

Supermarket Tours

Includes:
Final Report

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Aisle 5: 2001 Supermarket Tour	
Lisa Reflection	
Heather Reflection	

This Assignment was intended to be an update of the 2001 Supermarket Tour written by McMaster Students. The final product consists of additional information for Aisle 1 and 5. These additions are intended to be used alongside the existing 2001 Supermarket tour, they should not be used to replace them. The majority of the information has been updated, however certain section of Aisle 1 are currently still accurate and for Aisle 5 the information required is difficult to locate in the given time period.

Aisle 1 has been produced as an addition to the 2001 version of the Supermarket Tour, therefore the majority of the information is new but the topics covered remain the same. For each topic new information has been added and some of the existing information has been updated, for example there are many new types of consumer manipulation that have been described in the section that relate today's marketing techniques. For each section within this aisle examples have been given to more clearly illustrate how significantly the food system has changed over the last five years.

The information presented in aisle 5 has been significantly altered from the existing information in the 2001 version of the Supermarket Tour. This section has undergone a vast number of changes and is currently under a great deal of examination. Since the last version was created, many animal diseases have crossed the species divide and infected humans. This section is not even current to the issues facing this aspect of the food system because during the process of writing this report more issues of disease and over use of antibiotics were reported in the media. It would be beneficial if an update of this aisle be performed on a regular basis until the dangers to human health are addressed. A lot of the facts surrounding this topic are difficult if not impossible to obtain because they have been suppressed or are not accessible to the public.

The information presented in this paper is very beneficial to the purpose of the Supermarket tour, however it would be beneficial if more information were added. The amount of detail included in the tour should be identified because if the purpose is just a general over view it would be beneficial for this to be stated as well as a link to an area where more detail information could be gathered would be ideal. There are also many new topics that should be added or section that could be expanded.

Vertical Integration (*Replacement*)

Another form of corporate control and restriction of choice is found in the food products themselves. Transnational corporations typically seek “vertical integration,” a process where a company will take over all levels of a given industry. For instance, companies seek to control everything including farm equipment, seeds, fertilizers, animals, meat processing and packaging. The end result is that a few companies dominate the entire industry, a condition known as “oligopoly.” Consumers have less real choice, and do not receive the benefits of real competition¹.

In Australia, if you spend more than \$30 at any Coles Supermarket you receive a four cent per litre discount on gas purchases from any Shell Gas Station².

An example of vertical integration in the supermarket setting, is in Australia (and other areas such as the United Kingdom). This is the situation where customers receive a fixed per litre discount on fuel if they spend a certain amount (\$) or more on groceries³. This type of bundling and exclusive dealing, in the end, works to save the customer money, but then also works to the disadvantage of other gas stations effectively lessening competition both among supermarkets and gas stations.

The top two supermarket companies in Canada today are Loblaws Companies Ltd. and Sobeys (respectively). Together they are working to put each other, as well as hundreds of small food grocers out of business by providing lower and lower prices. Over the next couple of years shoppers can expect to be greeted with cleaner, brighter and fresher smelling stores as these two companies take over more and more small grocery chains. Prices are expected to drop drastically as these two giants battle each other, and join forces to get rid of warehouses like Costco Companies Ltd. and Sam’s Club, both owned by Wal-Mart⁴.

We’ve Come a Long Way (*Replacement*)

This process works to increase the distancing food has from those who consume it. Consumers no longer go to the supermarket and choose the items that will give them a nutritious, delicious balanced diet. Today the pattern follows the idea of precooked, prepared, or frozen dinners⁵. These are ‘added-value’ products, and the only value that is added is profit, there is no added nutritional value in a T.V. dinner! In addition to this, the concept of ‘added-value’ simply offers the option of erasing the need to prepare meals at home, that is the only value that is added, time is valuable.

Distancing is not only occurring between consumers and their food, but also between farmers and the farming practice. Today, farmers are being transformed into businessmen/women, and the use of high-tech machinery means that farming is no longer as harsh and tedious as it was in the past for industrialized nations.

