreases, when controlling for difficulty (Locke et al. 1989).

Goals can serve as reference points that influence a consumer’s willingness to initiate goal pursuit and to continue to pursue the goal over time (Heath, Larrick and Wu 1999). We propose that range goals are different from number goals in important ways that influence the motivation to continue. Range goals contain two reference points (e.g., lose 5 - 15 pounds), whereas a number goal contains only one reference point (e.g., lose 10 pounds). This two reference point structure of the range goal can result in 1) greater success rela-