Tulane study finds better way for stores to get consumers to ‘stock up’ on sales

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Retailers may want to rethink advertising their next big sale as an opportunity for customers to “stock up and save.” A new Tulane University study suggests a better way to boost sales.

It’s more effective to combine a time element to the ask — “Stock up for two weeks!” —with a prompt that helps consumers estimate how much of the product they’ll use in a specific timeframe. The result can significantly increase the quantity of a product consumers buy, according to the study published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science.*

“Consumers are not used to stockpiling goods. When merely asked to stock up, consumers do not always have a clear idea on how long they should stock up for,” said lead author Zoe Lu, assistant professor of marketing at Tulane’s A. B. Freeman School of Busin*ess.*

The tactic, termed as “Short-Asking with Long-Encouraging” or “SALE”, combines two simple reminders — a “long-encouraging” one reminding consumers how long they should purchase a product for and a “short-asking” one reminding consumers how much of the product they would consume in a short time unit (e.g., “Think about how many you'd consume in one day.”).

In one study, the authors found that when merely asked to stock up for the hurricane season (without being told how long they should stock up for), consumers were equally likely to stock up for one week, for two weeks, and for one month.

The findings also suggest that, a short-asking reminder is crucial for the long-encouraging reminder to increase consumers' purchases. Without it, the amount of product consumers buy will likely be far from being proportional to the length of time they are stocking up to cover.

Christopher K. Hsee, University of Chicago, and Kaiyang Wu, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, co-authored the study.

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