



Scaling the Human Insight Advantage with AI-ethnographies

“Dishwashing Tales”

Niels Schillewaert, PhD

Head of Research & Methodologies at Conveo





A STORY FROM MY HOUSEHOLD

I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE ...

Family frictions

Consumer
Voices



Yeah. Usually, when my children or my husband loads the dishwasher,

METHODOLOGY

Dishwashing, An Up-Close Method



Method

AI-moderated ethnographies and diary experience studies
In-context, show-and-tell video walk-throughs of a real load
Two-part interview: load → *pause* → return post-cycle

Sample

n=91 completed interviews across diverse households
Skewed female (76%), reflecting women remain primary organizers of cleaning routines
Age ranged from 21 to 79 years old

Core Idea Topics

The dishwasher is a **household practice** (rules, compromises, hacks, and work before and after)

Ethnographic Lens

“A Load” is a **Social + Material Performance**

IMPLICATIONS

What Will You Learn?



Dishwashing as Human Behavior

How one of the most **mundane household tasks** turns out to be a rich site of human behavior



Marketing Mix Decisions

Insights-driven marketing mix decisions and opportunity platforms



A New Ethnographic Method

A new method for ethnographies that is **scalable and replicable**, while remaining **authentic and in-context** and provides a “**quantified why**”



