

# Perspectives and Experiences of Online Grocery Shopping Among Rural and Urban Grocery Store Managers

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# Background

- Online grocery shopping has expanded at an accelerated rate (45% since 2019) for many higher income and affluent customers, and also for households of low income backgrounds.
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) expansion of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Online Purchasing Pilot (OPP) allowed for SNAP/EBT benefits to be accepted by authorized grocery retailers by allowing SNAP recipients to purchase groceries using their SNAP/EBT cards online.







# Building Upon Previous Work: Online Grocery Shopping Pilot Intervention Project



To learn more, scan and read our full manuscript:

Gustafson A, Gillespie R, DeWitt E, et al. Online Pilot Grocery Intervention among Rural and Urban Residents Aimed to Improve Purchasing Habits. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022;19(2):871.

- Adults across 7 counties in KY, MD, and NC were recruited to participate in an 8-week online grocery shopping intervention via community-based channels.
- Participants (n=129) were recruited into one of three arms:
  - Brick-and-mortar "BM" (n=56)
  - Online shopping only "O" (n=44)
  - Online shopping with intervention nudges "O+I" (n=29)
- O+I behavioral intervention consisted of three text messages/week plus a private Facebook group offering healthy recipes, food prep tips, and affective messaging to encourage healthy eating and shopping.

How was online grocery shopping impacting grocery store managers and employees?





# Methodology

State	Store Name <sup>1</sup>	Rural (R)/ Urban (U)	Brick & Mortar	Online Ordering
<b>Tennessee (n=6)</b>				
TN	Store A	R	X	
TN	Store B	R		X
TN	Store C	R	X	
TN	Store D	R		X
TN	Store E	R	X	
TN	Store F	R	X	
<b>Kentucky (n=5)</b>				
KY	Store A	U		X
KY	Store B	U		X
KY	Store C	U		X
KY	Store D	R		X
KY	Store E	R	X	
<b>North Carolina (n=6)</b>				
NC	Store A	U		X
NC	Store B	U		X
NC	Store C	R	X	
NC	Store D	R	X	
NC	Store E	R		X
NC	Store F	R		X
<b>New York (n=6)</b>				
NY	Store A	U	X	
NY	Store B	U		X
NY	Store C	U		X
NY	Store D	U		X
NY	Store E	U		X
NY	Store F	U		X

- Grocery store managers from four states were contacted in the Fall of 2021 to participate in a 30-minute semi structured interview.
- Stores were purposefully identified to include those that offered online grocery shopping for pick up or delivery, offered online shopping for SNAP redemption, or traditional brick and mortar stores accepting SNAP benefits.
- A Grounded Theory Approach was used as a framework to establish patterns in the data. An iterative inductive deductive approach was employed, and common themes formed the basis of codes which were then analyzed using NVivo software.

<sup>1</sup>Stores A-F designate different store locations within each state and does not correlate to same store locations despite multiplicity of identifier use in table.



# Results

Online ordering primary themes reported by grocery managers (n=15):

- Employee order challenges
- Perceived customer barriers
- Perceived customer benefits

Brick-and-mortar locations, without online services, primary themes reported by managers (n=8):

- Thoughts on implementing online shopping
- COVID-19 pandemic impacts
- Competition with other stores
- Benefits of maintaining brick-and-mortar shopping



# Online Shopping Barriers & Facilitators

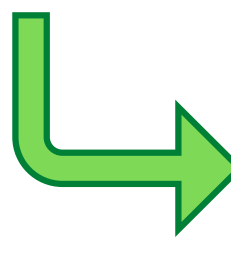
## Primary Theme

Employee Order Challenges

## Subthemes

 Staffing

 Technology

 Third-Party Delivery Options

"The labor situation is the worst I've ever seen it. I've worked for [store name] for 15 years and there's nothing even close to what we're dealing with right now."

"There's not a lot of accountability on [third-party delivery company] end when things go wrong" ... "Which is very frustrating because if you get on [store name] website and you go to order delivery, it looks like we're doing it."

"And so right now we're using tablets to process those payments and [store name] likes to run before they walk sometimes. And the push to get those tablets out was pretty big. And they're great when they work. But if the wind blows the wrong... they don't really have great connectivity."

# Online Shopping Barriers & Facilitators

## Primary Theme

Perceived Customer Barriers

## Subtheme

 Substitutions

“And I guess the app is not tied to our actual on-hand inventory. So it doesn't know that such and such is out of stock.”

