

## ROBIN MANUSCRIPT REVIEW HISTORY MANUSCRIPT (ROUND 1)



### Abstract

This analysis introduces the *Presenter's Paradox*. Robust findings in impression formation show that perceivers use a weighted averaging strategy when making judgments, which results in *less* favorable evaluations when mildly favorable information is added to highly favorable information. Across five studies, we find that presenters do not anticipate perceivers' averaging strategy and instead design presentations that include all of the favorable information available. This additive strategy ("more is better") hurts presenters in the perceivers' eyes because mildly favorable information dilutes the impact of highly favorable information. For example, presenters choose to spend *more* money to make a game show prize look *more* costly, even though doing so actually *cheapened* the value of the prize from the evaluators' perspective (study 1). Additional studies demonstrate the robustness of the effect and its implications for a variety of marketing contexts.

At the beginning of a journey, one of this paper's authors was sitting in a crowded airplane, awaiting take-off. After a two hour wait, a mechanical issue was announced, necessitating a switch to another aircraft. All passengers had to disembark, and many were visibly irritated. The airline did its best, or so they thought, to accommodate the disgruntled passengers by issuing the following gift packet: A \$35 discount coupon for future travel, an amenity coupon for a meal, premium beverage or mileage bonus, and a 25-cent phone card. At the time, our author thought to herself that the phone card, which amounted to about 5 minutes of free long distance, looked quite cheap. It may not even be enough time to arrange alternate transportation given the two hour delay. Is it possible that the airline thought the thrifty coupon would *add* to the customers' evaluations of their damage-control efforts, but that from the customers' perspective it actually *detracted* from their evaluation of the package as a whole? Could one of the world's largest airlines be spending thousands of dollars each year on phone cards and inadvertently be hurting rather than helping their image?

In the current paper we argue that this phone card example is a specific illustration of a more general research question: Do people who are presenting information correctly anticipate how the information they put forth will be combined in the minds of those who evaluate them? Taking a step back to analyze this scenario, we can see that there are two perspectives that must see eye-to-eye for the coupon booklet to be effective. There is a presenter, in this case the airline, who is making a decision about whether to include something in a presentation—in this case a thrifty coupon. There is also an evaluator, the airline customer, who is evaluating the information presented. Three questions of interest follow. First, how will customers combine their evaluations of components of the coupon booklet when forming an impression of it? Second, how does the company itself think about the components when deciding what to include in the coupon booklet? And third, are there important divergences between the two perspectives?

Customers can combine the information either by a process that resembles adding or one that resembles averaging, with differing consequences for how mildly-favorable information (a thrifty coupon) will affect judgments when it appears alongside highly-favorable information (a higher value item like a \$35 travel coupon). Additive models predict a positive effect, since the mildly-favorable information increases the total amount of positive information – after all, the addition of 25 cents to the overall package does increase the value of the package. Averaging models predict a negative effect, since the mildly-favorable information dilutes the impact of the highly-favorable. Past work demonstrates the pervasiveness of models that resemble averaging when forming impressions of persons (e.g., Anderson 1965, 1968) as well as product bundles (e.g., Gaeth, Levin, Chakraborty, & Levin 1991; Yadav 1994). This rationale predicts that customers will form a more favorable impression of a coupon booklet containing only a high value \$35 travel coupon than they will of a booklet containing both the high value coupon plus a lower value phone card, despite the objectively higher value of the bundle.

Everyday observations suggest, however, that presenters, that is, individuals who are attempting to *create* impressions, fail to anticipate this averaging-like process on the part of evaluators. Instead, they mistakenly assume an additive decision rule (“more is better”) when presenting information, leading them to create bundles that are less effective in the eyes of consumers while being more expensive to their creators. This question has not been addressed in previous research, despite its important implications across many domains in consumer research and beyond.

Before describing the studies conducted to test these hypotheses, we review past work to explain why the divergent mind sets of presenters and evaluators may lead them to different judgments about the same target object.

## **DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE LEAD TO DIFFERENCES IN JUDGMENT**

Several lines of research in the consumer behavior, psychology, and judgment and decision making literatures demonstrate that people in different roles often have different perceptions of the same situation (Asch 1952; Burson, Faro, and Rottenstreich 2010; Ehrlinger, Gilovich and Ross 2005; Gershoff and Johar 2006; Gilovich Medvec, & Savitsky 2000; Ichheiser 1949; Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross 2004). This work has shown, for instance, that people's goals, viewpoints and expectations can mediate perception and evaluation. Actors and observers, for example, make different causal attributions for the same behaviors (Jones & Nisbett, 1971), at least in part because the two roles differ in their focus of attention. The observer's perspective leads him or her to focus attention on the actor, making the situational reasons behind the actor's behavior less salient. The actor's focus, on the other hand, is outward toward the situation, heightening its influence in their minds. People's goals have also been shown to lead them to focus selectively on certain types of information. Individuals with promotion goals, for instance, are concerned with pursuing gains and accordingly focus on positive information about the self. In contrast, individuals with prevention goals are concerned with avoiding losses and thus are more attuned to negative information about the self (e.g., Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). Extending this work to presentation contexts, we examine whether the role people have in presentation situations—be it presenter or evaluator—can structure the combination strategies people use when forming versus attempting to create impressions.

