

# Too Much of a Good Thing? How Incongruent Signals of Popularity Diminish Product Appeal

**Sarit Moldovan**

The Open University of Israel

**Meyrav Shoham**

Tel Aviv University

**Yael Steinhart**

Tel Aviv University

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## **Abstract**

A high volume of sales or online reviews can make a product seem more popular and established and consequently enhance its appeal. However, sometimes these two signals are incongruent: the volume of sales considerably exceeds that of the reviews, or there are many reviews compared to sales. Findings from five experimental studies and an analysis of real-world data from Goodreads.com demonstrate how a lack of fit between the volume of sales and reviews can affect consumer inferences and reduce product appeal. We further show that each of the two types of non-fit leads to distinct inferences: when sales clearly exceed the volume of reviews, consumers infer that the product was not popular enough with fellow consumers to spur them to write reviews. When there are many reviews compared to sales, consumers question reviewer trustworthiness, as it is unclear who posted these reviews given the volume of sales. The effects are attenuated when justification is available.

**Keywords:** *sales ; reviews; incongruity*

**Track:** Digital Marketing & Social Media