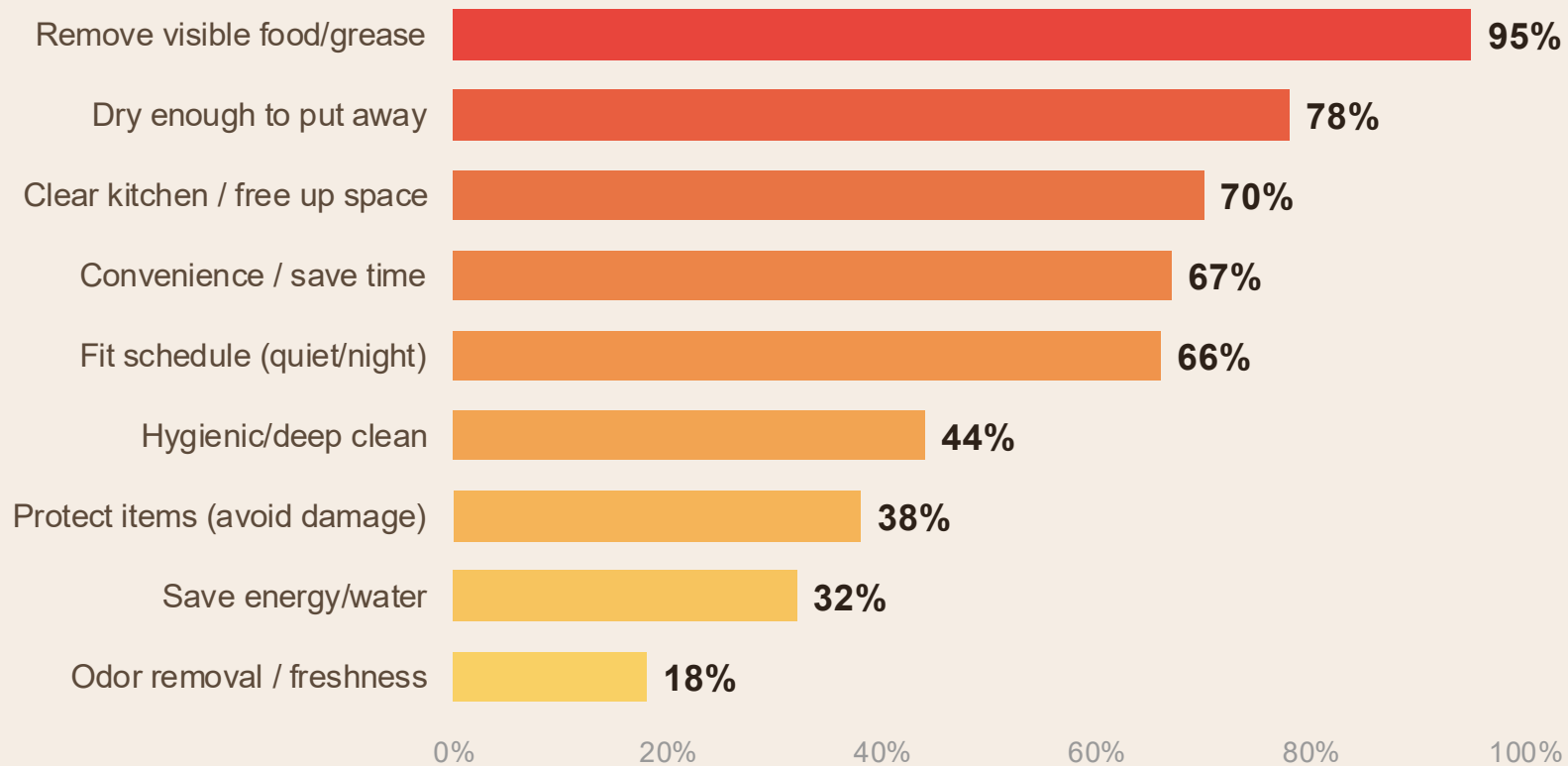
Video Insights

How **video insights** go beyond the conversation to reveal deeper behavioral patterns and brand usage

JOBS-TO-BE-DONE

What a “Successful Run” Needs to Deliver

Cleaning is necessary but not “sufficient”.
Convenience, schedule fit, and kitchen order are nearly as important.



The baseline expectation → dishes must come out looking clean

Plastics are the main failure point → towel-drying undermines the convenience promise

The dishwasher restores kitchen order → clearing the sink and counter is a key motivator

Households build dishwasher runs around daily rhythms → quiet night cycles are essential

FRICION THEMES

What's Driving the Pain

The entire cycle (from before pressing start to after the beep) is riddled with systemic friction

Four underlying themes explain the root causes of friction across the dishwasher cycle.

Front-End Labor

“Do I *have* to rinse/scrape?” is the central question driving time cost and frustration before the cycle even begins.

Fit & Geometry Constraints

Awkward items and rack layout limitations mean workarounds become standard operating procedure, not occasional exceptions.

End-State Reliability Gap

Cleaning is usually acceptable — but drying failures and residue consistently drive post-wash fixing behaviors.

Household Coordination

“The right way” rules create interpersonal conflict and re-loading behaviors, adding a social layer to a mechanical task.

OVERVIEW

The 5 Main Insight Platforms



FINDING 1

Pre-rinse is the “first” hidden labor

People manage risk before the machine even runs — calibrating effort, scraping, and rinsing as a form of insurance.



FINDING 2

Loading is “kitchen Tetris”

Spatial reasoning, household rules, and improvised hacks combine every single load cycle.



FINDING 3

Hacking is common

People want to maximize the load and enhance performance.



FINDING 4

Detergent focus only

Performance + convenience + cost — but no wider solution vision.



FINDING 5

Drying creates post-wash work

Especially plastics — pooling water leads to towel-drying, air-drying, and rework before items can be put away.



FINDING 6

Behavioral Archetypes

1. Tetris Maximizers
2. Routine Pragmatics
3. Protective Pre-Rinsers
4. Shared-Chore Negotiators



FINDING 1

Pre-Rinse Is the First “Hidden Labor”

The most common lived tension:

“Is the dishwasher a cleaner... or a finisher?”

Pre-rinse behavior reveals deep uncertainty about what the machine can actually handle - and who bears the cost of that uncertainty.

