

# EBT Payment for Online Grocery Orders: a Mixed-Methods Study to Understand Its Uptake among SNAP Recipients and the Barriers to and Motivators for Its Use

Olivia Martinez, BS<sup>1</sup>; Barbara Tagliaferro, MPH<sup>1</sup>; Noemi Rodriguez, MPA<sup>1,2</sup>; Jessica Athens, PhD<sup>1</sup>; Courtney Abrams, MA<sup>1</sup>; Brian Elbel, PhD<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To examine *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP) recipients' use of the first online supermarket accepting Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) payment.

**Methods:** In this mixed-methods study, the authors collected EBT purchase data from an online grocer and attempted a randomized controlled trial in the South Bronx, New York City, followed by focus groups with SNAP beneficiaries aged  $\geq 18$  years. Participants were randomized to shop at their usual grocery store or an online supermarket for 3 months. Focus groups explored barriers and motivators to online EBT redemption.

**Results:** Few participants made online purchases, even when incentivized in the randomized controlled trial. Qualitative findings highlighted a lack of perceived control over the online food selection process as a key barrier to purchasing food online. Motivators included fast, free shipping and discounts.

**Conclusions and Implications:** Electronic Benefit Transfer for online grocery purchases has the potential to increase food access among SNAP beneficiaries, but challenges exist to this new food buying option. Understanding online food shopping barriers and motivators is critical to the success of policies targeting the online expansion of SNAP benefits.

**Key Words:** EBT, online grocery shopping, public health, SNAP (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2017;■■:■■–■■.)

Accepted October 12, 2017.

## INTRODUCTION

Improving access to fresh produce is a common approach to prevent obesity in the US.<sup>1</sup> *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP) recipients are an important population to target given that they represent, on average, 1 of every 7 Americans and that the program's costs exceeded \$70 billion in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Policy and environmental approaches to reduce diet disparities among SNAP recipients through improved access to healthy foods have

had varying levels of success, in which some have demonstrated increased fruit and vegetable consumption (eg, Electronic Benefit Transfer [EBT] acceptance at farmers' markets) and others have had mixed results, at times showing no considerable improvement in diet quality (eg, introduction of a new supermarket in a nutritionally underserved area).<sup>3-18</sup> A newer strategy gaining attention is EBT acceptance for online grocery orders.<sup>19-21</sup> Recent research showed that buying food online is related to a decrease in

unhealthy food purchases.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that the acceptance of EBT for online food purchases has the potential to influence healthy diets among SNAP recipients and could be a practical antiobesity strategy.

In 2012, the US Department of Agriculture approved the first pilot program for an online grocer to accept EBT payment in low-income and nutritionally underserved zip codes 10454 and 10455 in the South Bronx, New York City.<sup>23</sup> The current study examines uptake of the pilot program and its impact on SNAP recipients' food purchases using sales data from the participating online grocer and by attempting to conduct a randomized controlled trial (RCT). A qualitative study was then conducted to examine barriers and motivators to online EBT redemption. To the researchers' knowledge, no previous studies examined the efficacy of accepting EBT for online grocery purchases. This applied research brief will provide insight for researchers and policy makers who seek to understand the impact of SNAP

<sup>1</sup>Department of Population Health, New York University School of Medicine, New York, NY

<sup>2</sup>New York City College of Technology, City University of New York, New York, NY  
*Conflict of Interest Disclosure:* The authors' conflict of interest disclosures can be found online with this article on [www.jneb.org](http://www.jneb.org).

Address for correspondence: Brian Elbel, PhD, Department of Population Health, New York University School of Medicine, 227 E 30th St, Office 626, New York, NY 10016; Phone: (212) 263 4283; Fax: (646) 501 2706; E-mail: [brian.elbel@nyumc.org](mailto:brian.elbel@nyumc.org)

© 2017 Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior. Published by Elsevier, Inc. All rights reserved.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2017.10.003>

benefit expansion to the online marketplace.

## METHODS

This study was reviewed and approved by the New York University School of Medicine Institutional Review Board.

