

Dispensation-Unit Effect: The Effect of Dispensation Unit on Treatment Judgments

Alican Mecit
SKEMA Business School
Yangjie Gu
HEC Paris
Aradhna Krishna
University of Michigan

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Abstract

When individuals lack medical expertise, they use the number of dispensation units as a heuristic for treatment difficulty. Presenting treatment in more units with lower dosage per unit (e.g., six 100 mg pills vs. two 300 mg pills) signals greater treatment challenge, reducing perceived efficacy and value—the "dispensation-unit effect." Seven studies across diverse medical contexts (cholesterol, hypertension, insomnia, vitiligo, hair loss, respiratory conditions), medication formats (pills, powders, creams, syrups), and dispensing containers demonstrate this effect's robustness. The effect extends to education and is mitigated by diagnostic information. These findings have implications for healthcare communication, pharmaceutical packaging, and policy interventions.

Track: Consumer Behaviour