1

Habit-Driven Rinsing

Most participants routinely pre-rinse dishes before loading, driven by upbringing habits and desire for first-time clean results

2

Machine Performance Concerns

Key motivations: avoiding residue on dishes, preventing clogs, eliminating odors, and supporting optimal detergent performance

3

Selective Pre-Treatment

Pre-rinsing decisions vary by food type, soil level, and timing; lighter loads often loaded as-is in a situational approach

4

Growing Trust in Machines

A minority skip pre-rinsing, trusting dishwasher capability to save time and water—signaling evolving trust in machine cleaning

FINDING 1 — PRE-RINSE

In their own words

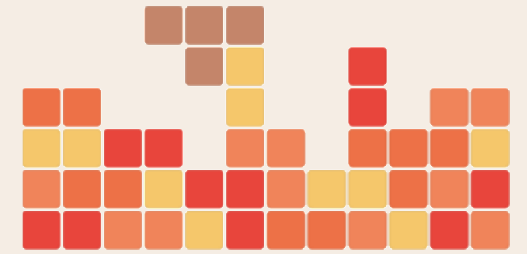
Consumer
Voices



So in terms of the dishes that I kind of pre rinse

FINDING 2

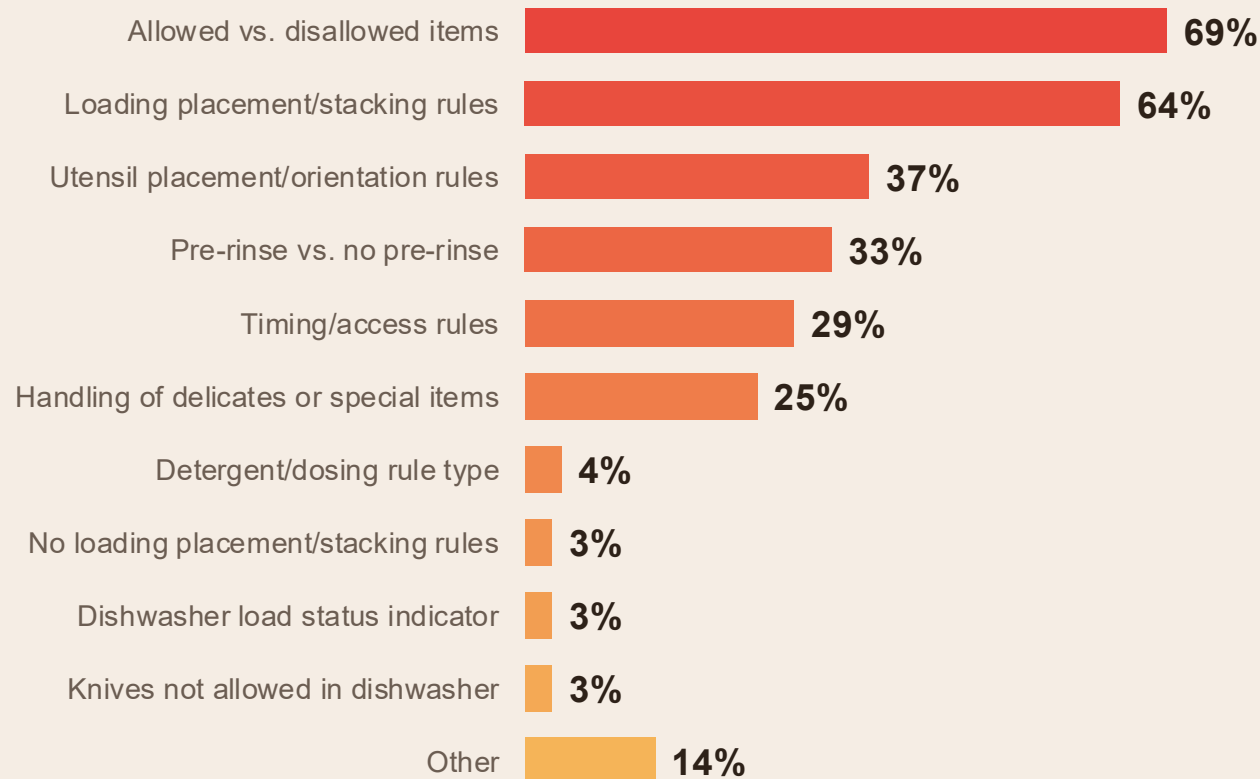
Loading Is “Kitchen Tetris” and the **only** way to a “kill screen”



Rule-making shows up as a way to reduce uncertainty and assert control over shared equipment. Loading rules are among the most common sources of household friction - and the most personal.

