

Food Store Density and the Efficacy of Health Nudges: Evidence from an Online Supermarket Experiment *

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Abstract

In recent years, behavioural economics has informed public policy, proposing nudges as an efficient instrument to steer behaviour change. Nudge interventions are prominently applied on public health issues like the promotion of healthy diets. Accompanying the topical discourse, scholars and practitioners discuss the real-world impact and public approval of behavioural public policy interventions. One domain of this debate are contextual and situational factors acting upon the efficacy of nudges. By focusing on healthy nutrition nudges, this paper investigates if food store densities moderate the relationship between nudges employed in an online supermarket setting and the number of healthy choices consumers make. We use experimental data on the dietary decisions of a representative sample of 1,923 US adults as well as county-level food store densities obtained from the Food Environment Atlas. Using OLS regressions and clustered standard errors, we find that food store densities do not moderate the efficacy of supermarket health nudges. Owing to methodological limitations and statistically insignificant results, our findings must be interpreted cautiously. Consequently, our prime intention is to stimulate more sophisticated research into the ecological perspective on nudging.

Keywords: Nudging, Behavioural public policy, Food choice, Food environment, Public health

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