### Design

In July, 2013, the researchers obtained data directly from the online grocer corresponding to all purchases made during the first 9 months of the pilot program (September, 2012 to June, 2013) in the Bronx zip codes where EBT acceptance was active. The RCT began in December, 2013 using a street-intercept design<sup>24</sup> to access a representative sample of at least 200 SNAP recipients aged  $\geq 18$  years residing in either of the 2 catchment zip codes, who would be affected by the online grocer's pilot program. Individuals in the catchment areas were recruited on the street sidewalk; eligible respondents were given informed consent forms to take what is commonly referred to as a street intercept survey<sup>24</sup> and participate in the RCT. Upon providing consent, participants filled out the study survey on food shopping habits and were randomized either to redeem their EBT benefits at least once per month via the online grocer (intervention) or to shop at their usual grocery store (control). Both groups were given an instruction sheet that directed them to mail the researchers at least \$30 in grocery receipts each month (\$30 was the minimum purchase required by the online grocer). Participants were compensated \$2 for the initial survey, and initially \$15/mo for correctly submitted receipts. This was later increased to \$25/mo to encourage continued participation in the RCT.

When it became clear that participants in the intervention group were not engaging in online food ordering even though the incentive covered over 80% of the \$30 minimum purchase amount for an online food order, focus groups were conducted to identify the barriers and motivators associated with online grocery shopping and redemption of EBT benefits. The qualitative approach was guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior proposed by Ajzen,<sup>25</sup>

which addresses individual-level factors that motivate individuals to act on a specific behavior.<sup>26</sup> It has been used to shed light on health behaviors, including those related to diet.<sup>5-7,9</sup> The focus group guide addressed 3 key topics: (1) shopping on the Internet, (2) grocery shopping and the Internet, and (3) SNAP and the Internet. Questions examined participants' attitudes about, perceived control over, perceived barriers and motivators to, and intentions toward shopping for groceries online. An external researcher with a doctorate in food policy and nutrition reviewed the focus group guide for clarity and content accuracy. The bilingual focus group facilitator translated the guide into Spanish.

Focus group participants were recruited from the initial street-intercept survey sample. These individuals were contacted via telephone and postal mail to participate in 1 of 6 groups held in March and April, 2015. In addition, focus groups included friends of these participants, who were invited to supplement the number of attendees. All focus group participants were required to be aged  $\geq 18$  years and currently receiving SNAP benefits. Each participant received \$25 cash and a round-trip MetroCard to travel to and from the facility where the focus groups were conducted. The goal was to conduct 6 focus groups, which is just above the standard of 3-4 groups for a relatively homogeneous population of interest for a study with a reasonably straightforward research question.<sup>27</sup> Focus group participants completed intake surveys about food shopping habits, use of technology, familiarity with shopping online, and demographic characteristics before the focus groups. The focus groups were 1 hour long and were audiotaped and facilitated by a bilingual moderator (who was trained in cultural anthropology and had experience in interviewing, and who had published qualitative research in food and nutrition), as well as the research coordinator as a note taker.

### Analysis

Sales data were analyzed at the transaction level using Mann-Whitney U tests to compare the average amount spent per order on 5 main food

categories, including fruits, vegetables, dairy, sweets, and salty snacks. These categories were predefined by the online grocer, except in the case of salty snacks and sweets, which were disambiguated from a combined cookies and snacks category. The RCT analysis could not be completed (described in Results) owing to a lack of participation. The focus group transcripts were analyzed from 2015 to 2016 using a multistage thematic analysis method.<sup>27</sup> The research coordinator (note taker), the focus group facilitator, and a graduate research assistant individually read each transcript to identify themes.<sup>28</sup> Together the analysts discussed a list of preliminary codes based on emergent themes and the focus group guide's key topics. Through an iterative coding process of individually reviewing transcripts, the coding scheme was revised and finalized. When coding discrepancies were found, the analysts discussed them until consensus was reached. The final coding was done in ATLAS.ti (version 7, Berlin, Germany; 2012) and the quotes for each code were individually analyzed. The analysts convened several times to discuss concurrences, similarities, differences, and correspondences among quotations.<sup>29</sup>

## RESULTS

### Purchase Data

During the first 9 months of the pilot program, 148 individuals (approximately 0.3% of the adult population in the targeted zip codes) placed 568 orders from the online grocer accepting EBT payment. Of these, about a third (53 customers) placed 174 orders paying with EBT. The EBT orders spent more on sweets and salty snacks and slightly less on fruit. There were no statistically significant differences between orders on vegetables and dairy. [Table 1](#) shows the average percentage of each transaction spent per order on main food categories.

### Randomized Controlled Trial

Of the 348 participants recruited, 166 were randomized to the intervention group and 182 to the control group (a number were removed after randomization because they provided incorrect zip codes, which caused imbalanced

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6843555>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6843555>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)