

'Do-it-alls versus specialists' studied

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A U.S. consumer research scientist says people perceive products that emphasize a single feature as being more effective than those with multiple features.

"The current research breaks new ground by showing that a product that specializes on a single attribute is perceived to be superior on that attribute relative to an all-in-one option -- even when the description of the specialized and the all-in-one options on the focal attribute is exactly the same," said Alexander Chernev of Northwestern University.

Chernev pointed to the "zero-sum heuristic" in consumer attitudes to explain the phenomenon. In other words, consumers believe options are balanced against one another, such that advantages in one aspect are likely to be compensated by disadvantages in another area.

But interestingly, said Chernev, when the multifunction product was priced higher than the single-function product, it was no longer perceived to be inferior.

"The findings reported in this research also imply that the widely use strategy of pricing specialized and all-in-one options at parity might, in fact, be sub-optimal," he said.

The study appears in the March issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

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