



Research report

What information do consumers consider, and how do they look for it, when shopping for groceries online? ☆

Yael Benn ^{a,*}, Thomas L. Webb ^a, Betty P.I. Chang ^a, John Reidy ^b^a University of Sheffield, UK^b Sheffield Hallam University, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 August 2014

Received in revised form 1 December 2014

Accepted 29 January 2015

Available online 4 February 2015

Keywords:

Front-of package labelling

Online grocery shopping

Label viewing

Pre-purchase information seeking behaviour

ABSTRACT

Previous research investigating what information shoppers seek when purchasing groceries has used either lab-experiments or observed shoppers in supermarkets. The present research investigates this question in a relatively naturalistic online-grocery environment. Forty participants completed their weekly shopping online while their eye-movements were recorded. Ten of the participants were subsequently interviewed to gain insight into their information seeking behaviour. We found that, when looking for products, 95% of participants navigated through the 'virtual departments', 80% used the 'search' facility, and 68% browsed the special offer pages. Once on the product pages, participants tended to look at the pictures of products, rather than examine detailed product information. To explain these findings, we suggest that online grocery sites simulate familiar supermarket environments, which may explain why consumers prefer to browse categories of products rather than use search terms. We also suggest that additional strategies are needed if consumers are to be encouraged to view detailed product information.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Introduction

Online grocery shopping is a relatively new environment that is rapidly growing in popularity. According to ShopperVista (2013), around a fifth of households in the UK are buying groceries online every month. For around a third of these, online shopping is the main way that food is purchased, while the other two thirds of households use online shopping to supplement offline purchases. This growth in online grocery shopping is predicted to increase by around 15% per annum, and account for approximately 10% to 12% of the market by 2020 (Rankin, 2013). Compared to traditional supermarkets, online environments present consumers with different challenges and opportunities. For example, in a supermarket a consumer has to walk to the correct aisle in order to find a product, whereas an online environment allows consumers to find products in a number of different ways, such as entering a search term, navigating through categories of products, or browsing special offer pages. Having found a product, consumers using an online system can access a large and varied amount of information, some of which is available in an offline environment (e.g., lists of ingredients, price), but some of which is not (e.g., which two products are often

purchased together). Even when the nature of the information provided in offline and online environments is similar, it is often presented in a different format. For example, to examine the ingredients that a product contains, consumers using an online system may need to click on an "extra information" tab, instead of looking at, for example, the back of the package. Given the increase in online shopping, it is important to understand what information consumers consider when shopping for groceries online, and how they go about finding it in this new environment.

Finding products

Online grocery retailers offer consumers at least three main ways of finding products. A consumer can either search for a product by entering a search-term (e.g., 'cinnamon bagels') into a search bar, access a list of special offers and view only those products that are discounted, or navigate through the different tabs and links (e.g., look at a list of breads in a virtual bakery department). Navigation involves two main stages. First, consumers traverse through a hierarchy of virtual departments until they locate a specific department. For example, a consumer looking for cinnamon bagels may navigate through to the bakery, then bread, before getting to a list of different types of bagels. In the second stage, the consumer may have to choose between several similar products either by requesting that the website sort the items by a specific attribute (such as price) or by scanning through the list of products. Searching is also a two-stage process. First, the consumer generates a search

☆ Acknowledgements: We would like to thank Benjamin Harkin, Yuting Huang, Su Lyn Kan, Gabija Povilaityte, Brooke Fisher and Charlotte Axon for their help in analysing the data. Funding: This research was funded by a grant from the European Research Council (ERC-2011-StG-280515).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: y.benn@sheffield.ac.uk (Y. Benn).

query that includes an attribute associated with the desired product (e.g., name, brand, etc.). The search engine then returns a set of results from which the consumer selects the relevant item.

The processes of navigating and searching have received considerable attention in the field of information sciences. While searching tends to be the more popular method of information seeking on the Internet (Levene, 2011), and is considered a more flexible system (Lansdale, 1988), navigation is often preferred when users seek to retrieve information in a familiar environment, such as a system for organizing personal files (Bergman, Beyth-Marom, Nachmias, Gradovitch, & Whittaker, 2008). It is yet to be explored whether users of an online grocery shopping system prefer to navigate in what is likely to be a relatively familiar environment (i.e., in that the organization and structure of virtual and physical departments is likely to be similar in online and physical supermarkets, respectively), or to search as they are likely to do when using the Internet for other tasks. This question is crucial for understanding how pre-purchase information is obtained by consumers using online grocery sites.

