

# **SAME CART DIFFERENT PRICE**

Instacart's Price Experiments

Consumer Reports | Groundwork Collaborative | More Perfect Union

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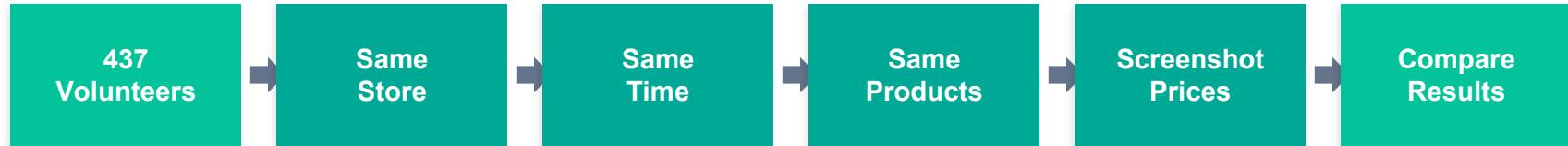
UNCTAD Working Group on Consumer Protection in E-Commerce

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# **QUESTION: DOES INSTACART CHARGE DIFFERENT PEOPLE, DIFFERENT AMOUNTS, FOR THE SAME ITEMS, AT THE SAME STORE?**

Instacart acquired Eversight an AI testing company in 2022  
Evidence of similar behavior towards workers

# METHODOLOGY: MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE



## THE APPROACH:

- 437 volunteers across U.S. (CR members + MPU community)
- 5 controlled experiments (September 2025)
- Synchronized shopping: same store, same time, identical baskets (18-20 items)
- Participants took screenshots but did NOT purchase
- ~200 complete submissions accepted

## RETAILERS TESTED:

**Primary:**  
Safeway (3 locations), Target (2 locations)

# FOUR MAJOR FINDINGS

## 1 SYSTEMATIC DISCRIMINATION

74% of products had multiple prices  
Up to 5 different prices simultaneously

Examples:

- Eggs: \$3.99, \$4.28, \$4.59, \$4.69, \$4.79 (20%)
- Store Brand Corn Flakes: \$2.99, \$3.49, \$3.69 (23%)

## 2 PRICE BUCKETING

Shoppers sorted into 4-8 tiers per store  
Identical item pricing within each tier

## 3 FICTITIOUS PRICING

Same sale price, different 'original' prices  
Example: Saltines \$3.99 for everyone  
But 'originally' \$5.93, \$5.99, OR \$6.69

## 4 CUMULATIVE IMPACT

Average basket variation: ~7%  
92% of shoppers paid MORE than  
lowest price  
Annual projection: \$1,200 per household

# EXAMPLE OF PRICE GROUPS



# "RANDOM" TESTING VS. PATENT PORTFOLIO

## WHAT INSTACART SAYS:

*"Customers are **randomly assigned** to price test cohorts by product category and location"*

*"These tests **do not use any personal or demographic data**"*

*"We **do not** use customer characteristics"*

## WHAT INSTACART/EVERSIGHT PATENTS DESCRIBE:

Patent Portfolio explicitly references:

- Purchase history
- Buying behavior
- Demographics: age, gender, household size, income
- "New-to-brand" status
- Grouping customers into "subpopulations"
- Product and Shopper Headroom

## ADDITIONAL:

- Data obtained from Acxiom & Epsilon (major data brokers)
- Brands can use "behavioral data" for targeted offers

Instacart's explanation: *Patents use "overly broad language to preserve optionality"*

# WHAT INSTACART SAYS VS. WHAT WE FOUND

| INSTACART CLAIMS                 | OUR FINDINGS  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| "Retail partners control prices" | Instacart scrapes Target, runs own tests  |
| "Only 10 retail partners"        | Found at Target (no partnership) + Partners make up large share of grocery market in US |
| "Most see standard price"        | 92% paid more than lowest price   |
| "Changes are negligible"         | \$1,200/year potential impact<br>Smart rounding was 10%+ differences                    |

After our inquiry: Instacart ended experiments

# EXPANSION TO PHYSICAL STORES?

## WHAT WE FOUND:

- Instacart deploying "Carrot Tags" (electronic shelf labels)
- Enables instant remote price changes at the shelf set by pricing software
- Patent describing expansive in-store price testing methodology across store networks through ESLs

## Before

Here's how Carrot Tags can take your aisles into the future



### Pick to Light

Instacart Shoppers and store associates can select an item on the Instacart Shopper app and the corresponding shelf label will flash—like magic, driving order find-rate improvements.



### Interactive Content

Customers can scan a QR code linking to curated content to learn more about an item, including whether it's eligible for EBT SNAP, or save a recipe to their online profile.



### Dynamic Attributes

Carrot Tags can display key attribute information, including dietary, merchandising or certifications so customers always know what they're purchasing.



### Price Optimization with Eversight

Fully unlock the potential of ESLs' instant and accurate pricing changes with dynamic rate improvements.

Partner with us to drive proven results [Request a Demo](#)

## WHAT HAPPENED:

- 1 We asked if Carrot Tags used for price testing
- 2 Instacart: "*not currently integrated*"
- 3 Website language **deleted** shortly after our inquiry

## After

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