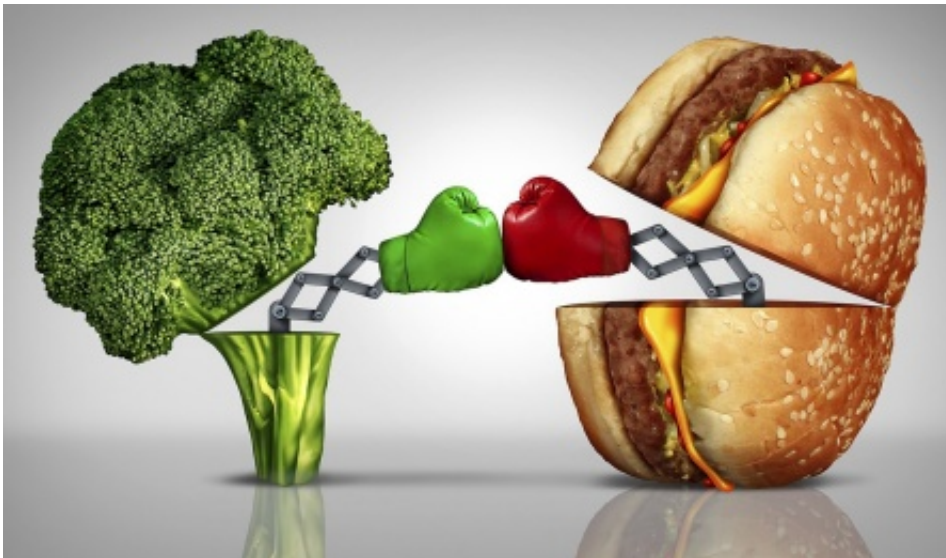


New study shows how consumers balance food choices

March 11 2016, by Kevin Manne



While more consumers than ever are making healthier choices at the grocery store, they tend to purchase a balance of healthy and less-healthy foods, according to new research from the University at Buffalo School of Management.

Published in the *Journal of Retailing*, the study found that [consumers](#) are concerned about eating a [healthy diet](#), but junk food still ends up in the shopping cart.

"There is a disconnect between what people say they want to eat and what they actually purchase," says study co-author Minakshi Trivedi, PhD, professor of marketing in the UB School of Management. "Each [group](#) we studied made tradeoffs on healthy and [unhealthy food](#) to varying degrees."

The researchers analyzed two years of scanner data across more than 70 stores of a major U.S. retail chain, along with survey responses from 400 of the chain's shoppers to see if consumers consciously balanced their health concerns with their actual food purchases.

The study grouped consumers into three segments using a mathematical model based on their attitudes and concerns: the first group was made up of health-driven buyers, the second took a more moderate approach to purchasing healthy products and the third group was indifferent to the healthier versions of products.

When faced with healthy or unhealthy choices—which the study based on the level of fat, sugar, or salt—the consumer segments showed distinct variations in characteristics, purchasing behavior and response to price and discounts.

Price had the smallest impact on the health-driven group, where 92 percent of buyers consistently purchased the healthy options. The moderate group was more price sensitive and likely to balance between healthy and regular versions of products—about half of the buyers in this group chose the healthy options. In the third group, consumers were more affected by price and discounts and preferred the regular versions of products as opposed to their healthy alternatives.

Retailers can use these findings to design different strategies that meet the demand for and encourage the purchase of healthier products, according to the authors. The study provides guidance to retailers about

which products to bundle for promotions and which element of the bundle to promote.

As for public policy, "If government agencies are to have any impact in promoting healthy consumption, they need to tailor their strategies to specific behavioral segments," says Trivedi.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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