### **THE EVALUATOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

Past work on averaging and adding in decision contexts has focused almost exclusively on how people in evaluative roles process information. This work shows that, as adding warm water to hot water leads to water of a more moderate temperature, adding information that is moderately polarized to information that is highly polarized frequently leads to judgments that are evaluatively intermediate (Anderson 1965, 1981; Gaeth, Levin, Chakraborty, and Levin 1990; Troutman and Shanteau 1979; Yadav 1994). The decrease in the average polarity of evaluations with the addition of moderately polarized stimuli resembles a weighted averaging process rather than an adding process. In one demonstration, Yadav (1994) asked consumers to rate the favorability of different sets of furniture items containing varying numbers of pieces. Consumers in the *individual item* condition read information about a bed that pretest subjects had rated as excellent. Those in the *two item bundle* condition rated a set consisting of two items: The same highly favorable bed plus a chest that was described as moderately favorable. Consumers' ratings of the furniture sets showed an averaging pattern. They gave higher favorability ratings to the set containing the bed alone than they gave to the set containing both the bed and the moderately favorable chest. A similar averaging-like pattern was observed in ratings of a highly favorable computer as compared to a bundle containing the same computer plus a moderately favorable printer.

### **THE PRESENTER'S PERSPECTIVE**

An important question that past work has left open and that is the focus of our current investigation is whether companies or individuals who are presenting information anticipate the information processing mind set of evaluators when they make decisions about what to include in a presentation. On the one hand, it is possible that people in presentational roles will be quite adept at anticipating evaluators' judgments. Consumers have extensive experience evaluating product bundles that others present in the marketplace. Consumers also make presentation decisions every day, whether it is what to highlight on a resume or how to advertise one's lightly used consumer appliances on eBay. Given their extensive experience, it is reasonable to think that consumers will be able to intuit the perspective of the evaluator and thus anticipate this averaging-like process in others' judgments. On the other hand, everyday observations such as the phone card example raise the possibility that people in presentational roles will fail to anticipate averaging and will instead mistakenly predict that evaluators will use an additive model when making judgments.

One reason presenters may fail to intuit averaging is that, while the evaluator's task is to make a summary judgment of the overall presentation, the task of the presenter is different: Instead of judging the target as a whole, the act of constructing a presentation from its individual components may turn the pieces themselves into the objects of attention. This may naturally lead the presenter to focus on each individual piece of information as a discrete entity when deciding whether to include it in the presentation. A simple piecemeal decision rule could thus be applied, if a given piece of information is "good," (i.e., is better than neutral), the presenter will conclude that it is compatible with the message he or she seeks to convey. Including all components that share the same positive polarity regardless of their extremity will result in presenters creating messages that look best when viewed with a model that resembles adding rather than averaging. This process would explain why the airline carrier in the opening example would include a less favorable calling card. While not as good as the \$35 travel voucher, it is above neutral and is, thus, better than nothing. Moreover, economic reasoning would agree: Adding a 25 cents phone card increases the monetary value of the package, a fact that the presenter, who calculates the overall cost for the company, is more aware of than the consumer, who merely evaluates his or her own benefit. Thus, an important self-other difference may emerge in presentation situations: Whereas the presenters' viewpoint may lead presenters to assume that "more is better," their evaluators may follow models that resemble averaging to form an evaluation – with the unanticipated result that the "more is better" strategy backfires.

## OVERVIEW

In the studies that follow, our main question of interest is whether people in presentational roles correctly anticipate the judgments that evaluators make or whether they mispredict evaluators' judgments. To probe for the *Presenter's Paradox*, presenters in the following studies, as in the real world, are always in the position of making a choice about what information to include in their messages, while evaluators are always in the position of forming an impression of one version of the presented message, again resembling their situation in natural contexts. This setup matches the general consumer situation exemplified in the opening example where an airline (i.e., the presenter) chooses which amenities to include in a coupon booklet, while the airline's customers (i.e., the evaluators) receive a specific booklet. Thus, we limit our scope to this common consumer situation.

