



# 1 Introduction

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Over the last decades, e-commerce has been booming and the grocery shopping industry has not been unaffected. An increasing number of grocery chains offer the option to shop for groceries online; moreover, many grocery businesses that operate entirely as an e-commerce platform with no physical stores have been created (Sloot, 2018). According to a research carried out by Morgan Stanley (2016) that surveyed 10,000 consumers in ten countries, groceries might be the next big driver of e-commerce globally. The grocery industry represents a multi-billion dollar business (USD 675 billion in the United States alone in 2016). There is still an enormous potential for growth, as the market share of online groceries remains very low compared to the grocery business overall (around 2 percent in the US and about 6 percent in some European markets such as the UK and France, where online grocery shopping has become somewhat more established). Online grocery shopping is expected to more than double in the next ten years, which would result in nearly 75 percent of consumers buying 25 percent of their groceries online in 2025 (A. C. Nielsen, 2015).

Nevertheless, online grocery shopping is a relatively new trend that has been gaining popularity and practical use on a wider scale only in the last few years (Sloot, 2018) and the depth of existing research is thus still lacking in some areas. Research has mostly focused on the adoption of e-commerce in general (e.g. Mandilas, Karasavvoglou, Nikolaidis, & Tsourgiannis, 2013; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008), the situational factors that determine the adoption of online grocery shopping (Chintagunta, Chu, & Cebollada, 2009), and to a certain extent, the changes in consumer behavior, particularly the impact on product/brand choice in the online supermarket (Degeratu, Rangaswamy, & Wu, 2000; Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003; Pozzi, 2009).

What is missing within the existing literature is the consumer's point of view. In other words, the understanding of how switching to online grocery shopping and the shopping behavior changes affect consumers themselves. Based on a qualitative study of online grocery supermarket customers, this





that online grocery shopping indeed reflects the consumer's desire for efficiency and time saving during a task seen as utilitarian. The shopping trips were fairly fast for most of the participants regardless of their lack of experience with online grocery shopping.

The time efficiency is closely connected to the fact that most purchases are carried out on the first page of each product category (Anesbury et al., 2015). In other words, consumers consistently use the default option of the page display in the retailer's online store and mostly only view the products displayed on the first page (the default page). This corresponds to other findings, according to which products located on the first page in the retailer's online store yield more purchases (Breugelmans, Campo, & Gijbrecchts, 2006), although there are numerous ways in which consumers can find a particular item in an online shop.

To find a product in a brick-and-mortar supermarket, a consumer must find the correct aisle and walk down it in order to locate the product. In the online shop, a consumer can use the search function and directly look the product up, view the special offer page directly, or use the "virtual departments" that resemble the aisle organization as if in a traditional supermarket (e.g. dairy, meat, vegetables, fruit). The latter turns out to be the consumers' preferred option. A study, in which 40 participants made an online grocery shopping trip while their eye movement was recorded, revealed that 95 percent of the participants used the "virtual departments" search function, thus copying offline supermarket behavior, 80 percent navigated by searching directly, and 68 percent browsed the special offers (Benn, Webb, Chang, & Reidy, 2015). Consumers have thus been shown to search for a product in the online environment in a similar way they would search for the same product in a physical supermarket, rather than searching for the product directly. This may be due to the fact that most online grocery retailers simulate a familiar supermarket environment (Anesbury et al., 2015).

Once the consumer finds the relevant product category, s/he is likely to shop on the first page, which corresponds to other findings mentioned



and affect their everyday lives? These are the questions this paper aims to address, exploring how changes in shopping behavior, which arise from regular grocery shopping online, are reflected in consumers' everyday lived experience. Knowing how online grocery shopping fits into people's everyday lives allows us to view the effect of e-commerce in the offline world and can help online supermarkets target their consumer segments more efficiently.

### 3 Methodology

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The goal of this research was to reveal how online grocery shopping translates into people's everyday lives. As the goal was to understand the changes from the consumer's point of view, qualitative research methods were applied, as they allow us to capture a certain phenomenon using the informant's frame of reference and attempt to experience what the informant is experiencing (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In particular, semi-structured interviews were conducted with consumers who have had extensive experience with online grocery shopping.

A set of potential topics of interest relevant for the current research was created based on the literature review. These topics were later complemented with exemplary questions that served as guidelines on how to approach the exploration of each of the set topics during the interviews. Both the research topics and interview questions were finalized during the process of data collection.

