

Do Larger Packages Increase Usage?

Background

Would you eat more M&Ms if the package was larger?
Yes you would.

Researchers have found that people do pour more out of larger packages. Larger package size increased product usage between 7% to 43%. This stems from a deep-seated perception that per-unit cost is cheaper in large packages.

Some products, like those with potentially harmful effects from overuse such as bleach and medicine are not affected by package size. Increased package size increases the usage most with food and household products that are used frequently and are familiar to the consumer.

This trend does eventually slow down as package sizes assume titanic proportions. So, while there is a large increase in usage between small and medium packages, there is no difference between the medium and large packages. After a certain point, increasing package size will have no effect on usage. After all, there are only so many M&Ms you can eat before getting sick or so much Tide you can use before you run out of cloths to clean.

Buying the economy size packages of food may impact more than just your bank account. It may have an impact on your waistline. It is important to remember that package size may effect how much you consume. So be sure to monitor the size of your portions. The bigger your stash of M&Ms, the more you will eat.

Key Teaching Point

- People pour more from larger packages because they perceive the larger package as being cheaper.
- Larger package size increases the usage most with food and household products that are used frequently and are familiar to the consumer.
- After a certain point, increasing package size will have no effect on usage.

Student Demonstration

Before the session, set up four stations around the classroom. Set up and number each station as follows:

1. one pound bag of M&Ms
2. large bag of pretzels
3. small bag of M&Ms
4. small bag of pretzels

When you are ready to begin, ask the students to take out a sheet of paper and number 1-4. Then break the students into two equal groups. Ask one group to go to station 1 and 2 and record how many pretzels and M&Ms they would pour from each bag. Then ask the second group to go to station 3 and 4 and record how many pretzels and M&Ms they would pour from each bag (i.e. 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, etc.).

On the blackboard make four columns with the headings 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Ask the students to tell you how many they would have poured at each of the stations. Keep a tally for each station under the corresponding column on the chalkboard. The totals from station 1 and 2 should be larger than those from station 3 and 4.

Ask the students to brainstorm why they think people eat more from larger packages. Then discuss the background information provided here.

Wansink, Brian (1996), "Can Package Size Accelerate Usage Volume?" *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60:3 (July), 1-14.