## STUDY 1: GAME SHOW PRIZES

Study 1 examines whether people taking the perspective of a game show host designing prizes for a contest will correctly anticipate that contestants will use a process that resembles averaging when evaluating the prizes. In addition, study 1 examines a new question in the averaging literature—is it possible that evaluators will average when forming impressions even when the moderately favorable item is actual money? That is, can giving customers more money ever lead them to estimate that a consumer bundle, in this case a game show prize, is worth less?

Presenters imagined they were in charge of organizing prizes for a game show. They could either decide to give contestants a prize of a seven night stay in a luxury resort or to give them the same luxury resort stay plus an additional gift certificate for \$25 in spending money. We predicted that presenters would choose to add the \$25 coupon, thus spending *more* money to make the prize seem *more* valuable. We further predicted that this addition of a modest sum of spending money would, ironically, *cheapen* – rather than *enhance* – the perceived value from the customer’s perspective.

### Method

Ninety-four students at a large, public university in the Midwest and a large, public university in the Southeast completed this study along with other unrelated questionnaires as a “Questionnaire Day.” Students either received extra credit in their marketing course or payment.

Participants in the *presenters* condition read, “You are in charge of organizing prizes for a game show. You have the option to give winners of the final round either a seven-night stay at a luxury resort, or a seven-night stay at the luxury resort plus a certificate for \$25 in spending money. If your goal is to make contestants perceive the prize as costing the most, what would you choose to give the winner?” (choose A or B). The order of prizes was counterbalanced. At this point, presenters indicated either the luxury resort prize alone or the luxury resort and \$25 in spending money prize.

Participants in the between-subjects *evaluators* condition read, “Imagine that you received the following prize at a game show...” Participants then saw the luxury resort [and \$25 spending money] prize, and were asked, “Please estimate the cost of the trip in the space below.”

### Results and Discussion

As predicted, evaluators’ estimations of the worth of the trip reflected an averaging-like process. They estimated that the prize was of significantly *lower* value when it consisted of a seven-night stay plus \$25 in spending money ( $M = \$1477.17$ ,  $SD = \$1009.39$ ) than when it consisted only of the seven-night stay ( $M = \$2904.76$ ,  $SD = \$1971.99$ ;  $F(1, 42) = 9.38$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, and also as predicted, presenters failed to intuit evaluators’ judgments and instead made presentation decisions that reflected an assumption of adding. Seventy percent (35 out of 50) of the participants in the presenters condition chose to include the seven-night stay at a luxury resort plus \$25 spending money prize, whereas only 30 percent chose to include only the luxury resort stay ( $\chi^2 = 8.0$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Study 1 thus provides an initial demonstration of the Presenter’s Paradox with a compelling example. Presenters’ failure to understand the information processing mind set of

evaluators leads them to make a costly error in judgment – they spent more money on a prize, only to unwittingly cheapen it in the eyes of their customers. In addition, study 1 demonstrates the ironic effect that adding \$25 in spending money can actually lead evaluators to *reduce* their estimates of a trip’s cost, on average, by over \$1,000. As far as we know, this study demonstrates for the first time that adding actual money to a bundle can lead to lower valuation judgments via an averaging process.

## STUDY 2: HOTEL AMENITIES

In study 2, participants take the perspective of a hotel owner who is choosing which amenities to feature in an advertisement. Of interest is whether owners will correctly anticipate that customers are likely to use a process that resembles averaging when they consider the amenities in forming an impression of the hotel. We predicted that hotel owners would choose to feature both highly favorable and moderately favorable amenities in the advertisement, assuming that more is better. As in study 1, we predicted that this strategy would backfire when evaluators average across the amenities, which will result in more favorable evaluations of the hotel that offers a small number of highly positive amenities than of the hotel that offers additional moderately favorable amenities. We additionally asked participants to indicate the extent to which the addition of the mildly favorable amenity adds or detracts from the overall advertisement.

### Method

A total of 227 students at a large, public, Midwestern university and a medium-sized private university on the East Coast completed this study along with unrelated others as part of a “Questionnaire Day.” They received between \$7-9 depending on the length of the packet.

Participants in the presenters’ (owner) condition read, “Imagine that you are the owner of a medium-sized beachfront hotel... You are getting ready to list your hotel on hotels.com...The customers you are targeting are college students at [your University]. Your hotel has the following amenities... Ratings can range from 5 stars (excellent) to one star (poor)...” Presenters saw that their hotel had 2 amenities that had been rated by an outside rating agency, a pool rated 5 stars and a restaurant rated 3 stars, and they were asked to indicate which amenities they would include in the advertisement. Presenters also estimated, in a counterbalanced order, how much they thought their prospective customers would pay if the hotel had the pool only [had both the pool and the restaurant]. Finally, presenters were asked whether they thought the restaurant would add or detract from prospective customers’ evaluations (1=detract; 7=add).

