

# Divide and conquer: Shelf dividers stimulate purchasing by increasing perceived variety

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### **Abstract**

Retail shelf design significantly influences purchasing decisions, particularly in environments with large assortments. This research explores how vertical shelf dividers, which segment shelves into subcategories, affect consumer search strategies, perceived variety, and purchasing outcomes. Drawing on the distinction between epistemic and hedonic search strategies, we propose that shelf dividers improve search efficiency by systematically guiding attention (epistemic search) and enhance category salience, which increases perceived variety (hedonic search), ultimately increasing purchasing. Across four field experiments, shelf dividers enhance search efficiency (Study 1) and perceived variety through increased category salience (Study 2) with stronger effects under time-pressure. Studies 3 and 4 confirmed increased sales using in-store observation and sales data, identifying vertical dividers as an efficient, low-cost strategy to optimize retail performance.

**Track:** Retailing & Omni-Channel Management