

# Eyes in the aisles: Why is Cap'n Crunch looking down at my child?

April 2 2014, by Katherine Baildon



Director of Cornell's Food and Brand Lab Brian Wansink and post-doctoral lab researcher Aner Tal, are releasing a new study today published in the Journal of Environment and Behavior that discovered consumers are 16 percent more likely to trust a brand of cereal when the characters on the boxes on the supermarket shelves look them straight in the eye. Credit: Cornell University

*Silly rabbit, Trix are for kids!* In a study of 65 cereals in 10 different grocery stores, Cornell researchers found that cereals marketed to kids are placed half as high on supermarket shelves as adult cereals—the average height for children's cereal boxes is 23 inches versus 48 inches for adult cereal. A second key finding from the same study is that the average angle of the gaze of cereal spokes-characters on cereal boxes marketed to kids is downward at a 9.6 degree angle whereas spokes-characters on adult cereal look almost straight ahead.

To examine the influence of cereal box spokes-characters Cornell Food and Brand Lab Researchers Aner Tal and Brian Wansink, in collaboration with research assistant Aviva Musicus from the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, asked two questions: 1. Do cereal characters make eye contact? 2. Does eye contact with cereal spokes-characters influence choice?

First, the researchers conducted a study to determine whether the angle of the gaze of spokes-characters on children [cereal boxes](#) was such that it would create eye contact with children. To test this, they evaluated 65 types of cereal and 86 different spokes-characters in 10 different grocery stores in New York and Connecticut. For each character the angle of the gaze was calculated four feet from the shelf—the standard distance from which shoppers view the boxes. Results show that characters on cereals marketed to children make incidental eye contact with children and cereals marketed to adults make incidental eye contact with adult shoppers. Of the 86 different spokes-characters evaluated, 57 were marketed to children with a downward gaze at an angle of 9.67 degrees. In contrast, the gazes of characters on adult marketed cereals were nearly straight ahead, at a .43 degree upward angle. In agreement with previous studies, the children's cereals were placed on the bottom 2 selves while the adult cereals were placed on the top 2 selves. Thus the average height of the spokes-characters gaze was 53.99 inches for adult cereals and 20.21 inches for children cereals.

In a second study researchers examined the extent to which eye contact with cereal box spokes-characters influences feelings of trust and connection with a brand. 63 individuals from a private northeastern university participated. They were asked to view a Trix box and rate their feelings of trust and connection to the brand. Participants were randomly shown one of two versions of the box, in one version the rabbit was looking straight at the viewer and in the other the rabbit looked down.

Findings show that brand trust was 16% higher and the feeling of connection to the brand was 10% higher when the rabbit made eye contact. Furthermore, participants indicated liking Trix better, compared to another cereal, when the rabbit made eye contact. This finding shows that cereal box spokes-characters that make eye contact may increase positive feelings towards the product and encourage consumers to buy it.

Creating spokes-characters who make eye contact with a product's target audience (child or adult) is a package design that can be used as an advertising tool that influences people to buy and develop brand loyalty. Two key take-aways from this study are:

- If you are a parent who does not want your kids to go "cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs" avoid taking them down the cereal aisle.
- If you are a cereal company looking to market healthy cereals to kids, use spokes-characters that make [eye contact](#) with children to create brand loyalty!

Provided by Cornell University

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