Household Dishwasher Rule Types

Found in 91 of 91 interviews | 263 mentions



7 in 10

Have rules about what can and cannot go in



2 in 3

Have placement or stacking rules



Machine Can't Compensate

Even high-performing machines or detergents cannot overcome poor loading — technique is seen as the ultimate variable.

In their own words

Consumer
Voices



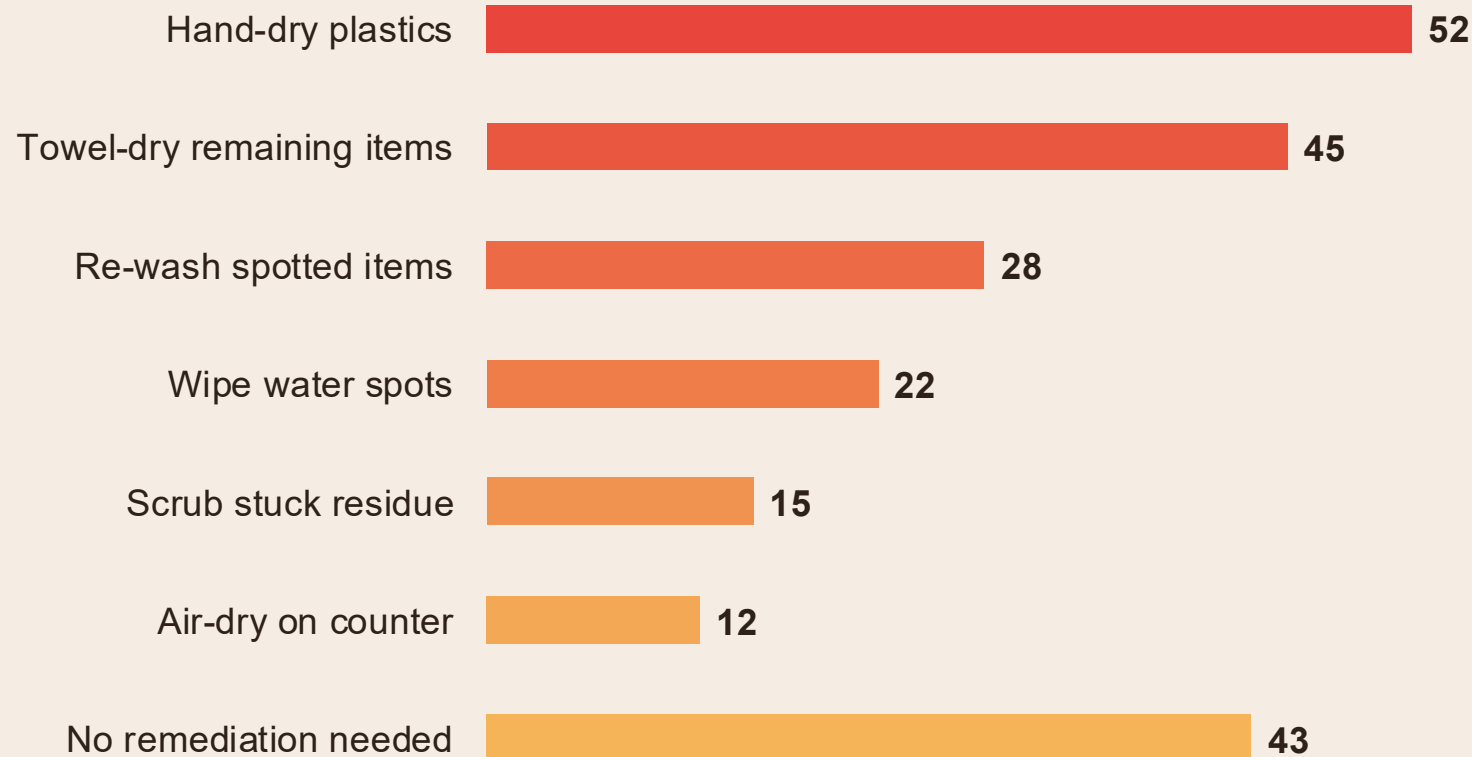
Yes. I ran out of room on the bottom for so I

FINDING 5

Post-Wash Fixing Is Systemic

Remediation after a cycle: widespread and normalized. The dishwasher's job doesn't end when the cycle ends, households complete the job manually.