Navigation is typically viewed as having a number of limitations. For example, the nested, hierarchical structure of the categories, which is often described using a location metaphor (such as 'departments'), requires consumers to remember the exact path required to retrieve information (e.g., to get to semi-skimmed milk, consumers may have to navigate from fresh-food to dairy to milk to semi-skimmed). This process can be difficult (Lansdale, 1988) and the path may not always be obvious. For example, non-dairy yogurts may be classified under 'yogurts', 'desserts' or 'special diets'. Navigation has been shown to be difficult for users approaching tasks using the Internet, mostly due to their lack of familiarity with the relevant categories and sub-categories (Levene, 2011). In contrast to navigation, searching is a more flexible strategy for finding items, as it allows users to reach an item using any part of the name (e.g. brand, type of product) that they happen to remember (Lansdale, 1988). This feature, combined with the power of search engines to automatically categorize pages, means that search engines such as Google have become the most popular method for retrieving information on the Internet (Levene, 2011). However, despite the apparent flexibility of searching over navigating and its preference by users of the Internet, it has consistently been shown that, in environments where people are familiar with the nested structure (such as a personal filing systems), people prefer to navigate and only resort to searching when navigation does not allow them to reach the target (Bergman et al., 2008).

There have been several attempts to explain the preference for navigation in familiar contexts. One explanation relies on the cognitive demands of searching versus navigating. When consumers search for a product, they are required to generate a precise search term. This can be challenging, as it requires that the person correctly recalls a product name or brand and accurately spells it (Gwizdka, 2010). This process likely involves linguistic resources (Benn et al., 2015) and may interfere with a concurrent verbal memory tasks such as remembering a shopping list. For example, Bergman, Tene-Rubinstein, and Shalom (2013) found that recalling a list of words from memory was disrupted more by searching than by navigating. In contrast, navigation is based mainly on recognition because progressing through a hierarchy provides immediate visual and contextual feedback about the success of navigation as well as clues about the next step (Teevan, Alvarado, Ackerman, & Karger, 2004). Lastly, it has been suggested that navigation in a virtual environment is similar to navigation in the real world (Benn et al., 2015), in that it relies on specialized brain regions around the hippocampal formation that are used for navigation in the real world (Maguire, Frackowiak, & Frith, 1996, 1997). As such, navigation in familiar spaces is considered to be a deep-routed neurocognitive behaviour that does not compete for linguistic resources. As such, navigating to find products may be cognitively easier.

Deciding between products

Once consumers using an online grocery website have identified relevant products, they then need to decide which products to buy. Online environments provide various types of information about products. Typically, consumers first see a list of products (e.g., bagels) that contains a small image of the product, its title (e.g., "New York Bakery Co. cinnamon and raisin bagels"), along with its price and whether it is currently on offer (i.e., discounted or part of a special promotion). Further information about the product, such as its ingredients or allergy information, is often available on a separate page that can be accessed by clicking on the image of the product or its title. Much of this information is part of compulsory labelling systems that have been introduced in an attempt to promote public health as well as awareness of environmental and social issues (e.g., animal welfare, fairtrade, country of origin). For example, in the UK, it is compulsory to label food items with information such as ingredients, nutritional information, whether the product includes genetically-modified ingredients, allergy information and more. It is presumed that clear labelling allows consumers to make informed choices (Kim, Nayga, & Capps, 2001). However, evidence on label viewing and information seeking behaviour during online grocery shopping has not, to the best of our knowledge, been previously reported.

Studies of information seeking in traditional supermarket environments typically report relatively high levels of (self-reported) label usage. For example, Bender and Derby (1992) found that, between 1982 and 1986, 80% of U.S. consumers reported that they paid attention to ingredients lists and/or nutrition labels on food products. However, recent studies using more objective measures of label usage have reported lower figures. For instance, Grunert, Wills, and Fernández-Celemin (2010) examined the use of nutrition labels in supermarkets in the UK using in-store observations alongside interviews and questionnaires. Across six product categories, only 12% of consumers were observed looking at the back or side of the product packaging before selecting a product. Similar findings were reported in five other European countries: Sweden, France, Germany, Poland, and Hungary (Grunert, Fernández-Celemin, Wills, Storcksdieck Genannt Bonsmann, & Nureeva, 2010). These studies suggest that, while some consumers use detailed information about products to guide their choices (at least some of the time), most consumers purchase products after simply looking at the front of the package.

One objective way to investigate what information consumers attend to when selecting products is through the analysis of eye-movements (for a review, see Graham, Orquin, & Visschers, 2012). For example, Beattie, McGuire, and Sale (2010) used eye-tracking to examine whether consumers look at information about the environmental impact of products such as a light bulb, liquid detergent, or orange juice. Beattie et al. found that consumers looked at information about the carbon footprint of the light bulb, but paid less attention to carbon information on the other two products. Despite a relatively small sample (only 10 participants took part), these findings demonstrate how eye-tracking can be used to investigate what information consumers consider. Consumers' goals have also been shown to influence the amount of attention that they pay to different types of information about food products. For example, van Herpen and Trijp (2011) asked participants to either 'buy a cereal product' or 'buy a cereal product that will give you a healthy start for the day'. They found that emphasizing health motivation increased attention towards, and use of, nutrition labels (see Visschers, Hess, & Siegrist, 2010, for similar findings).

While laboratory experiments are important for understanding the information that consumers consider when making specific purchases (Graham et al., 2012), manipulating participants' motivations as well as limiting the choice of products constrains ecological

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7308975>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7308975>

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