Participants in the evaluators (customer) condition read, “You are planning a vacation with some friends from [your University]... On the hotels.com site, hotels can list selected amenities, and the rating that the amenities received from Triple A’s Accommodations guide... Below is Triple A’s rating for each amenity the hotel listed.” Participants, in a between-subjects design, saw an advertisement featuring either the 5-star pool only or an advertisement featuring both the 5-star pool and the 3-star restaurant. They were then asked to indicate how much they would be willing to pay per night (per room) for the hotel. Those in the pool plus restaurant condition also reported whether the restaurant added or detracted from their evaluation.

## Results and Discussion

As predicted, customers' willingness-to-pay judgments showed a pattern that resembled averaging. Those who saw the advertisement featuring both the 5-star pool and the 3-star restaurant indicated that they would be willing to pay significantly *less* per night ( $M = \$92.45$ ,  $SD = \$38.42$ ) than did those who saw the advertisement featuring the 5-star pool only, ( $M = \$108.80$ ,  $SD = \$55.91$ ),  $F(1, 149) = 4.4$ ,  $p < .05$ . In contrast, and also as predicted, presenters failed to anticipate evaluators' judgments. Seventy-two percent (54 out of 75) of those in the presenters condition chose to include both the 5-star pool and 3-star restaurant in the hotel advertisement, whereas only 28 percent chose to advertise only the 5-star pool ( $\chi^2 = 14.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Presenters also wrongly expected that they would be able to charge a higher per night room rate if they advertised both the 5-star and 3-star amenities ( $M = \$99.22$ ,  $SD = \$47.41$ ) than if they advertised only the 5-star one ( $M = \$93.13$ ,  $SD = \$44.89$ ),  $F(1, 75) = 9.57$ ,  $p < .01$ . This results in the cross-over pattern shown in Figure 1, which highlights the discrepancies between presenters' and evaluators' perspectives.

---

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

---

*Add/Detract.* In addition, while presenters felt that listing the 3-star restaurant added to the advertisement ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ), customers thought it did not ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $F(1, 149) = 12.49$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Presenters making choices about which hotel amenities to feature in an advertisement failed to predict that customers' willingness-to-pay (WTP) judgments would be derived by averaging the star rating of the amenities presented. Instead, presenters' decision process reflected an incorrect prediction that consumers would add when making judgments. Specifically, while the hotel owners thought that advertising the moderate restaurant would *increase* customers' valuations of their hotel, prospective hotel customers thought that the rooms were worth *less* when the advertisement featured both the pool and the restaurant when compared with the pool alone.

Our main question of interest in this paper is whether presenters are able to correctly intuit evaluators' judgments when they make decisions about what to include in a presentation. Studies 1-2 demonstrate that presenters fail to anticipate evaluators' information-processing mind set. Presenters believe that including a \$25 gift certificate will enhance customers' perceptions of the value of a prize, but it inadvertently lowers their valuation judgments instead. Similarly, presenters believe that featuring a mildly favorable amenity on an advertisement for a hotel will lead prospective customers to give higher WTP judgments, but it actually leads them to give lower WTP judgments.

The next two studies examine whether the presenter/evaluator difference persists when the components of the "bundle" are negative (study 3) and when the presenters are experts (study 4). In so doing, they also examine more specifically whether it is inferences made by the evaluators about unmentioned attributes that presenters fail to anticipate. For example, the \$25 gift certificate may have led evaluators to judge the resort itself as cheap; otherwise they would not be able to get much for \$25. Presenters may have failed to intuit this inference. Similarly, prospective hotel customers may have inferred hotel amenities that were not mentioned, projecting, for instance, that the hotel with a 5 star pool also had other top tier amenities, such as

a 5 star restaurant. Presenters similarly may have failed to recognize such an inference. While this possibility does not bear on our main point of interest—that presenters fail to intuit evaluators’ judgments—the next two studies use scenarios where the components of the “bundle” do not directly bear on each other, thus informing us of whether it is a necessary component of the effect.

### STUDY 3: LITTERBUG PENALTIES

Study 3 examines whether the Presenter’s Paradox will also emerge when the components of the bundle are negative rather than positive. Sometimes, penalties used by policy makers contain multiple components, such as a jail sentence or community service requirement, in addition to a monetary component such as a fine. For instance, in the state of Michigan the penalty for hitting a construction worker while driving is noted on Department of Transportation road signs as being 15 years in jail plus a fine of \$7,500. The signs in Illinois read 14 years in jail plus a fine of \$10,000. In both of these cases the penalty can strike drivers as “off” because the jail time component seems to be highly severe, while, in comparison, the fine seems more like a moderate penalty. Indeed, from an averaging perspective, the fine may soften evaluators’ perceptions of the penalty overall.