 Cost

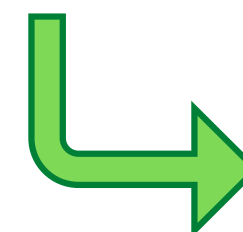
“There is a 4.99 fee at our location, at all [store name] locations. That is sometimes a customer concern. Some other retailers may not charge a fee. But we do have a fee currently, and that might be something that changes in the future.”

## Primary Theme

Perceived Customer Benefits

## Subtheme

 Convenience

 Personal Connection

“They do a good job. If you got you good personnel that communicates correctly. And so when they do that job well, and that customer gets used to them, it's just like that is their personal shopper, and they know their name. They know who they are. They talk to them every week. That means something.”

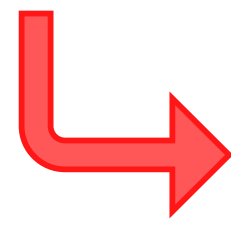


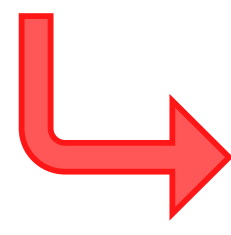
# Brick-And-Mortar Barriers & Facilitators To Offering Online Shopping

## Primary Theme

Thoughts on Implementing Online Shopping

## Subtheme

 Perceived Customer Response to Offering Online Ordering

 Barriers to Implementation & Overall Change

"In general I think it is a great idea. And I'm looking forward to... Especially if we are able to incorporate EBTs with food stamps into that in a official or legal capacity, I feel like that would be amazing and I feel like that could really boost our business."

## Primary Theme

Competition with Other Stores

"I would say there is still some loyalty, as far as the change, but I had found that you really got to fight a little harder now."

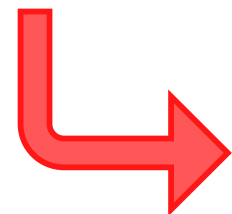
"We're very rural. There's still a vast amount of people who still do go shopping. So [Supercenter], I would say, would be the more... What's the word? Competitive, I would say, in terms of fighting for our business, the business of our customers."

# Brick-And-Mortar Barriers & Facilitators To Offering Online Shopping

## Primary Theme

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts

## Subtheme

 Changes to store operations

 Customer behavioral shifts

“We went days that it was every day, he had to shift and adjust. There was one day that we didn't have anybody in produce. No one to do produce because we were waiting to hear back about who was good and who wasn't good. And one day we didn't have two bag boys.” “And so I just went to [co-worker] and I said, I guess we're baggers this afternoon.”

## Primary Theme

Benefits to Maintaining BM Shopping

Mainly our customer quality is because of the friendly atmosphere, the family atmosphere. I mean, that's what we thrive on. We thrive to be family-like to our customers, and we know some of them intimately. I mean, just, we know their children, we know their children's children.”





# What We Learned

- The shopping behavior changes among customers seemed to be most apparent in brick-and-mortar stores.
- Issues with the supply chains, staffing, and technology were more prominent for online stores. These issues seemed to impact online stores more when looking at how store managers operated during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- SNAP-related responses were limited- Why?
  - SNAP customer status is blinded during the shopping process when fulfilling an online grocery order.
  - Majority reported not having access to purchasing data – either because the online ordering was through a third party, or because it was handled at the corporate level.



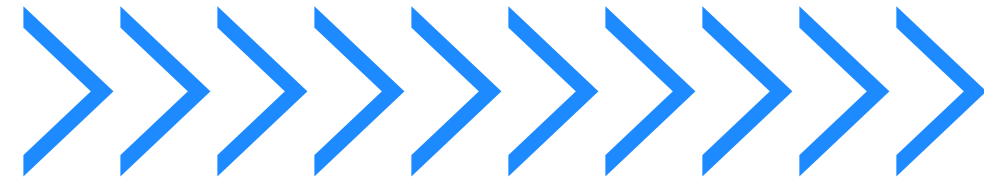
# Future Work

- The grocery manager perspective is necessary to inform policies and to enhance the evolving virtual food marketplace.
- The OPP's goal is to promote an equitable expansion of healthy food access through online grocery shopping.
  - Attention and investment from policymakers and corporate retailer leadership needed to improve access for underserved populations.
- Innovative ways to increase healthy purchases could be effective to improve dietary intake and shopping choices. This can be done via:
  - Behavioral nudge messaging strategies
  - Pre-filled grocery carts with healthier food and beverage items
  - Retailer-supported marketing strategies (3 P's) for healthier grocery items





# Questions?



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