April 30, 2024

Dear Editors,

We are submitting our paper, “Reward or Shoot the Messenger? Experiments on How People Treat the Messenger After Receiving Good Or Bad News” for consideration for publication in *Nature Human Behaviour.*

Across two studies with over 5,000 participants from the United States, we document *messenger bias*: people reward messengers for bringing good news (*reward the messenger* effect) and punish them for delivering bad news (*shoot the messenger* effect), even when the messenger has no effect on the good or bad outcome and cannot choose not to share the news. The present research is an advance on prior work in three ways.

First, we go beyond the prior exclusive focus on the shoot-the-messenger effect and examine both the shoot-the-messenger and reward-the-messenger effects together, comparing them for the first time against behavior towards a non-messenger. Second, we demonstrate the implications of messenger bias using behavioral measures, in addition to the attitudinal measures that previous research has exclusively focused on. We show that in certain circumstances, attitudinal and behavioral outcomes lead to different conclusions about the presence and magnitude of messenger bias. Third, after uncovering the messenger bias, we show how to ameliorate it, exacerbate it, or almost eliminate it.

Documenting and understanding messenger bias has important implications for improving interpersonal relations, markets, and politics. Thus, our results will be of great interest to scholars from a diverse range of fields, including psychology, marketing, political science, economics, public health, medicine, and behavioral science. We also think that they will attract broad media coverage.

Sincerely,

Alessandro Del Ponte, University of Alabama

Alan Gerber, Yale University

Gregory Huber, Yale University

John Cho, Yale University