

Too much information: When does adding mildly favorable details dilute the big message?

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When a large item and a small one are packaged together, consumers often perceive the overall value to be less than that of the large item, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. This applies to information as well as products and gifts.

"People who evaluate a bundle follow an averaging strategy, which leads to less favorable [judgments](#) when mildly favorable pieces are added to highly favorable pieces," write authors Kimberlee Weaver (Virginia Tech), Stephen M. Garcia, and Norbert Schwarz (both University of Michigan).

The authors found this "presenter's [paradox](#)" across many product domains from bundles of music to hotel advertisements, scholarships, penalty structures, and gifts. For example, presenters who created packages for an MP3 music player chose to spend more money to make the package look more valuable, but to consumers it seemed cheaper. In another study, people perceived a \$750 fine for littering to be more severe than a \$750 fine plus two hours of community service.

"These [discrepancies](#) between presenter and evaluator perspectives result from their different tasks, which elicit different processing information styles," the authors write. For presenters, more components add value, but evaluators, who tend to average, have a different [perception](#).

Presenters should be aware of the consumer tendency to average when they're creating product bundles or presenting information. "Whether a public relations expert is deciding which reviews to include on the jacket of a book, a guru at a record label is deciding which songs to include in a music album, or a legal team is building up arguments for a [legal case](#), they all face the important task of deciding what information to include in their presentations," the authors write.

"Fortunately, there is a simple remedy: Taking the perspective of the evaluator and asking yourself how the bundle will appear to someone who averages across its components will alert you to the fact that others will not always share your sense that more is better," the authors conclude.

More information: Kimberlee Weaver, Stephen M. Garcia, and Norbert Schwarz. "The Presenter's Paradox." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2012. ejcr.org/

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