Post-Wash Actions (% of Households)



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Fine means I only had to hand-dry a few things."

Households have learned to expect imperfection and built repair routines to compensate.

57%
Need post-wash remediation

8/10
Rate results "as expected"

! PARADOX ?

FINDING 5 — DRYING

In their own
words

Consumer
Voices



MARKETING MIX RECOMMENDATIONS

Winning Moves Across the Value Chain

Actionable plays for brands, manufacturers, and retailers — mapped to the frictions users actually feel.



DETERGENT BRANDS

Bundle Rinse Aid

Only 22% use rinse aid. Cross-sell starter kits pairing pods with rinse aid to tackle drying and spot frustrations.



DETERGENT BRANDS

Own the Loading Narrative

Loading is high-stakes “Kitchen Tetris.” Position formats as forgiving regardless of how the load is arranged.



DETERGENT BRANDS

Defuse Pre-Rinse Anxiety

Pre-rinsing is anxiety, not necessity. Build trust with “skip the rinse” messaging backed by proof of performance.



APPLIANCE MAKERS

Win on Put-Away Readiness

The cycle doesn’t end at “clean.” Differentiate on dry plastics, less pooling, and true put-away readiness.



COOKWARE BRANDS

Design for Cleanability

Eliminate “dishwasher-safe ambiguity.” Focus on drainage-friendly shapes and materials that dry evenly.



SMART APPLIANCES

Prioritize Status Certainty

The killer feature isn’t remote start — it’s knowing clean vs. dirty vs. dry-ready in real time.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Ethnographies in the Field

1 Access & Recruitment

Getting access to the actual kitchen is a hurdle from the start

2 Observer Effect

Participants clean up before visits; natural kitchen behavior is hidden

3 Time, Cost & Occasion

Behavioral dynamics often occur outside the observation window

4 Data Overload

Video, audio, notes, photos — hard to distill clear themes

5 Interpretation Bias

Ethnographic interpretation depends heavily on the researcher

6 Limited Generalizability

10–20 households: deep insight, but not prevalence

7 Capturing Tacit Behavior

Automatic habits are hard to articulate or observe

8 Translating Insights

Rich narratives → stakeholders need decisions, not observations

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

AI and ethnographies are a match

Study Logistics

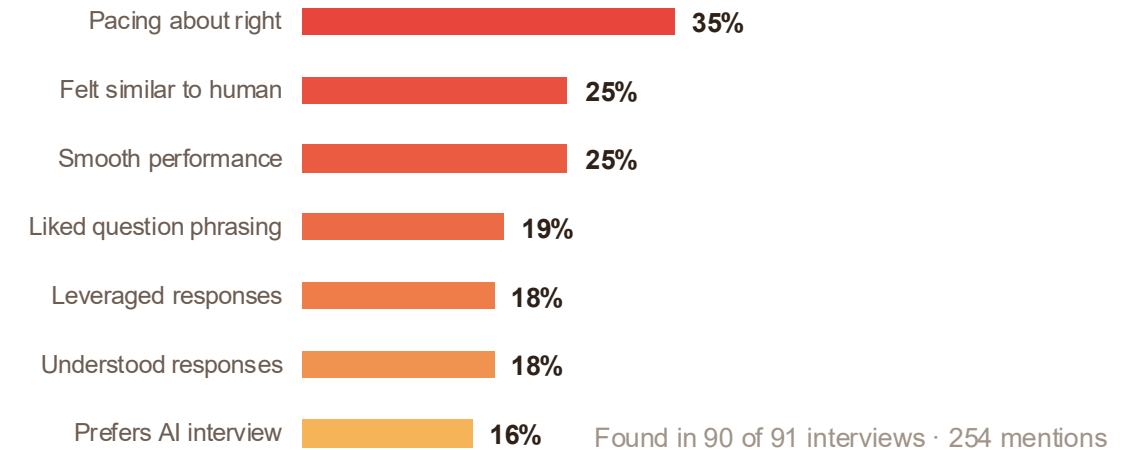
2 days vs **4–5 months** traditional mobile ethnography