Following McCracken (1988), the sample consisted of ten online grocery customers. The data sample was chosen in line with the most meaningful characteristics of online grocery customers. First, the selection criteria based on various demographic statistics that describe the typical online grocery shopper in the Czech Republic were identified. These criteria included age, gender, income level, geographical location, and family structure. According to a report from KPMG (2016), 20 percent of the population aged 18 to 44 has shopped online for groceries at least once and another 25 percent is



## 4 Research Context

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The Czech Republic is among the top European nations when it comes to the amount of sales of groceries online. Currently 2.5 percent of all sold groceries in the country is sold online, which ranks the Czech Republic 7th worldwide in the most sold groceries online as a percentage of all sold groceries in the country (Statista, 2015). Online grocery shopping was introduced to the Czech Republic around the beginning of the decade and has since witnessed a booming growth with more sellers entering the market, more regions in which online grocery services are available, and more consumers who have tried to shop or shop regularly for groceries online (GfK Czech Republic, 2017).

As of 2018, more than 50 percent of people in the Czech Republic have tried to place an online order for groceries (compared to 24 percent in 2016) and one out of five customers purchases groceries on the internet regularly (compared to one out of ten in 2016) (InsightLab, 2018). Women are more experienced online grocery shoppers, with 27 percent having shopped for groceries at least once and 11 percent shopping regularly (InsightLab, 2017). Not surprisingly, online purchases are leading among the younger generation and experience with online grocery platforms decreases with age. While 61 percent of people between 18 and 24 have some online grocery experience, the share is 37 percent for the age category above 65 (InsightLab, 2018). The highest number of customers can be found in the Central Bohemia Region and the capital city Prague, while the online grocery platforms are the least used in the rural Liberecky Region and the Kralovehradecky Region. The typical shopper generally comes from a large city that has over 100,000 inhabitants (InsightLab, 2018).

In terms of market share, the market is dominated by three brands, two of which do not possess brick-and-mortar retail spaces: iTesco (an online version of Tesco), Kosik.cz, and Rohlik.cz. Brand recall for these three brands is 66 percent, 62 percent, and 57 percent, respectively.



## 5 Findings

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Consumers who have adopted online grocery shopping as their main means of buying groceries and/or shop online for groceries on a frequent and regular basis show a substantial change in their shopping behavior in the online supermarket environment when compared to the previous habits in a physical store. In line with the findings of other studies (e.g. Hand et al., 2009; Chintagunta et al., 2009), the consumers switched to regular online shopping either because of an external force driving them out of the traditional store, such as an injury or giving birth, or because of an internal motivation to save time or energy by shopping from the comfort of one's home.

Based on the data, four aspects of online grocery shopping were identified. These factors correspond to the benefits and/or pitfalls of online grocery shopping as perceived by the consumers. In particular, the online grocery shoppers associate online grocery shopping with the following themes, which lead to a perception of particular benefits/pitfalls of online grocery shopping:

1. More efficient shopping planning and perceived higher overall efficiency of shopping trips
2. Increased shopping uniformity and perceived diet monotony
3. Final price awareness throughout shopping and perceived cost efficiency of online grocery shopping
4. Alteration of the range of products bought and perceived benefit of the different product offer

In the following sections, the online supermarket customers' approach to online grocery shopping will be described, as well as the corresponding behavioral pattern in the online supermarket and the consequences of the shopping pattern for the lives of these consumers.

## 5.1 More Efficient Shopping Planning and Perceived Higher Overall Efficiency of Shopping Trips

As Kumar and Kashyap (2018) postulated, grocery shoppers exhibit utilitarian behavior. Hence, as utilitarian shoppers, they shop on the internet to reach a specific goal most efficiently. Although utilitarian shoppers display similar goal-driven behavior in the traditional brick-and-mortar store as well, the convenience of online grocery shopping makes the shopping efficiency even more possible as the utilitarian consumers try to minimize their costs, both financial and non-financial (Kumar & Kashyap, 2018).

In the current research, the online shopping environment allowed consumers to be more efficient by becoming better planners. Their planning of shopping trips, products to buy, and meals to eat in the following days involved more deliberate planning than when shopping for groceries offline. This can be summarized by Eliška's statement:

*“I see the biggest change in the fact that I plan more what we are going to eat. When I used to go to a store, I didn't care too much about it and just bought something on the spot, but now I think more about what we are going to have for meals... Another thing that I feel changed quite a lot for me is that I never used to make shopping lists and then I went to a store and bought for example something that I already had at home and forgot I had it, but that does not happen to me anymore because I just look in the fridge and see if I have it or not... I think [that] my shopping became so much more efficient.”*  
(Eliška)

More efficient shopping planning has an immediate effect on the consumers' lives, as they also start to plan the family's diet throughout the week and hence make plans for specific products and ingredients and their quantities. The more rigorous shopping planning that comes with shopping online is documented by some customers only starting to use grocery shopping lists after switching to an online supermarket. The overall better planning of



view his/her favorite and/or previously bought products. We refer to this option as “My Favorites”.