Food distancing as stated by Brewster Kneen (1993), is the increasing separation of humans from nature. It is the disconnection of labourers from their labour, and can be

prevented by initiating regional food systems, on smaller sustainable farms with less detachment from the land. It works in 5 different ways; geographically, individually, physically, technologically and ethically⁶.

Consumer Manipulation (*New Sections/subheadings to be added*)

“About 80 percent of consumer choices are made in store and 60 percent of those are impulse purchases.”⁷

Buggy’s (*New Section*)

The use of extra large, and extra deep buggy’s give the customer a sense that they have all kinds of room to go above and beyond what is on their shopping list if need be. It gives them the illusion that using that whole buggy for a few measly items is a waste, so why not get a couple extra things to fill it up, and to make the shopping trip a little more worthwhile. Another manipulative technique that is often used is the availability of junior shopping carts, for children to have the opportunity to walk around and ‘shop’ with their parent(s) for school snacks and cereals.

Air Temperature (*New Section*)

Susan also describes that the air temperature in shopping centers and supermarkets is usually kept a couple degrees cooler than room temperature because it is proven the cold people tend to eat more. The reasoning here is that a person who is chilly, is therefore more hungry, and will likely increase the number of purchases and spend more money on groceries that they otherwise would not buy.

Brand Loyalty (*New Section*)

Brand placement and brand loyalty are also very important. When consumers are dedicated to a specific brand name because it offers the right product features, at the right price. Most people purchase safe or familiar brands out of habit, which is what causes competition between multinational food corporations. An example of a multinational food corporation is Nestle. The Nestle Corporation owns the brand names of “Nescafe, Lean Cuisine, Nesquick, Milo, Peters, Aliens, Lucky Dog, Carnation, Crunch, Vittel, Perrier, Friskies, Go Cat, Smarties, Maggi, Kit Kat and Activ.”⁸

Supermarket Language (*New Section*)

Every supermarket uses a universal language to sell food products, and each food product has its own key words. These “weasel words” are used to make products sound better than they actually are, and they include; sale, extra, double, and soothing (etc.). Other methods of manipulation are making items sound wholesome and healthy by using the words ‘natural’, ‘lite’ and ‘low fat’ when in fact they are the same as all of the other products. As stated by Bryce “many food products claim to be made from ‘natural’ ingredients, giving the illusion of goodness or wholesomeness.” In fact many ‘natural’ fruit juices come from imported fruits, are juiced with the skins and all, and poured into colourful juice boxes and advertised as fresh fruit juices. Another example for weight conscious foods, is that items advertised as lite or low fat, are simply whipped to add air or water. Then when the product is finished, a chemical thickening agent is added to make the product seem the same as all other products, but with a low fat label⁹.

Another type of advertising in supermarkets is the promotion of new items through pressure sales¹⁰. When a new item comes into the supermarket, the technique is to get it into the consumer’s buggy by pressuring them to buy it, usually by illustrating signs that say ‘buy now, before they’re gone!’, ‘limited supply’, or ‘hurry, get yours for only \$...’. This type of manipulation makes the consumer feel that if they do not buy the item now, it will disappear and they will have no other chance to purchase it.

Use of Colour (*New Section*)

The next form of manipulation is product packaging. Psychological research has proven that the colours red and yellow stimulate appetite (another reason why Tim Hortons, Wendy’s, McDonalds, Country Style, and Burger King). The colours blue and green are usually associated with coolness and freshness (respectively), and often used on dairy products. Orange and red are used to market hot chickens and precooked foods, indicating that they are hot and fresh (not really though). Toothpaste boxes are most often found in white, blue, green and silver (and often sparkles) for sparkling white teeth. And lastly coffee is always packaged in brown and black, often with gold to indicate good style and quality.