10x **lower cost** than mobile ethnography

60 hrs of interview **data** generated

91 interviews · **55 questions** · 43 open-ended · 12 closed-ended

Comparison to Human Moderator



97%



Rated Excellent or Very Good

3% rated 3. No poor ratings.

25%



Felt Similar to Human

Pacing, follow-ups, and conversation flow felt natural. Many preferred AI over live interviews.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Brands Are Under-Reported in Self-Reports

Video-based AI interviews capture actual behaviors, exposing mismatches between what participants claim and what they do.

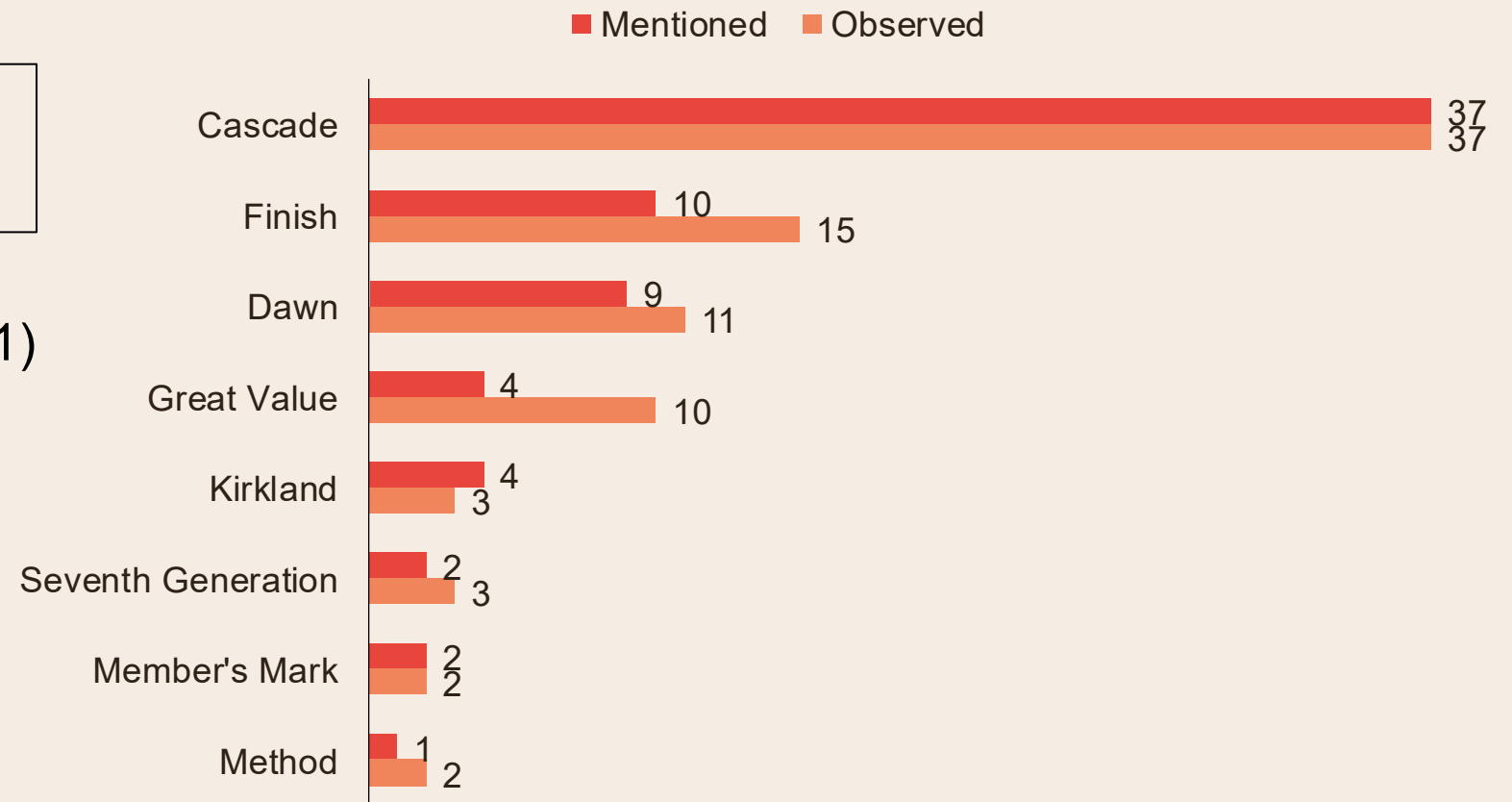
Multi-modal video insights reveals blind spots

