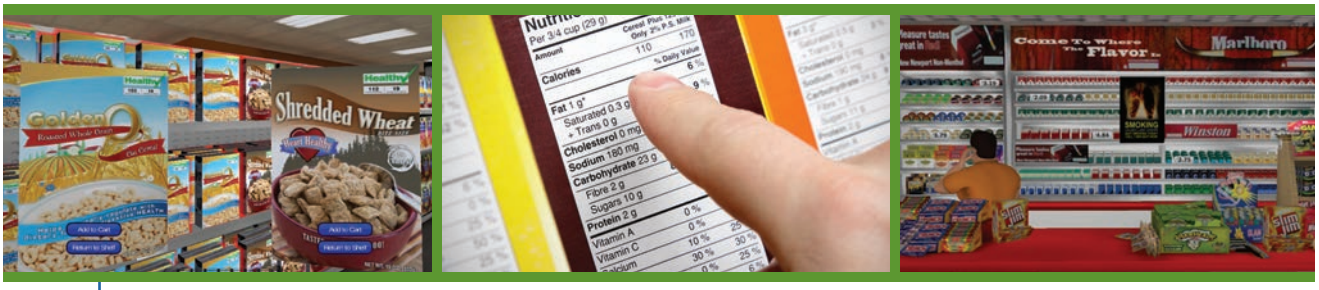
RTI iShoppe®—Consumer Health Behavior Research Tool



RTI iShoppe is a web-based virtual store application that researchers can use to study consumers' behavioral responses to product packaging, prices, advertisements, and the retail environment.

Overview

RTI International social science researchers and an experienced 3D graphic design and programming team developed RTI iShoppe, a web-based consumer research tool for studying consumer behaviors to help inform health policy decisions. The tool places study participants in a computer-simulated store environment to collect information about participants' purchasing behavior. RTI collaborates with its clients to develop customized applications of the tool that address clients' specific research needs.

Advantages of RTI iShoppe

Virtual shopping environments are ideal for conducting experimental research because they allow random variation of product characteristics (e.g., price, label, nutritional information) or the store environment (e.g., point-of-sale signage or other interventions) to assess consumer response. This level of experimental control would be difficult and expensive to achieve in a real-world setting. Previous research suggests that virtual stores such as RTI iShoppe are a valid tool for measuring consuming behavior.

RTI iShoppe offers a number of advantages:

- Records each step of the study participant during the shopping task as well as his or her interaction with the products and store environment. These data are available to the researcher for data analysis.
- Provides price integration from other sources (e.g., location-specific, scanner-based price data) to address specific research questions.
- Allows for data collection in-person for small studies or via an internet panel for large studies.
- Collects detailed data on visual attention by integrating eye-tracking software with RTI iShoppe.

Possible Applications Using RTI iShoppe

RTI iShoppe is ideal for studies that aim to

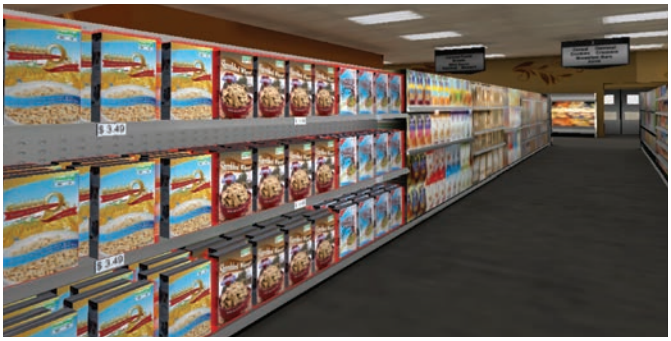
- Explore consumer understanding and use of new labeling features (e.g., nutrition information or warning statements)
- Determine consumer preferences for foods with varying nutritional profiles
- Examine how changes in product price (e.g., introduction of a tax) can influence purchase decisions
- Assess how changes in the store environment (e.g., a behavioral intervention) influence purchase decisions

