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Mind the Gap: The Effects of Shopping Medium on Consumer Food Evaluations and Choice

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ABSTRACT

Mobile grocery shopping is rapidly growing in popularity across the United States. Many retailers are responding by creating their own mobile apps to facilitate this demand. However, it is not yet clear whether consumers' food evaluations and choices differ when grocery shopping on mobile apps as compared to traditional brick-and-mortar retail store settings. Thus, the purpose of this research is to inform both theory and practice by identifying these potential differences and examining why they may be occurring. Study 1, conducted in a retail behavioral lab, shows that shoppers were able to accurately differentiate between healthy and unhealthy food products in a physical store setting where they were processing nutrition information in a more concrete mindset. However, when shoppers processed the same information on the 2 retailer's mobile app (in a more abstract mindset), they were unable to accurately differentiate between healthy and unhealthy food products. Further, shoppers perceived an unhealthy food product to be healthier when it was presented on the retailer's mobile app than when it was presented in-store. Overall, these findings can potentially provide critical insight to a number of constituencies including retailers, consumer welfare advocates, policy makers, and public health officials, among others.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ashley Thomas is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Indiana University Southeast. Her research interests include food labeling, consumer health and welfare, public policy and retailing.

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