In study 3, we asked government employees (presenters) to create a penalty structure designed to discourage littering in the community and asked community residents (evaluators) to evaluate the severity of different penalty structures. Our prediction was that the presenter mind set would lead presenters to assume adding on the part of evaluators. Thus, we predicted that they would recommend a penalty structure that included both a strongly severe penalty plus a moderately severe one. In contrast, we predicted that evaluators would ironically find the penalty structure more severe when it contains *only* the strongly severe penalty.

#### Method

A total of 141 participants (n = 29 government employees, n = 112 undergraduates) volunteered to participate. Government employees were recruited in person and completed hard-copy questionnaires, whereas undergraduates were randomly selected from the student directory of a large, public, Midwestern university and volunteered to complete an online survey.

The sample of government employees was assigned to the presenters condition and read: “Every year the highways become filled with tons of litter. Suppose that the governor has charged you with the task of curbing littering in the state, especially that of college students. Before designing the road signs, however, you must decide the penalty structure. You are considering modeling the penalty structure of either State A or State B: State A: \$750.00 or State B: \$750.00 fine and 2 hours of community service.” “What would you recommend to the governor? (State A’s Penalty or State B’s Penalty).” The order of the penalties was counterbalanced.

The undergraduate sample read one of two evaluators conditions: “Imagine you are driving on the highway, and you see a sign stating the penalty for littering: THE PENALTY FOR LITTERING IS \$750 [AND 2 HOURS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE].” Participants were then asked, “How severe does this penalty for littering seem to you?” (1=not severe, 7=very severe).



## Results and Discussion

As predicted, evaluators used a process that resembled averaging when evaluating the severity of the penalties. They rated a penalty of \$750 plus 2 hours of community service as *less* severe ( $M = 5.22, SD = 1.50$ ) than a penalty that consisted only of the \$750 fine ( $M = 5.83, SD = 1.28$ ),  $F(1, 110) = 5.3, p < .05$ . In contrast, and also as predicted, presenters failed to anticipate averaging on the part of evaluators. Eighty-six percent (25 out of 29) of the government employees in the presenters condition thought that the penalty including both the \$750 fine and 2 hours of community service would be more severe, whereas only 14 percent thought the \$750 fine alone was more severe ( $\chi^2 = 15.2, p < .001$ ). Thus, Study 3 replicates the effect established in studies 1-2 with negative information. While the government employees believed 2 hours of community service would increase evaluators' perceptions of the severity of the penalty, evaluators thought the penalty structure was more severe with only the strongly severe penalty.

Study 3 also demonstrates that the effect obtains in situations where the components of the "bundle" do not directly bear on each other and in cases where inferences about unmentioned components are not relevant. That is, a small community service penalty does not make a \$750 fine less harsh. In addition, the penalty for littering is a what-you-see-is-what-you-get situation where all components of the penalty are known upfront. Thus, implicit assumptions about additional components are irrelevant.

### STUDY 4: MANUSCRIPT EVALUATIONS

In study 4, we investigated whether the effect extends to experts. As reviewers of manuscripts, we may often wonder why our colleagues mix excellent studies with "so-so" ones. After all, when we are reviewing manuscripts, we are in evaluation roles, averaging weaker studies with the stronger ones. Yet, when we are in the role of authors preparing manuscripts, we have often found ourselves believing that including mildly favorable studies can only *add* to the strong studies in a manuscript and certainly should not detract from the paper as a whole. Study 4 tests whether our expert colleagues follow an averaging model as manuscript evaluators (reviewers) but an additive model as manuscript presenters (authors).

Psychologists attending a major annual convention were recruited to make judgments about manuscripts. Participants either took a presentational (author) or evaluative (reviewer) role. "Reviewers" evaluated the favorability of two manuscripts, one with three perfect studies (highly favorable) and one with three perfect (highly favorable) and two slightly flawed (mildly favorable) studies, operationalized here as marginally significant support for the hypotheses. "Authors" chose which studies to include in the manuscript. Based on studies 1-3 we predicted that "reviewers" would average when forming an impression of the manuscripts but that "authors" would fail to predict averaging, choosing instead to submit a manuscript that presents all available studies, including those that provide only marginal support for the hypothesis.

#### Method

Fifty conference attendees were recruited during three poster sessions to fill out a brief questionnaire on manuscript impressions. Only participants indicating previous experience reviewing manuscripts for journals were retained ( $N=31$ ).