Recent Applications

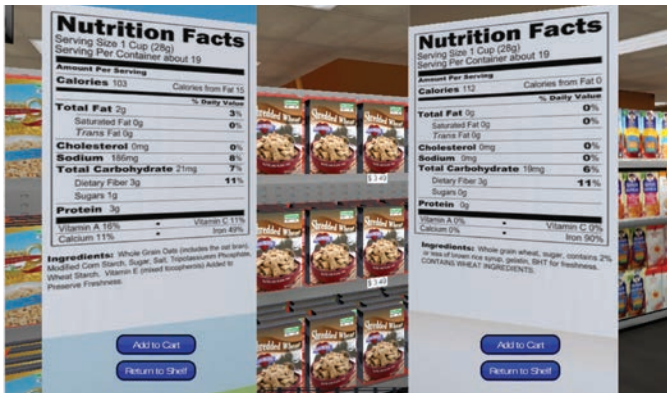
- RTI conducted a series of experimental studies to examine the potential impact of tobacco regulatory policies at the point of sale. For one study, we found that both youth and adults were less likely to attempt

tobacco purchases when products were enclosed rather than on display, providing support for policies banning open display of tobacco products. For another study, we found that banning tobacco advertisements from the store or displaying antismoking signs at the checkout counter did not deter study participants from choosing tobacco products during their virtual shopping task.

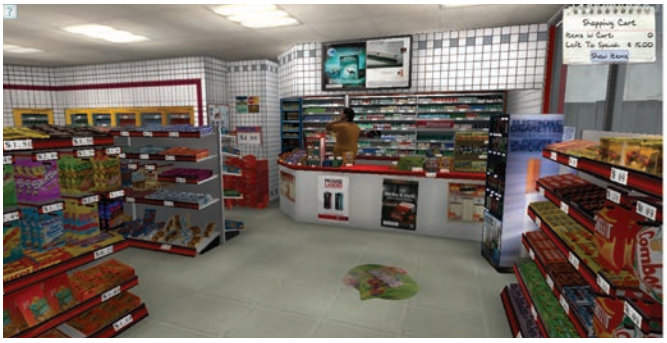
- RTI conducted an experimental study to assess consumer responses to alternative front-of-package (FOP) labels. FOP labels provide information to help consumers make informed and healthy food choices. The pilot study examined three labels (traffic light, check mark, shelf label) and a control (no FOP label) for two product categories: cereal and salty snacks. The pilot study provided evidence that RTI iShoppe can be used to test alternative label formats in a virtual store environment.



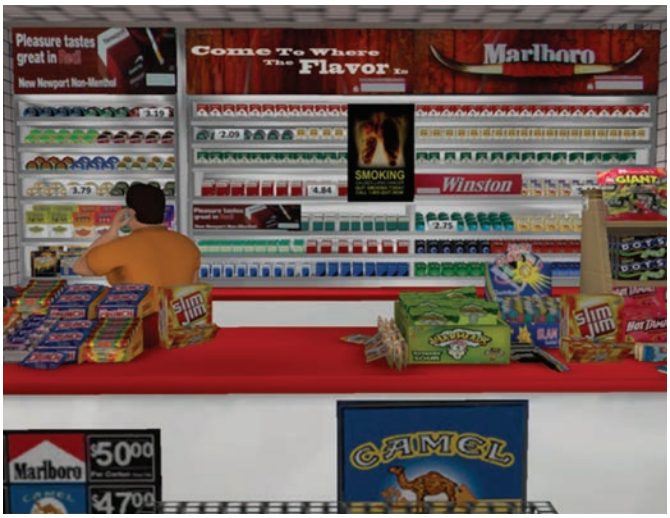
View of virtual grocery store.



Respondents can select two products for comparison.



View of virtual convenience store.



Store environment manipulated to display antismoking sign at point of sale.

More Information

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