Self-reported brands in **70%** of interviews (64/91)

Platform **detected** brands in **85%** (77/91)

revealing a **20% gap in reported vs observed**, especially for smaller brands.


Detergent Brand: Mentioned vs. Observed



METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Brands Are Under-Reported in Self-Reports

Q24 > Please show me the detergent you will use on camera now. Why do you choose that detergent?



Completed 35m 25s

Quality: 8/10 Good

Started on February 12 at 12:12 AM • Completed on February 12 at 1:36 AM

Panel data

Age 21 Gender Female City Marysville State OH Country United States

Education High school graduate Seniority level Entry-level

Household income \$40,000-\$59,999

Screener response data

About how old is your main dishwasher? 3-5 years old

How many times a week do you personally use (load or unload) the dishwasher at ... 4 to 5 times a w...

Interview start

Question 24 Please show me the detergent you will use on camera now. Why do you c...

So this is the dishwashing detergent I use. It's just easy for me. It's cheaper than what I find. Usually, it's like it comes in bulk, and it's cheaper for me altogether in the end for how many dishes I do. This is what they look like as an individual little packet. So they got some powder and some liquid stuff in both of these right here.

22:08 Participant answered question

Main dishwasher detergent br... Brand explicitly named aloud

Detergent brand observed Finish

Reason for choo... Convenience of format (p... Price/... Packaging or d...

+ Add facet

Video Analysis (9 cues)

Visual: The person shows a package of Finish Powerball Quantum dishwasher detergent. (Action: displaying, Brand: Finish, Product: Powerball Quantum)

Visual: A person shows the packaging for Finish Powerball Quantum dishwasher detergent. (Action: showing, Brand: Finish, Product: dishwasher detergent)

Verbal: The person explains that they use this brand of detergent because it's easy, cheaper, and comes in bulk. (Action: discussing, Brand: Finish, Product: Powerball Quantum)

Verbal: A person explains their preference for a specific brand of dishwasher detergent due to its ease of use and cost-effectiveness. (Action: discussing, Brand: Finish, Product: dishwasher detergent)

Visual: A person opens the Finish Powerball Quantum package and takes out a single dishwasher tab. (Action: opening, Brand: Finish, Product: Powerball Quantum)

Visual: The person opens the detergent package, takes out a single pod, and shows it to the camera. (Action: holding, Brand: Finish, Product: Powerball Quantum)

Brand **not** mentioned, but **detected** up to the SKU level

WHAT DID WE LEARN

The Power of AI-Ethnographies

Video-based AI interviews go beyond self-reports to capture what people actually do, revealing richer, more actionable insights.

AI Video Ethnography

Reveals authentic human behaviors in natural settings



AI Insights Marketing Mix

Multi-modal AI detects behaviors, brands, and emotions that self-reports miss



Extra Context

Reported vs. observed behaviors bridges the say-do gap and blind spots



With A Scalable Method

A rich, repeatable approach to generate “quantified why”



Want to become an expert dishwasher? 😊

Contact us to learn how AI-ethnographies can transform your consumer insights

Thank you

Want to connect for a meeting or demo?

Niels Schillewaert, PhD

Head of Research & Methodologies at Conveo

niels@conveo.ai

