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The Market That Wasn't: The Non-emergence of the Online Grocery Category

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Abstract

We examine the non-emergence of a potential new market category. In the late 1990s the entrepreneurial firms that attempted to sell groceries online attracted significant resources, made meaningful technological advancements and generated immense publicity, yet online grocery retail still failed to emerge as a stand-alone market category. Drawing on multiple primary and secondary data sources, we elaborate on existing frameworks of category emergence to investigate how the social construction of a market category offers a partial explanation for category non-emergence. Our explanations are rooted in the instability and contestation of the underlying beliefs, logics, and bases for legitimacy that can typify an emerging market's focal actors and audiences. Our findings suggest that under such conditions of instability and contestation, if a core identity frame fails to emerge for the category as a whole, then in spite of significant advances in other areas, a new market category may still fail to emerge.

Keywords: [Online Technology](#); [Food](#); [Emerging Markets](#); [Service Industry](#); [Food and Beverage Industry](#);

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Citation:

Navis, Chad, Greg Fisher, Ryan Raffaelli, and Mary Ann Glynn. "[The Market That Wasn't: The Non-emergence of the Online Grocery Category](#)." *Proceedings of the Frontiers in Managerial and Organizational Cognition Conference 1* (September 2012).

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