Participants in a two condition between-subjects design either took the perspective of a reviewer reviewing manuscripts for the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, or the

perspective of an investigator making a personal submission to the journal. *Reviewers* read: “Imagine you are a reviewer for the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology and are evaluating two recent submissions. The theories behind the studies in both of the manuscripts are novel, and you think that both manuscripts can potentially make strong contributions to the field. The main theoretical predictions in the manuscripts were supported as follows:”

#### Manuscript A

Study 1: Highly significant  
Study 2: Significant  
Study 3: Significant

#### Manuscript B

Study 1: Highly significant  
Study 2: Marginally significant  
Study 3: Significant  
Study 4: Marginally significant  
Study 5: Significant

Authors read similar instructions, “Imagine you are preparing a manuscript for submission to the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. You have conducted five studies: one was highly significant, two were significant, and one was marginally significant (see below). The theory behind your studies is novel, and you think it can potentially make a strong contribution to the field. You are trying to decide which of your five studies to include in the manuscript. It seems that the manuscript can take one of two coherent versions. In one version, you include all the studies; in the other, you drop the two marginally significant ones.” *Authors* saw information about the studies presented in a list.

Study 1: Highly significant  
Study 2: Marginally significant  
Study 3: Significant  
Study 4: Marginally significant  
Study 5: Significant

*Dependent variables:* *Reviewers* rated the favorability of the manuscripts on 7-point scales (1=not favorable; 7=very favorable). *Authors* indicated which version they would submit by checking one of two counterbalanced options, “include all” or “drop two.”

## Results and Discussion

Results were consistent with predictions. A repeated measures ANOVA showed that the reviewers averaged, rating the manuscript with three highly favorable studies ( $M=6.0$ ) more highly than the manuscript with five studies, three of which were highly favorable and two of which were mildly favorable ( $M = 5.4$ ),  $F(1, 21) = 4.8$ ,  $p < .05$ . In contrast, results from the *author* condition were consistent with an additive decision rule. Eight times as many participants (89%) elected to include the mildly favorable studies than elected not to include them (11%),  $\chi^2 = 5.4$ ,  $p < .05$ . This study suggests that experts who are familiar with *both* roles, having served as authors as well as reviewers in the past, can fall prey to the same effect. Like study 3, study 4 also indicates that it is not necessary for participants to make an inference that goes beyond the information given to obtain the effect. That is, a poor experiment does not change a strong one. Likewise, there is no inference to be made about additional studies in the three study condition, since there are only three studies.

## STUDY 5: DEBIASING THE PRESENTER

On theoretical grounds, we may expect that the structure of presenters' and evaluators' tasks is at the heart of the paradox documented in studies 1-4. Presenters face many pieces of potentially relevant information and need to determine, in a bottom-up fashion, which ones to include in a presentation. This presumably draws attention to each individual piece of information as a discrete entity. If a given piece of information exceeds a neutrality threshold, the presenter will conclude that it is compatible with the message he or she seeks to convey and will include it. This results in presentations that would fare better under an adding rather than averaging rule. In contrast, evaluators' primary task is to make a summary judgment of the overall presentation, which fosters a focus on the big picture and results in a process that resembles averaging as observed in many impression formation studies (Anderson 1965; Gaeth et al. 1991; Yadav 1994).

This rationale suggests that the presenter's paradox should be attenuated or eliminated when presenters are induced to focus on the overall package, rather than the individual pieces. To test this prediction, presenters in study 5 imagined they were applying for a job as a film director. They had made two films in the past, one had received a 5 star rating and the other a 3 star rating. Presenters were then asked to predict how their prospective employer would evaluate their portfolio. In the *individual pieces* condition, participants were asked to evaluate their portfolio from the evaluators' perspective by focusing on the individual components of it: They first rated how good their portfolio would look with only the 5 star film and then asked how good it would look with both the 5 star and 3 star one. In the *whole picture* condition participants were asked to evaluate their portfolio from the evaluator's perspective by focusing first on the big picture overall, and then on the individual components: They first rated how good the production company would think their portfolio was if they included both films and only then were they asked to rate how good it would look with only the five star film. We predicted that the whole picture condition would help presenters to better map onto the perspective of evaluators by leading them to focus on the information as a whole. If so, then presenters in the whole picture condition should recognize that they would be better off presenting only the top ranked film. Note that support for this prediction would also bolster our conceptual account in terms of differential presenter and evaluator foci.

### Method

A total of 89 undergraduates from a large, public, Midwestern university completed this study along with unrelated others as part of a "Questionnaire Day" for which they received between \$7-9 depending on the length of the packet.

