The Freedom to Choose: Increasing Nutrition among Low Income and Food Insecure Individuals

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How do we know what to buy?

- 285 variety of cookies
- 75 iced teas
- 230 soups
- 175 salad dressings
- 40 toothpastes

- Information?
- Prices?
- Weighing taste and convenience?
Achieving Objectives

The welfare approach

• Seeks policies that maximize overall welfare while imposing the policy objective
  • Usually several equivalent policies (tax, caps on production, etc.)
  • Suggests the most direct policy is the more efficient policy
Achieving Objectives

**Behavioral economics approach**

- Individuals make hundreds of thousands of decisions a day.
  - Making every decision a deliberate decision would be physiologically impossible.
  - As a result, humans fall back on *rules-of-thumb* and *habit*.
- What would happen if we did rationally consider each decision?
- How could cognitively strategies engage the unthinking?
  - Reactance
  - Rebelling against a threat to freedom
  - Fat tax versus a thin subsidy
  - Limits on ketchup
The Bloomberg Effect

Experiment

• Participants were offered soda while filling out paperwork
• Slightly less than half of participants were men

Soda Consumption

Ounces

Control

Bloomberg
Bloomberg Effect

Increase in Weekly Expenditures

All significant at the p < 0.01 level
Hot vs. Cold Decisions

**Cold State**
- We consider
  - Prices
  - Health information
  - Logic
- We buy
  - Smaller portions
  - Moderate foods

**Hot State**
- We eat for
  - Taste
  - Convenience
  - Size
  - Visual effect
  - This decision is an (supposed to be) exception
- We buy
  - Bigger
  - More hedonic
Hot/Cold Study
Behavioral Interrupt

• Upstate NY schools with pre-ordering of lunch items through SmartBoards

• Students who did **NOT** pre-order (Hot State):
  
  ➢ 11.8% less likely to take a fruit
  ➢ 8.9% more like to take a snack food
  ➢ 25% more likely to take a starchy side

10 Spanish and English Floor Stickers Placed Throughout the Grocery Store.

Follow green arrow for a healthy [weight]

Follow green arrow for a healthy [heart]

Follow green arrow for your [health]

(6 ft long by 3 ft wide)
All-You-Can-Eat

- Rational: eat until the next bite of food provides no more enjoyment
- Individuals entering an AYCE pizza buffet were asked to participate
  - Half were given a coupon for a free drink
  - Half were given a coupon for a free drink and 50% off their meal

Don’t like it? Eat 0.5 slices more
What is normal anyway?

- Soda can – 12 oz
- Starbucks – “Tall” 12 oz
- McDonald’s soda – “child” 12 oz
- McDonald’s coffee – “small” 12 oz
- Consumers presented with two sizes of items
  — Regular and Double
  — Half and Regular
Give ‘em a Choice!

• People report being more satisfied with an option if they have chosen it than if it is forced on them, even when the default option is what they would have chosen anyway!

• When given a choice between carrots and celery, 89% of kids both took and ate carrots vs. 69% when carrots alone were offered.
Feeding America

• Nation’s leading domestic hunger-relief organization
• Recognizes that behavioral nudges can provide nutrition education
• Recognizes that behavioral nudges can distribute more foods to encourage
  – Today, 68% of the food distributed through the Feeding America network is classified as Foods to Encourage and by 2025 their goal is to be at 75% Foods to Encourage
Nudge interventions at food pantries

• Feeding America is building the evidence base for nudge interventions as a nutrition education strategy in food bank and food pantry settings!
Multiple Facings

Whole Wheat Bread

- Single Exposure: 32%
- Multiple Exposures: 63%
Packaging Matters

Boxed: 35%
Unboxed: 22%
Perceived Value Matters

• Shopping without prices is surreal
  ▪ No reference for value
• Having a displayed price increases selection by more than 20%
Food Scarcity and Bandwidth

Scarcity drives poor decisions

Does this make nudging more effective?
Public microsite of FeedingAmerica.org

Health, nutrition and hunger-relief professionals Educatess, Connects, Engages

Nudge Resources

Nudge Video

Nudge: How to Guide
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