

Who's Grocery Shopping Online and Why: Cross-Sectional Analysis of a Nationally-Representative Sample Since the Pandemic

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Objectives: COVID-19 has created a new normal, affecting food purchasing behaviors, moving a portion of them online. It is unknown how these behavioral shifts may differ by sociodemographic characteristics and whether shifts may widen or diminish existing diet-related disparities. To fill these gaps, we use nationally-representative Consumer Panel survey data to examine shifts in online grocery shopping by sociodemographic characteristics.

Methods: The Nielsen COVID-19 Shopper Behavior Survey was administered to a subset of Nielsen Homescan panel participants in March-April 2020 ($n = 17,262$ households (HH)). We describe survey-weighted HH sociodemographic characteristics and reasons for online shopping. Survey weighted-multivariable logistic regression was used to examine sociodemographic correlates of reported increases in online food shopping.

Results: One third (34%) of our survey-weighted sample said they shopped for groceries online more since COVID-19, and 60% of these

HH reported planning to continue shopping online after COVID-19. In adjusted analyses, all age groups (40–54 y, 55–64y, 65 + y) had lower odds of online shopping than heads of HH 39 years or younger (all $OR = 0.7, P < 0.001$). Lower educated (high school or less) HH had lower odds of online shopping compared to higher educated (college or more) HH ($OR = 0.7, P < 0.001$). HH in the South had higher odds of online shopping than those in the Northeast ($OR = 1.2, P = 0.006$). Compared to Non-Hispanic (NH) white HH, Hispanic HH had higher odds of online shopping ($OR = 1.2, P = 0.02$), and NH Asian HH had lower odds of online shopping ($OR = 0.8, P = 0.02$). HH with children had higher odds of online shopping compared to households without children ($OR = 1.4, P < 0.001$). Of those who said they would increase the amount of online shopping they did for everyday items including food (37%), the top reasons were to avoid public germs and COVID-19 (81%), to take advantage of the convenience (44%) and to access a better selection (17%).

Conclusions: There are disparities in shifts in online shopping behaviors due to COVID-19. Understanding these disparities can inform public health nutrition interventions related to online food shopping. We will assess the August 2020 survey as the pandemic may further change food shopping habits.

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