Television Commercials (*New Section*)

Television, the drug of the nation, is one of the most significant manipulation techniques in history. It works to reinforce ideas of what the everyday world is all about, stating that everyone has this item so you must buy it as well, or that you cannot live without this product (etc.). Advertisers know that unhappy and/or worried people tend to purchase more consumer goods in order to make themselves feel better. Bryce calls this process ‘retail therapy’. The message is sent across as ‘you’re not good enough if you don’t have this product’ or ‘you are not as cool as your friend if you don’t buy ...’ a certain kind of shampoo or lunch snack. By making the consumer feel guilty, or in need of the item, they effectively influence their purchasing patterns.

Another type of television advertising technique, is the time of day that ads are aired. Commercials that are aired during daytime hours are geared more towards stay at home mothers, elderly people or very young people¹¹. These are commercials that include household appliances, cleaning supplies, healthy food, and toys for toddlers and young children, among other things. Television commercials that are aired after six o'clock include beer, getaway vacations, tanning salons, bars/clubs, sportswear, sports gear and upcoming films. Advertisers are fully aware of who their target audience is and when they are most likely to be watching, so they effectively air commercials at specific times when they can reach as many consumers as possible.

An experiment that was done in the past shows that smells play a major role in the persuasion of purchasing goods. A shopping center in Montreal experimented with one of the five senses, by pumping tiny traces of citrus fragrances (lemon, orange, grapefruit and tangerine) into the air supply in the mall for a period of one week. Although the shoppers could not distinctively smell the aroma, it played an influential role on their spending patterns. Store owners reported having a \$55 to \$90 increase in per customer purchasing within that one test-week!¹²

Taste Testers (*New Section*)

It is in this way that supermarkets use smells to promote impulse buying among consumers. Another example of this is taste testers. Often in supermarkets, you see one or more tiny taste tester booths. These function to give buyers a taste of a product, which inevitably makes them hungry for more, and often the product is kept right at the stand so that the consumer does not even have to go and find the product.

Entrances (*Replacement*)

Usually there is only one store entrance and one exit. This effectively allows the supermarket to control where the consumer begins their shopping, and since you are more likely to spend money at the beginning of the shopping trip than at the end, the high-end merchandise (wines, and gourmet foods) are placed at the beginning.

Music/Muzak (*Replacement*)

Music is often played in many supermarkets, but is rarely noticed by anyone. In the supermarket, it is not meant to catch the attention of the consumer, but is meant to 'reduce stress, improve morale, and delay fatigue'. By relaxing the consumer, it invites them to stay longer and spend more time and money looking around. It is the only music in the world that is meant to be heard, but not listened to.

This is effective because it is proven that music affects the heartbeat and therefore the consumers perceptions both of time and behavior. One source states that “the average heart pounds away at 80 beats a minute. ‘Amazing Grace,’ which everyone would agree is a slow song, clocks in at 60 beats a minute. Simon and Garfunkel’s ‘Sounds of Silence’ runs closer to 100 beats a minute.”¹³ She also states that fast music in a supermarket is worse than no music at all, and this is because the faster the music, the faster people tend to think and walk, and therefore they tend to spend less money in the store.

Product Placement (*additions*)

Do you ever wonder why things in the supermarket are so hard to find? Why is the spaghetti and spaghetti sauce not in the same aisle? Often stores use the method of spreading things out, so to make consumers ‘wander’. The more items a person looks at, the more likely they are to make an impulse buy. Everyday items such as milk, and dairy products are at the extreme end of the supermarket away from the produce and bakery section. Customers are forced to walk past (or through) every section of the supermarket in order to get their dairy products.

Triangles are good methods of displaying items and information that you want people to see¹⁴. It is the concept of balance, when you look at a triangle your eye always moves to the center point. So in this way, many supermarkets use triangular displays and place the most expensive product, often a brand name, at the center being surrounded by other similar products of cheaper value. Once the consumer sees the most expensive, or best value product, it is hard for them to encourage themselves that the cheaper one is better.

Staple items are the items that most people need to buy on every shopping trip. These include butter, milk, and bread (along with other possibilities), and are often the items that have a minimal shelf life. These items are most often found at either end of the supermarket so that the consumer is forced to walk through every aisle in order to get what they want. The aisles that staple foods are found in also tend to be more narrow than the other wider aisles, simply making consumers feel that selection is limited and they must compete for what they want, often ensuring that they buy more than one of the item.