Participants read, "Imagine that you are a director working for a film production company and are applying to direct a new drama film... Before soliciting outside applications, the producer in charge of the film asked candidates inside the company to apply. You are the only internal candidate who is applying. The application asks for your portfolio. Portfolios are similar to resumes; candidates list selected films they have directed along with the Film Association Rating each film received. You have directed the films below in the past (five stars=excellent; one star=poor)." Participants saw that they had made a 5-star and a 3-star film.

Then subjects in both conditions were asked the following questions. *If you only include [the 5 star film], how favorable do you think the production company will think your portfolio is?* and *If you include both [the 5-star and the 3-star films] how favorable do you think the production company will think your portfolio is?* Participants in the *individual pieces* condition were asked about the 5-star film first and both films second, while those in the *whole picture* condition were asked about both films first and the 5-star film only second. All participants then responded to a question asking them whether the 3 star film would add or detract to the production company's impression.

## Results and Discussion

There was an interaction between information processing style (individual pieces versus whole picture) and the ratings of the films,  $F(1, 87) = 5.47, p < .05$ . As predicted, focusing on the films individually led to an adding pattern in evaluations, rating the package with one film as less desirable than that with two films ( $M$  one film = 6.18;  $SD = 1.80$ ;  $M$  two films = 6.67;  $SD = 1.02$ ). In contrast, when presenters were encouraged to look at the whole package first they showed evidence of an averaging pattern, rating the package with one film as more desirable than that with 2 films ( $M$  one film = 7.25;  $SD = 1.83$ ;  $M$  two films = 6.77;  $SD = 0.96$ ). Responses to the add/detract question showed a similar pattern. Those who focused on the individual components thought that the three star film would *add* to the producer's evaluation of the ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = 1.41$ ), while those who looked at the whole package first thought that the three star film would *detract* from the producer's evaluation ( $M = 3.86$ ;  $SD = 1.32$ ),  $F(1, 89) = 4.83, p < .05$ .

These results indicate that the Presenter's Paradox is due to a differential focus on information. Evaluators make their judgments by focusing on the package as a whole. This leads them to blend the different components together into one summary judgment. Presenters, on the other hand, appear to naturally focus on each individual component in the package. This leads them to adopt an additive pattern when presenting information. Importantly, however, manipulations that lead presenters to focus on the whole picture enable presenters to intuit evaluator's judgments.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present analysis introduced the *Presenter's Paradox*: Presenters fail to anticipate the information processing mind set of evaluators and, as a consequence, design presentations that thwart their intentions. When considering which information to include in a presentation, presenters follow a "more-is-better" rule that resembles an additive strategy in impression formation. They assume that every favorable piece of information adds to their overall case and hence include it in the bundle they present. Unfortunately, presenters fail to recognize that evaluators follow a strategy that resembles averaging, under which the addition of mildly favorable information dilutes the impact of highly favorable information. Hence, presenters' more-is-better strategy backfires and they would be better off if they limited their presentation to their most favorable information.

Across five studies we showed that this paradox is highly robust and of obvious practical importance in marketing. Study 1 showed that participants taking the role of a person creating prizes for a game show chose to spend *more* money in an effort to make a contest prize look

*more* valuable, even though they actually cheapened the perceived value of the prize from the evaluator's perspective. In Study 2, participants taking the perspective of hotel owners estimated their rooms to be more valuable when they featured both a 5 star and a 3 star amenity, while people taking the role of prospective customers felt the opposite—they gave higher willingness to pay judgments when only the 5 star amenity was featured in the advertisement. Study 3 extended the examination to negative information and additionally showed that the misprediction persists in situations where the components of the bundle do not bear on one another. Study 4 showed that even expert scientists are vulnerable to the Presenter's Paradox when evaluating versus authoring manuscripts. Finally, Study 5 illuminated the psychological process underlying the judgmental differences, suggesting that the disconnect arises because presenters process the individual pieces of information in the bundle, whereas evaluators focus on the overall gestalt. In fact, when presenters were prompted to consider the "big picture," they were able to intuit evaluators' judgments.

While previous research in consumer behavior has demonstrated a process that resembles averaging in decision making (e.g., Anderson 1965; Gaeth et al. 1991; Yadav 1994), this past work has focused solely on the evaluator's perspective. The current studies thus address a significant gap in the literature by demonstrating that people in presentational roles fail to anticipate evaluators information processing mind set and instead make presentation decisions that are consistent with the assumption of an additive model. This question has not been addressed in previous research, despite its obvious implications across many domains in consumer research and beyond.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

One question for future research is at what stage in the presentational sequence does the failure of prediction occur? One possibility is that presenters are myopic. If presenters operate under the assumption that evaluators will see the information exactly as they do, it may not even cross their minds to try and look at it through evaluators' eyes, as individuals typically only consider a fraction of the possible representations in the inferential process (Arkes, Faust, Guilmette, & Hart 1988). Still, another explanation is that the failure of prediction occurs further along in the presentational sequence; presenters may attempt to take the perspective of evaluators, but may inadvertently project their own construal onto evaluators. Future research may attempt to disentangle these two possibilities.

