

## Research: Large-sized packaging leads to over-consumption

Brian Wansink ran four studies to find out (1) whether consumers use more of a product when it comes in larger packages, and (2) what the possible reason for that behaviour might be. In one initial experiment he had consumers use cooking oil and spaghetti sauce, both from a small and a large container. But the large container had not been filled to the top, so that it contained the same amount of product as the smaller container. The user test showed that:

- When using cooking oil from a small container, consumers only used 81% of the quantity they used from the large container.
- In the case of spaghetti sauce this was 77% of the quantity used from the large container.
- Conclusion: large-sized packaging encourages people to overuse the product.

In three subsequent experiments Wansink showed that:

- Excessive use of a product from large-sized packaging is probably best explained by the hypothesis that consumers weigh up the quantity they use against the price per unit (with consumers estimating the latter lower as the packaging gets larger).
- Excessive use also occurs with products that are on offer ('sales promotion'). This confirms the idea that consumers adapt their use to the estimated price per unit.
- Excessive use of a product does not increase proportionally as the packaging gets larger; in case of a small, medium (2x) and large (3x) container, the difference in use only occurs between the small packaging on the one side and the medium and large packaging on the other.

One last field experiment went on to show that consumers are very calculating when it comes to the quantities of a product they use. At a launderette consumers turned out to indeed use larger quantities of washing powder when it came in a larger box; when using bleach, however, this phenomenon did not occur at all (simply because excessive use of bleach can damage clothes).

*Reference(s)*

Wansink, B. (1996), Can package size accelerate usage volume? Journal of Marketing, vol.60, no.3, p.1-14. \*

\*: available in the EURIB library.