Endnotes

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Aisle 5: The Meat Market Or What's Your Beef?

(Addition)

- The traditional methods of farming and the modern factory farm are both being scrutinized because of the outbreaks of mad cow disease, avian flu and many other diseases crossing the species boundaries

Animal Abuse (Addition)

- Forty years ago chicken meat was considered a luxury however it is predicted that 49 billion chickens will be consumed in 2005 alone.
- Originally chicken took 3 months to become the acceptable slaughter weight of 2Kg now with the introduction of selective breeding, a chicken only needs 41 days from the time it hatches to become an acceptable weight to be slaughter.
- Genetic selection has given us dairy cattle that produce 10 times the amount of milk a calf can drink, double-musled beef cattle, and chickens whose rapid growth cause their bodies to give from metabolic strain.
- The chickens that are raised for meat, 98% of these chickens are supplies by three different companies. This dominance is decreasing the genetic variability and the chickens are becoming prone to heart failure, oedema of the liver and death.
- If the chicken where not slaughter at an early age they would not survive over one year without a severely restricted diet. This causes great concerns because chickens must be 20 weeks before they can breed and reproduce. ⁱ

Crowding (Addition)

- Industrial countries have created stricter policies and regulations causing factory farms to relocate to countries that do not prohibit the processes used by factory farming. For example, in the Philippines, factory farming has become a large part of the economy. ⁱⁱ

Antibiotics (Addition)

- Antibiotics are fed to animals for three reasons, therapy for sick, prophylactic for herd and to promote growth. In 2005 it was recommended that antibiotic use be restricted to only sick animals, under the supervision of a veterinarian. This also came with the suggestion that the public be made aware of the use of antibiotics in animals. ⁱⁱⁱ

Desertification (Addition)

- The United Nations believes that an area the size of Sir Lanka dried up and become desert every year. This is caused by climate change, and intensive logging and farming.

- Many farmers are attempting to reverse the effect of desertification and reclaim the land as productive agricultural land. But this process is slow and many have not yet discovered its existence.^{iv}

Greenhouse Gases (Addition)

- In agriculture the largest producer of methane gas is the digestion of domestic livestock. The production rates in 2005 are predicted to be decreased by 20% if animal breeding and husbandry are improved, biotechnology and decreased consumption of red meat and milk products. The other steps that can be taken to reducing methane production are to develop new manure systems that trap the methane allowing it to be used on the farm as an energy source.^v

Animal Waste (Addition)

- Animal manure pollutes many cities water sources, efforts were made to control this growing problem. In 2002 the federal government targeted 40,000 concentrated animal-feeding operations. The traditional method is to store the manure outdoors until it can be used for fertilizer. The problem is that it seeps into water source; the smell is disturbing to people, and releases a large amount of gases.
- Many farmers are building miniature sewage treatment plants on their property large farms such as Perdue and Tyson have built gasification and processing plants to deal with the manure.
- There have also been the introduction of feeding zeolite, this mineral absorbs liquids and the hope is that it will solidify the manure. This mixture will then be used, as fertilizer and the zeolite will create a slow release system to reintroduce the minerals into the soil.^{vi}
- In North Carolina, the largest producer of pork in the U.S.A in 1999 was covered with manure pits. When hurricane Floyd hit the area in 1999, the pits flooded and burst covering field, and waterways with pig manure. This massive mess caused a large number of fish kills and millions in clean up costs.^{vii}
- Since 2000, all intensive livestock operations with an animal unit over 400 must present a manure management plan, have manure system inspected and undergo a mini environmental review. These large operations are also prohibited from spreading manure during the winter. These have been beneficial steps towards making the factory farming more environmentally sustainable but these programs are limited because they are not enforced or monitor.^{viii}

Walkerton (Addition)

- The provincial and municipal governments of Canada have attempted to discover the best possible programs to implement, but as of 2003 they were lacking the information and jurisdictional power to make any movements forward^{ix}

