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Do Consumers Evaluate Cell Phones Differently if the Warranty is Expressed in Years or Days?

Different units can be used to describe product features, but what may seem a rather arbitrary choice may have profound consequences for consumer product evaluations, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“Consumers find it easier to process information expressed in default units and attribute the positive feeling associated with easier understanding to the product itself,” write authors Christophe Lembregts and Mario Pandelaere (both Ghent University).

Would you evaluate a cell phone differently if its warranty was expressed in days instead of years? Most consumers are more accustomed to seeing warranty information described in years rather than in days. So consumers find it is easier to process the information when a warranty is described in years instead of days, resulting in a more positive evaluation of the product. But why do consumers prefer standard units?

In a series of studies, the authors found that switching from standard to alternative units may negatively impact how consumers evaluate products. For example, a product with a warranty of 731 days was rated more negatively than a product with a warranty of 2 years, despite the fact that these warranties are equivalent.

However, this mainly occurred when a product was shown in isolation. When multiple products were compared, consumers focused more on the numerical difference between features. For instance, a warranty of 731 days may appear strange when you see it alone in an advertisement. But if you were to compare this product to others with warranties of 550 or 365 days, your focus would shift to the numerical difference between warranties.

“Consumers prefer to receive product information in small numbers, but also want this information to provide sufficient distinction between products. Default units strike an optimal balance between both needs by providing specific product information in rather small but accurate numbers. Because default units best serve these two purposes, they are more frequently used than alternative units,” the authors conclude.

Christophe Lembregts and Mario Pandelaere. “Are All Units Created Equal? The Effect of Default Units on Product Evaluations.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2013. For more information, contact Christophe Lembregts (Christophe.Lembregts@ugent.be) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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