Future research should also consider social factors that might influence or interact with these cognitive processes. For instance, people who are highly self-conscious are more prone to view themselves through the eyes of others (Garcia, Weaver, Spence, and Darley 2008). Could their predisposition to consider others' perspectives actually mitigate the occurrence of the Presenter's Paradox? Another interesting factor to consider is culture. Compared to Western cultures, Eastern cultures are more likely to process information holistically (Miyamoto, Nisbett, & Masuda, 2006). Accordingly, are people from Eastern cultures less likely to exhibit the Presenter's Paradox?

In sum, the discovery of the Presenter's Paradox advances our understanding of how to best present information, a perennially important task for both consumers in their everyday lives as well as marketing practitioners in their professional ones. Whether a public relations expert is deciding which reviews to include on the jacket of a popular press 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, we all face the important task of deciding what information to include in our presentations. However, the present analysis suggests that we often inadvertently dilute the very message we seek to convey simply by our efforts to strengthen it.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Norman H. (1965), "Averaging versus adding as a stimulus-combination rule in impression formation," *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 70, 394-400.
- Anderson, Norman H. (1968), "Application of a linear-serial model to a personality-impression task using serial presentation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 10, 354-362.
- Anderson, Norman H. (1981), *Foundations of information integration theory*, Academic Press: New York.
- Arkes, Hal. R., David D. Faust, Thomas J. Guilmette, and Kathleen Hart (1988), "Eliminating the hindsight bias," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 73 (May), 305-307.
- Asch, Solomon (1952), *Social Psychology*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall.
- Burson, Katherine A., David Faro, and Yuval Rottenstreich (2010), "ABCs of principal-agent interactions: Accurate predictions, biased processes and contrasts between working and delegating," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 113 (Sep), 1-12.
- Cialdini, Robert B. (2008), *Influence: Science and Practice*, Prentice Hall.
- Ehrlinger, Joyce, Thomas Gilovich and Lee Ross (2005), "Peering into the bias blind spot: People's assessments of bias in themselves and others," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31 (May), 680-692.
- Gaeth, Gary J., Irwin P. Levin, Goutam Chakraborty, and Aron M. Levin (1990), "Consumer Evaluation of Multi-Product Bundles: An Information Integration Analysis," *Marketing Letters*, 2 (January), 47-58.
- Garcia, Stephen M., Kimberlee Weaver, John M. Darley, and Bryan T. Spence (2009). Dual effects of implicit bystanders: Diffusing vs. facilitating helping behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19, 215-224.
- Gershoff, Andrew and Gita V. Johar (2006), "Do you know me? Consumer calibration of friends' knowledge," *Journal of Consumer Research*, (March), 496-503.
- Gilovich, Thomas, Victoria H. Medvec and Kenneth Savitsky (2000), "The spotlight effect in social judgment: An egocentric bias in estimates of the salience of one's own actions and appearance," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, (February), 211-222.
- Ichheiser, Gustav (1949), "Misunderstandings in human relations: A study in false social perception," *American Journal of Sociology*, 55. (part 2), 70.
- Jones, Edward E., and Richard E. Nisbett (1971), "The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of behavior," In E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 79-94). Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- Lee, Angela Y., Jennifer Aaker, and Wendi Gardner (2000), "The pleasures and pains of distinct self-construals: The role of interdependence in regulatory focus," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78 (June), 1122-1134.
- Miyamoto, Y., Nisbett, N.E., & Masuda, T. (2006). Culture and the physical environment: Holistic versus analytic perceptual affordances. *Psychological Science*, 17, 113-119
- Pronin, Emily, Thomas Gilovich, and Lee Ross (2004), "Objectivity in the eye of the beholder: Divergent perceptions of bias in self versus others," *Psychological Review*, 111 (July), 781-799.
- Read, Daniel, George Loewenstein, and Michael Rabin (1999), "Choice bracketing," *Journal of*

- Risk and Uncertainty, 19, 171-197.
- Troutman, Michael C. and James Shanteau (1976), "Do consumers evaluate products by adding or averaging attribute information?" *Journal of Consumer Research*, 3 (September), 101-106.
- Yadav, Manjit S. (1994), "How buyers evaluate product bundles: A model of anchoring and adjustment," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (September) 342-353.



Figure 1. Study 2: Presenters' estimates of customers' willingness-to-pay judgments and customers' actual willingness-to-pay judgments as a function of the number of amenities featured in the advertisement.