- The municipal government was put in charge of controlling the development of factory farms and regulating the environmental impacts but this solution was not beneficial by any means because if the town did not decide on zoning by-laws that would prohibit certain activities then farmers would sue if they were denied the rights to set up an industrial farm
- The municipal government was confused and unable to deal adequately with the proposal for factory farms, all parties held the belief that the provincial government needed to step in

Organic Farming (Addition)

Factory farming has caused many farmers and individuals to search for a healthier option. Organic farming is one of the newest responses, however because it is still in the early stages of development it has not yet been completely regulated. Many products may be labeled 'natural' or 'organic' but the only guarantee organic products are labeled certified organic. This knowledge is not commonly known and many people do not see a difference between the labeling except for the price.

The benefits that organic farms advertise to consumers are that organic food the animals are raised in humane and safe environments comparable to the traditional views of farming, use of antibiotics, hormones, and pesticides are prohibited except in the case of sickness. However in the certified organic program all animals that are treated with antibiotics are removed from the program and no longer marked as certified organic.

Instead of spraying fertilizers and pesticides, organic farmers rotate their crops and often let their fields have at least one season off. This helps the soil replenish nutrients and prevent pest cycles. The manure from the livestock is used as fertilizer because it is simply returning what the animals took from the soil.

Many studies have been done in comparing the health of traditional groups in Africa, New Zealand, Australia and South America who still consume their traditional food staples that have not been changed by production. To the health of traditional groups who have switched to consuming produced goods. The health of the traditional group is greater and experiences less malnutrition. The groups that have switched to producer goods experience a large percentage of malnutrition and sickness. This sickness has even negatively affected the DNA of the subjects studied.^x

Endnotes

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Submitted by
Students

The Supermarket Tour Specific Topics

After reviewing the supermarket tour we have decided that we will be focusing specifically on updating aisle 1 and aisle 5. Aisle 1 focuses on the food system and the marketing schemes that are employed by supermarkets, while Aisle 5 is directed towards the meat market.

Lisa Arens will be working on aisle 1, which looks specifically at the outside of the supermarket. Issues arise in regards to the actual food marketing system, corporate control, food distancing, consumer manipulation, attracting consumers and consumer alternatives. Other issues that will be researched on a somewhat lower scale are things such as owners/operators, who is making the profit, and how packaging and product placement affect a consumers purchase decision.

This is an important topic because in today's society, corporate marketing agencies are coming up with newer and more effective ways to sell products. Ads are becoming less informative, and sale signs are becoming bigger and brighter. Even the placement of a product in a supermarket is proven to increase sales by a certain percentage every year! As large corporations get larger, and profit becomes centralized in one or two large firms, there will need to be limits set on how much profit a corporation can obtain annually. This section will successfully inform consumers of how they are being manipulated into 'impulse purchases' and how they can effectively work to minimize these purchases.

Heather Boyd will be working on aisle 5, this topic should be examined because when dealing with animals, systems are constantly changing and with the recent shift to organic farming. Farmers are becoming more aware of the chemicals and processes that are used in raising animals especially beef. The recent mad cow disease and the closure of the U.S. boarder to Canadian beef have affected the proceeds in a significant way.

The aisle considers such topics as animal abuse, how chemicals in meat affect the consumer and environmental impacts. This topic is especially personal for Heather Boyd because she grew up on a small family farm that raises beef for personal consumption. The issues of the mad cow disease did not greatly impact her family business because of

the small scale. However it is interesting to learn the innovations that have resulted out of necessity to adapt and improve the current system.

This topic is especially import because the consumer has become increasingly aware of the issues surrounding beef. This has arisen out of personal concern with the disease. The unique opportunity to educate the public about the beef market has been created and could lead to increased interest in education about the complete food system.

If the topics that we have chosen to update are not satisfactory for this assignment each of us have chosen a second aisle to update. Lisa Arens has chosen aisle 6 as a second choice for updating and Heather Boyd has chosen aisle 3. Aisle 6 focuses on additives and the role they play in the food system. Aisle 3 focuses on the biodiversity and how industrial farming and the current food system affect it.