## 5.2 Increased Shopping Uniformity and Perceived Diet Monotony

“My Favorites” became one of the most frequently recurring topics during the interviews and explains to a degree the perceived increased efficiency and planning of the online grocery shopping by the informants, who use this page partly as a shopping list. Cecílie, Eliška, and Honza describe the efficiency effect of this function as follows:

*“What is really cool [about online supermarkets] is that once you select the items you want for the first time, they will stay there for the future and you can just quickly click on them if you want them again in your next shopping trip. Basically you always buy the same things.” (Cecílie)*

*“What is great about Rohlík [online supermarket] – but other platforms probably have this as well – is that you can use the function that remembers what you are buying and saves the products you have bought last time [as] your favorite products, so I always first go into ‘My Favorites’ where I click on the usual maybe 15 items I buy all the time such as fruit, bread, cheeses, and so on...” (Eliška)*

*“[It’s] great that you can just have a prepared shopping list [in the ‘My Favorites’ section] that you buy every Friday again and again and again...” (Honza)*

As can be concluded from Honza’s statement, the “My Favorites” section can be used as a shopping list itself, thus supplementing the planning process, yet rendering it more efficient. The “My Favorites” function makes it easier for the respondents to shop for products that they are used to. This makes their shopping faster and more efficient as a result. However, consistently with Pozzi (2009), who explored shopping based on past shopping history



*“I think I save a lot financially as well. When I shop [for groceries] online, I only buy things that I need... but when you go to the supermarket physically, then you can see the products and all the food and you buy things that you don't need... especially when I'm hungry – then I would buy half of the store. That doesn't happen on the internet because you're just not that tempted.” (Eliška)*

*“One doesn't buy that much because you don't see the things physically.” (Cecilie)*

*“Overall I save money because I don't buy things that I don't need.” (Barbora)*

In other words, the respondents feel that online shopping represents a financial saving for them because they only buy exactly what they need and are not tempted by the point-of-purchase marketing. This is a significant finding for impulsive product marketing, but also for marketing communication, as consumers in the online environment are apparently more focused on the task and not easily distracted by promotional offers.

However, there is also another process that allows consumers to control the cost of their shopping in the online environment. An online grocery provider operates on the same principle as other e-commerce retailers, automatically saving purchased goods in the shopping cart and automatically calculating the total price of the purchase. This virtual shopping cart is generally visible in the upper right corner of the screen and is present regardless of where the consumer browses on the particular website. It updates automatically when more goods are put in. Hence, a consumer always sees the final price at any given moment.

In the current study, the regular shoppers described that the possibility of seeing the final basket price helps them from going over their personal “price ceiling”, as Jakub puts it. Consumers have a clear awareness of the total price that they intend to spend during the shopping trip. The traditional offline supermarket environment, however, does not offer any



some respondents, the online grocery assortment was one of the drivers that led them online and hence the different product offering affected them even more substantially.

Ilona exemplifies the story that ran through the accounts of the online shoppers. She started shopping online for groceries more than two years ago because of a knee injury; however, another reason – although less significant at that time – was the range of healthy products that can be found in the online supermarket. Although her knee healed, she never went back to the traditional supermarket shopping and now buys 90 percent of her groceries online. There were many factors that propelled her to stay with the online grocery provider, including time saving and convenience; however, the different product assortment was the main factor that prevented her from going back to the traditional way of grocery shopping. Ilona describes her view on the product offering as follows:

*“I got used to buying meat from the farmer’s selection on Rohlík, which is so hard for me to get anywhere else. Like there is the bio option in supermarkets but that’s the next level above ‘from the farmer’s’, which makes that meat outrageously expensive. I also like their selection of alternative flours like buckwheat, almond, or millet. You almost can’t get these anywhere else. Our family almost stopped eating gluten since Rohlík. There are so many healthier alternatives on Rohlík that I wasn’t buying before. I wouldn’t even know where [to buy them]...” (Ilona)*

Similarly, Honza also added vegan or regional products that he “wouldn’t find anywhere else or would have trouble finding somewhere else”.

