

Even in tough times, savvy shoppers reluctant to give up grocery favourites, new study shows

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Along with the price of petrol, the cost of groceries is a major concern for most Australians. New University of Western Sydney research reveals the pivotal role that emotions and brand loyalty have on our grocery purchases - and how we will make sacrifices elsewhere so we can still afford our trusted, often more expensive, supermarket favourites.

Daniela Spanjaard, a lecturer in the UWS School of Marketing, has carried out a fascinating study of grocery shopping behaviour. She has discovered our supermarket decisions are much more complex and emotionally-driven than we realise.

"Walking into a supermarket nowadays we're confronted with some 20,000 different grocery products. What used to be a simple choice has become much more challenging," says Ms Spanjaard.

"We discovered that supermarket shoppers have really strong emotional attachments to their favourite grocery brands that go way beyond the expected concerns about price and quality, even when the household budget is tight.

"People's grocery purchases are based on factors like convenience, influence of family members, reliability and the impact the brand has on their daily lives.

"We got comments from shoppers like: 'We never buy anything else and don't even bother to look at any other brand'; and 'I've tried several times to substitute it with other [cheaper] brands and not telling them, and the kids complained that something is wrong with the tortellini'.

"Grocery shoppers are steadfastly loyal to their favourite brands, even if they cost more. They just find ways to tighten their belts elsewhere."

Ms Spanjaard studied 16 shoppers ranging from 18 to 80 years of age, analysing 342 individual grocery purchases during 12 different supermarket visits.

This included videotaping the shoppers during their supermarket trips, carrying out questionnaires and in-depth interviews, and asking shoppers to keep a diary of their grocery purchases.

"Analysing the shoppers' reactions, we looked at how long it took them to select each purchase, body language and facial expressions, and whether products were put into the trolley or returned to the shelves," she says.

"The average selection time ranged from seven seconds to 53 seconds; on occasion it extended to nearly three minutes.

"All shoppers exhibited similar behaviours, ranging from making fast decisions and showing minimal emotion; through to thoughtfully comparing brands and showing signs of consternation like frowning, hand wringing, hair tugging, and putting hands on hips.

"These types of negative emotional responses would often coincide with shoppers' favourite brands being out of stock, or when comparing brands they were unfamiliar with.

"The more time a shopper took to make a purchase, the more complex the decision making and the greater level of negative emotional responses they felt about making a decision."

Ms Spanjaard says emotions also play a role in the way shoppers use their favourite brands.

"One shopper from our study loved her favourite brand of coffee, but couldn't afford to buy it all the time, so she mixed the generic coffee with her favourite brand so she could continue to experience the pleasure of using the product."

Provided by University of Western Sydney

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