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## With grocery purchases, Americans begin to mimic 'European model'



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KANSAS CITY — Nearly 50% of shoppers visited multiple stores on their most recent grocery trip, according to the study “Food Shopping in America” by The Hartman Group.

“That’s a crazy big number when you think about how busy people are and overscheduled,” said Christina Bowden, senior director of consulting, The Hartman Group.

Yet this multi-retail society isn’t entirely new.

“For years, consumers have cherry-picked,” said Phil Kafarakis, president, Specialty Food Association.

This is partially due to different experiences in various environments, he noted. An even bigger cause is unique product preference.

Studies on the idea of stock-up trips vs. fill-in trips have been around for the last decade, said Steve Clouthier, managing director and partner, Sterling-Rice Group. During a stock-up run, consumers buy most of their products — it's the main, planned shopping trip. Fill-in sprees are typically during the week and not planned. They're also trips for those few items shoppers can't find at their main retailer that are stocked at stores such as Trader Joe's.

Mr. Clouthier said the current climate is a result of consumers' movements to the perimeters of stores.

"We're moving toward a European model where we're buying more fresh food and buying it more frequently, so consumers are visiting different places for different things," he explained.

With quality over price as a driving force, many consumers might think Sprouts has the best produce, Whole Foods has the best fish, Kroger has the best meats and Trader Joe's has the best snack mixes.

"People develop their preferences and then go to that store for a specific category or item because retailers have done a good job of trying to differentiate their offerings to draw the consumer in, Mr. Clouthier said."

With the takeover of omnichannel, the question might be whether this trend will reverse the multiple store preference to a one-stop trend again. Ms. Bowden said there's a possibility ... if it's done in the right way. But, with the popularity of niche experiential areas in stores, it's clear that presently a company can't and shouldn't be everything to everybody.