Online grocery shopping thus allowed the consumers to render their diets healthier and more sustainable. However, once the consumers adapted to the online shopping pattern, they started using the “My Favorites” function and the core of their shopping list became more or less the same. This finding suggests that shoppers tend to adopt new products and thus expand their usual product range together with their shopping and eating





online shopping trips more thoroughly than they would have planned if they were going to a physical store. They plan exactly what they are going to eat and how much of each ingredient they need. In some consumer cases, this led to the adoption and use of grocery shopping lists.

Efficiency was aided primarily by the “My Favorites” instrument that allows consumers to select the same items as in their past orders or that they have saved previously. Consumers were shown to use this instrument creatively both to control the time spent on shopping and the cost of shopping. The time saving that the “My Favorites” function creates for the customers is significant compared to the time that a consumer would have to spend to select the same products in a traditional supermarket. In this way, consumers use this function in the way described by Sorensen (2017) to eliminate choice overload and navigate the shop more efficiently. This finding then confirms what was suggested by other researchers, in that it decreases brand exploration (Pozzi, 2009). The quest for time efficiency can be added here, which also decreases new product exploration, once consumers become familiar with the online grocery supermarket environment and start using its functions to the fullest. Their buying habits then become automated, rendering the shopping monotonous.

The online supermarket customers also achieve cost efficiency through planning and the “My Favorites” instrument, which prevent them from buying unnecessary products. Hence, the overall shopping basket price decreases when compared to shopping for groceries in a traditional supermarket. This is due to the fact that consumers are not exposed to point-of-purchase marketing to such a degree. Moreover, the overall decrease in expenditure spent on groceries is also impacted by the fact that the final basket price is visible on the screen at any given moment of the shopping trip, offering more control over the spending.

The efficiency of online shopping, however, is counterweighted by the pitfall of uniform shopping, which brings monotony into people’s diets. While, contrarily to some previous studies (e.g. Pozzi, 2009), at the moment of switching to online food provisioning consumers tend to explore the



## Appendix

**Table A1 List of Research Participants**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Geographic location</b>	<b>Family structure</b>	<b>Frequency of online grocery shopping</b>
Adéla	38	Value chain manager	Jablonec nad Nisou	2 adults + 2 children	Infrequent
Barbora	23	Administrative assistant	Prague	1 adult	Frequent
Cecílie	26	Business analyst	Prague	2 adults	Frequent
Dana	32	Maternity leave/hairstylist	Březina u Mnichova Hradiště	2 adults + 1 child	Infrequent
Eliška	25	Maternity leave/translator	Prague	1 adult + 1 child	Frequent
Františka	30	Maternity leave	Jablonec nad Nisou	2 adults + 1 child	Frequent
Gabriela	30	Advisor	Liberec	2 adults	Infrequent
Honza	27	Government official	Prague	1 adult	Frequent
Ilona	48	Doctor	Prague	4 adults	Frequent
Jakub	32	Consultant	Prague	1 adult	Frequent



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## Sažetak

# Prednosti i mane internetske kupovine namirnica iz perspektive potrošača: primjer iz Češke Republike

ZNANSTVENI ČLANAK

Klára Šarkovská\*  
Zuzana Chytková\*\*

Tijekom proteklog desetljeća internetska kupovina namirnica razvila se u važno područje e-trgovine te trenutno predstavlja multimilijardski biznis. Iako su već provedena općenita istraživanja o različitim aspektima ponašanja kupaca prilikom *online* kupovine, kupovina namirnica specifična je po svojoj rutini i svakodnevnosti. Kao uobičajena i rutinska aktivnost ona utječe na svakodnevne živote potrošača, ali i na pitanja od šireg značaja, npr. problem bacanja hrane. Ovaj se rad bavi ponašanjem *online* kupaca i utjecajem *online* kupovine na njihove svakodnevne živote. Na temelju kvalitativnog istraživanja, opisuju se četiri promjene u ponašanju potrošača nakon prelaska s *offline* na *online* kupovinu namirnica. Zatim se opisuje kako te promjene utječu na svakodnevnicu potrošača i na njihovu percepciju prednosti i/ili mana internetske kupovine namirnica.

**Ključne riječi:** *online* trgovina, e-trgovina, ponašanje potrošača, kvalitativno istraživanje, potrošačke prednosti, Češka Republika

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\* Klára Šarkovská, studentica, Odjel za marketing, Škola poslovnog upravljanja, Ekonomski fakultet u Pragu, Češka Republika, e-mail: klara.sarkovska@gmail.com.

\*\* Zuzana Chytková, docentica, Odjel za marketing, Škola poslovnog upravljanja, Ekonomski fakultet u Pragu, Češka Republika, e-mail: zuzana.chytkova@vse.cz.

