

Nudging customers towards healthier food and beverage purchases in an online supermarket

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Registration date 26/05/2021	Overall study status Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Last Edited 24/01/2022	Condition category Nutritional, Metabolic, Endocrine	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Unhealthy dietary patterns contribute to the development of obesity and cardiometabolic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. Dietary patterns are, in turn, driven by several factors that range beyond individual choices. One of these factors concerns the food environment, in which supermarkets serve as key providers of foods and beverages. They therefore provide the opportunity to promote healthy dietary patterns among the population, not only through what is on offer but also how these products are presented and advertised. Health-promoting supermarket environments could be created using healthy food nudging. Healthy food nudges actively promote healthy product choices among customers without removing the unhealthy options. The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of single and combined nudging strategies in an online supermarket on the total percentage of healthy purchases, and whether the nudging strategies had different effects across food groups, and if there were differences in revenue following the nudging strategies.

Who can participate?

All customers of the participating online supermarket chain.

What does the study involve?

Customers visiting the online supermarket are randomly allocated to:

1. No intervention (regular online supermarket)
2. Addition of information nudges (symbols on healthy products)
3. Addition of availability nudges (unhealthy-to-healthy product swaps and healthy check-out suggestions)
4. Addition of information and availability nudges combined

For the 5-week study period sales data are collected from all customers placing a delivery order in the online supermarket.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The study does not involve direct benefits or risks for the participants.

Where is the study run from?

Amsterdam UMC, VU University (Netherlands)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
June 2020 to October 2020

Who is funding the study?

1. Dutch Heart Foundation (Netherlands)
2. Netherlands Organization for Health Research and Development (Netherlands)

Who is the main contact?

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Contact information

Type(s)

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Additional identifiers

Clinical Trials Information System (CTIS)

Nil known

Protocol serial number

2020.536

Study information

Scientific Title

Nudging customers towards healthier food and beverage purchases in a real-life online supermarket: a multi-arm randomized controlled trial

Study objectives

Implementation of nudging strategies in an online supermarket result in an overall higher percentage of healthy products purchased, and online nudging strategies have differential effects across food groups. Moreover, online nudging strategies do not result in differences in total retailer revenue.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 29/09/2020, the medical ethics review board of VU University Medical Center Amsterdam (Medisch Ethische Toetsingscommissie VUmc, De Boelelaan 1109, kamer 08A-08, Postbus 7057, 1081 HV Amsterdam; +31 (0)20 444 5585; metc@vumc.nl) reviewed the study protocol and deemed the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) as not applicable, ref: 2020.536

Study design

Multi-arm parallel-group individually randomized controlled trial

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Prevention

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Promoting healthier food and beverage purchases among the general population

Interventions

Randomization is concealed as supermarket employees conduct the randomization and allocation of customers to one of the trial arms in a software system name Blueconic (Blueconic. Customer data platform. Boston, USA. 2020). The system is set to randomize and allocate the customers in equal distribution percentages of 25% across all four trial arms.

Two types of online nudges on healthy products are used, consisting of information nudges and availability nudges. The information nudge highlighted specific product information of healthy products via the use of labels highlighting a product's tastiness, convenience, or popularity. The availability nudge increases the number of placements of healthy products, via unhealthy-to-healthy product swaps and healthy check-out suggestions.

Customers visiting the online supermarket are randomly assigned to:

Arm 1: no intervention (regular online supermarket)

Arm 2: addition of information nudges (symbols on healthy products)

Arm 3: addition of availability nudges (unhealthy-to-healthy product swaps and healthy check-out suggestions)

Arm 4: addition of information and availability nudges combined

The trial was implemented in the online supermarket of a Dutch supermarket chain for five consecutive weeks between mid-August until mid-September 2020. During this period, sales data were collected from all customers placing a delivery order in the online supermarket.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

The total percentage of healthy purchases per individual shop measured using customer sales data based on the total weight of products purchased during the 5-week study period.

Key secondary outcome(s)

Secondary outcome measure:

Total percentage of healthy purchases within 19 food groups per individual shop measured using customer sales data based on the total weight of products purchased during the 5-week study period

Tertiary outcome measure:

Total retailer revenue measured using customer sales data based on the total amount of Euros spent during the 5-week study period

Completion date

01/10/2020

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

All customers placing a delivery order (i.e., shops) in a real-life online supermarket between mid-August until mid-September 2020

Participant type(s)

All

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Adult

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

15045

Key exclusion criteria

Shops reflecting an average household grocery shopping pattern are included in the analysis. Therefore, all business-related customers, and customers who purchased >90% of products in their shop from alcohol, other foods, and snacks, are excluded from the analysis.

Date of first enrolment

15/08/2020

Date of final enrolment

15/09/2020

Locations

Countries of recruitment

Netherlands

Study participating centre

Amsterdam UMC, VU University

De Boelelaan 1089a

Amsterdam

Netherlands

1081 HV

Sponsor information

Organisation

VU University Medical Center

ROR

<https://ror.org/00q6h8f30>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Hartstichting (CVON2016-04)

Alternative Name(s)

Heart Foundation

Funding Body Type

Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location

Netherlands

Funder Name

ZonMw (CVON2016-04)

Alternative Name(s)

Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development

Funding Body Type

Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Other non-profit organizations

Location

Netherlands

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not expected to be made available due to confidentiality agreements with the collaboration supermarket chain.

IPD sharing plan summary

Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article		17/01/2022	24/01/2022	Yes	No
Statistical Analysis Plan			01/06/2021	No	No