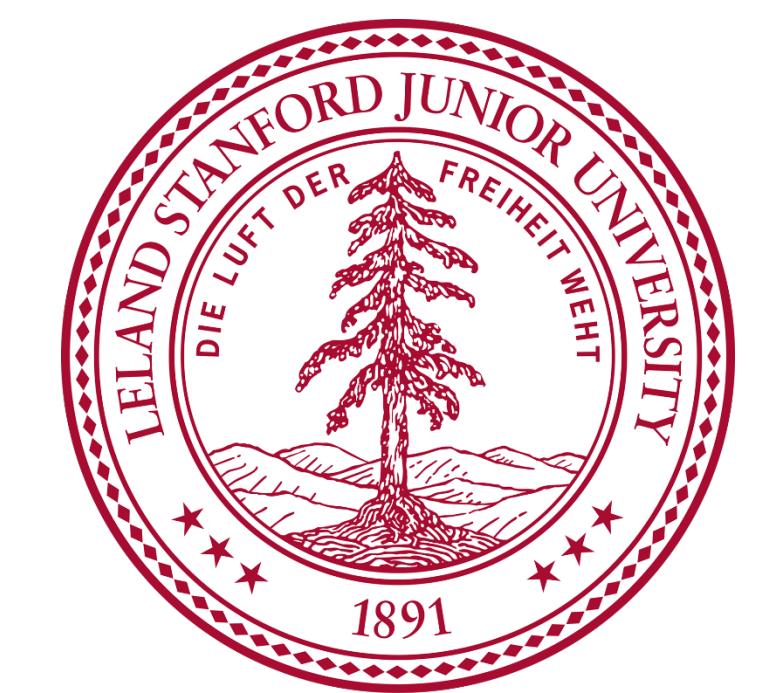




Rethinking “Healthy” Grocery Stores: Misalignment Between Shopper Beliefs and Product Nutrition

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Background Objectives

- Grocery stores: The gold standard consumer source for healthy foods and solution to food deserts
- Compared to Safeway, Whole Foods Market (WFM) bans foods based on additives and preservatives and has fewer ultra-processed foods
- FDA criteria for “Healthy” for each component:
 - Sodium < 230 mg
 - Added Sugar < 1-5 g (varies by food group)
 - Saturated Fat < 1-2 g (varies by food group)

Question 1. Do consumer perceptions of healthiness differ b/n Whole Foods Market and Safeway foods?
Question 2. What is the prevalence of healthy products in the WFM store?

Methods

A. Survey (March to April 2025):

- Digitally surveyed 144 adult residents (1 per household) on their health beliefs, grocery shopping behaviors, and perceptions of the healthiness of Whole Foods Market products, versus Safeway and Other grocery stores
- 25-question survey using Likert scale
- Matched paired t-test for Likert scale scores

B. Grocery Store Inventory (April 1, 2025):

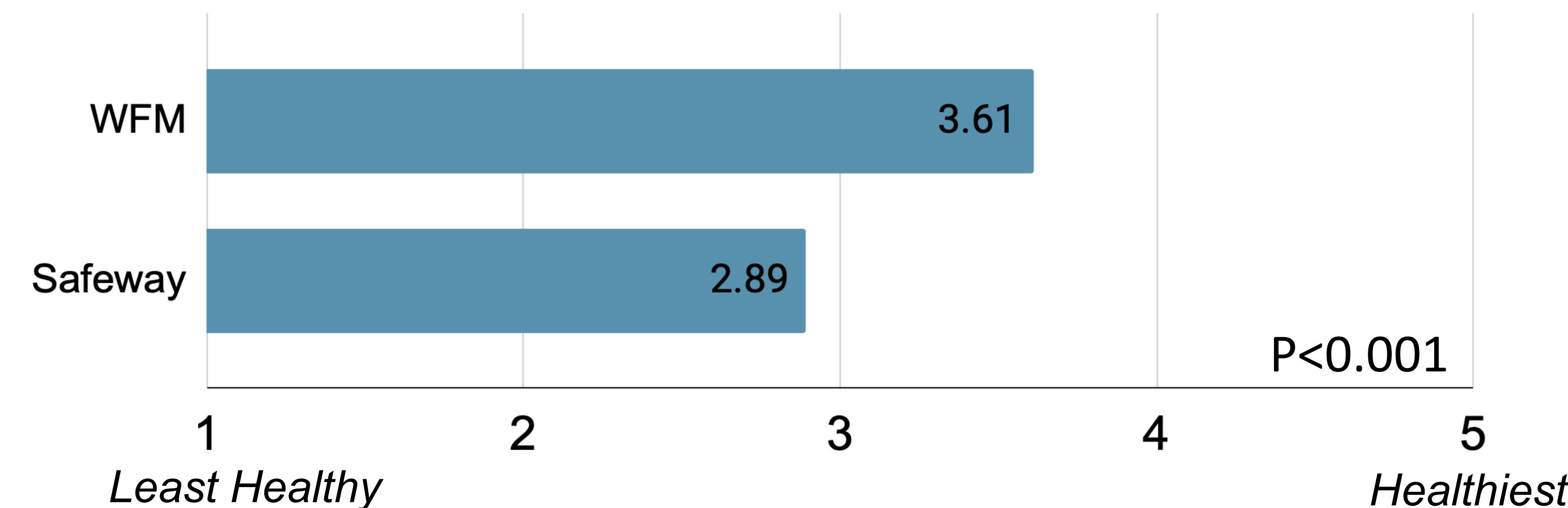
- Web-scraped Whole Foods Market store’s food inventory (N=6,975 items, including 374 fresh produce)
- Designated “Healthy” or “Not Healthy” per food item for Sodium, Added Sugar, and Saturated Fats
- Used a per Calorie system, based on FDA’s recommended daily allowance of Sodium, Added Sugar, and Saturated Fats
- Designated a food item to be “Not Healthy”, if “Not Healthy” for at least one component

Results

CONSUMER SURVEY (N=144)	WFM	Safeway/Other
Race/Ethnicity		
White	54%	55%
Asian	38%	35%
Hispanic	0%	3%
African American	2%	5%
2 or more	6%	2%
Household income*		
\$450K or more	33%	25%
\$250K - 449K	31%	25%
<\$250K	36%	75%
Self-Rated Physical/Mental Health		
Good	67%	63%
Fair	31%	32%
Poor	2%	5%
Checks Nutrition Labels*		
Always	67%	49%
Sometimes	27%	49%
Never	6%	2%

*p<0.05

Customers' Perceived Healthiness of Whole Foods Market and Safeway



Whole Foods Market Inventory (N=6975) (selected)	Not Healthy Sodium (%)	Not Healthy Added Sugar (%)	Not Healthy Sat Fat (%)
Fresh Veggies (n=274)	20	0.4	4
Fresh Fruits (n=100)	0	0	1
Cheeses (n=320)	74	1	87
Dairy Beverages (n=153)	14	17	86
Yogurts (n=181)	4	65	77
Breakfast Cereals (n=98)	20	61	13
Snacks (n=827)	28	33	44
Bread (n=170)	82	16	10
Prepared Meals (n=195)	68	8	39
Desserts (n=212)	22	95	75
Soups (n=190)	97	38	19

Conclusions

- Whole Foods Market has a favorable Consumer perception of being a Healthier grocery store option than Safeway/Other grocery stores.
- Fresh vegetables and fruits were the healthiest but comprised only 5% of the Whole Foods Market Inventory.
- Virtually all food products had over 65% items be Not Healthy Sodium, Added Sugar, and/or Saturated Fat.

Implications

- Even “Healthy”-branded grocery stores are not as nutritionally healthy as consumers perceive.
- Our results support a disconnect between favorable consumer *perceptions* and the *objective* Healthiness based on Sodium, Added Sugar, and Saturated Fat content of Whole Foods Market food products

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