Sophisticated Manipulation

Can Advise Against a Purchase Boost Sales?

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated whether the strength of the compromise effect can be influenced by the salesperson through the use of a sales message, and whether it is wise to refer to the added option in a negative way. Online experiments were conducted in which two scenarios were presented to each of the participants, one scenario about washing machines and one about digital cameras. For both the washing machines and the digital cameras, the basic compromise effect was replicated. In the case of washing machines, the compromise effect could be enhanced by using a positive sales message. When a negative advice about more expensive options was included in the sales message, the compromise effect was weakened. This research provided evidence that short-term customer trust influences the choice of the compromise option, although it does not mediate the observed effects. Those effects were not observed for digital cameras, however. A basic requirement for the enhanced compromise effect to occur might therefore be limited familiarity with the product category. It might thus be effective for marketers to add a more expensive option to the assortment, but without referring to it, when there is limited familiarity with the product category.

INTRODUCTION

Investigating economic behavior, and maybe even more the manipulation of this behavior, has always been a central point of interest in marketing. Although there has already been extant research on persuasion and manipulation of choice behavior, many questions that could bring valuable additions to the persuasion literature remain unanswered and require further research. This study aims to address such a question by starting from one of the most documented context effects in the literature: the compromise effect (Simonson 1989). Simply stated, the compromise effect implies that by adding an option with extreme attribute values to the choice set, the relative attractiveness of the option which has now become a compromise option will increase, while no single option is obviously inferior. Consider for example John, who is planning a holiday next week and therefore wants to buy a digital camera to make some lovely pictures. In the store, John can choose between two alternatives: camera A, costing 60 euros, which has 10 megapixels and camera B, costing 80 euros, which has 14 megapixels. In this choice set, both products have extreme values on their product attributes. Suppose that an alternative would be added to the choice set with higher product attribute values on all product attributes, for instance camera C, costing 90 euros, which has 16 megapixels. The compromise effect predicts that camera B will become relatively more attractive, because it is a compromise regarding product attribute values.

Thus far, the research in this domain has mainly focused on the compromise effect as a result of the choice set: in the example, the compromise effect occurs merely by

changing the composition of the choice set, i.e. adding camera type C to the choice set. No other causal effects are taken into account (Dhar, Nowlis and Sherman 2000, Simonson 1989). This paper will try to expand the application domain of the compromise effect by studying whether this compromise effect can be influenced by the salesperson through the use of a sales message, i.e. whether the salesperson can boost the sales of the compromise option by using a sales message. Consider for example that John is assisted by a salesperson who recommends him to buy camera B through the following sales message: "You stated that you want a camera for your holiday next week? Well, this camera has enough megapixels for your goals." It is expected that by recommending camera B, the salesperson is able to enhance the compromise effect, resulting in an even higher relative preference for the compromise option.

In addition, the effect of referring to the added option with a negative advice will be investigated. For example, the salesperson could use the following sales message: "You stated that you want a camera for your holiday next week? Well, this camera has enough megapixels for your goals. It isn't the best we offer, but it should be fine for your needs: you should therefore not buy camera C, as it has too many specifications you don't need." Otherwise stated, is it wise to refer to the added option in a negative way additionally to the positive advice for the compromise option when using the compromise effect as a sales tactic? The answer is not as trivial as it may seem. Customers do not take the advice of a salesperson for granted and under some circumstances, the sales message may backfire (Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004).

Finally, this research aims to uncover what is at play: persuasion knowledge and trust might be key concepts that determine the effectiveness of the sales message, and thus explain what is observed in this setting. In order to develop an integrated theory, each component will now be consecutively discussed.

1   LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1   The Compromise Effect

Imagine bookkeeping all decisions you make in one week. The classical economic theory assumes that these decisions are made conform the principle of value maximization, stating that consumers compare the utility or subjective value of all possible options and subsequently choose the option with the highest value (Dhar et al. 2000). Empirical evidence suggests that several of the records you have written down are probably not made in this way: numerous examples in consumer behavior literature have shown that the principle of value maximization is a very restrictive simplification which is violated often in reality (Dhar et al. 2000). Kahneman and Tversky (1979) for example gave evidence that people overweigh outcomes that are considered certain, make decisions with regard to a reference point, and that losses loom larger than gains, known as loss aversion. This has been integrated in prospect theory which offers an alternative account for utility maximization. In addition, other violations of utility maximization have been demonstrated such as the endowment effect, where people overvalue and have a high aversion for giving up objects they own, and the status quo bias, which is a preference for the current state (Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler 1991).

Consumers do not always have clear preferences: there may be uncertainty about the value of the different product attributes and their weighting. By consequence, consumers make their decisions under preference uncertainty and this allows for several context effects to occur (Simonson 1989). One of the most documented context effects is the compromise effect (Dhar et al. 2000), which refers to the finding that options with

extreme values on their product attributes are relatively less attractive than products with intermediate values, while no single option is obviously inferior. In other words, by adding an option C with extreme product attribute values to the original choice set {A,B} such that B lies between A and C on all product attributes, the relative attractiveness of product B increases as product B is now the compromise option (Dhar et al. 2000, Simonson 1989). For example, consider an assortment of two televisions A and B. Suppose that a third option C is added to the assortment such that B lies between A and C on all product attributes (*Figure 1*). Given that television B is now the compromise option, it should become more attractive relative to television A, resulting in a greater share of television B relative to television A. Simonson (1989) has shown that people seek reasons for their choices, not only to justify the decisions to themselves, but also to justify them externally. A compromise option is easier to justify, given that it combines the different attributes, instead of choosing an extreme option. In that regard, choosing the compromise option is the safest choice. In the example, customers' preferences may be uncertain. Therefore, choosing television B is the safest and most justifiable choice given that this middle alternative combines all product attributes. However, remark that adding television C will induce a substitution effect, resulting in a decrease of the absolute share of television A and B. As it is a priori not clear how big the share of television C will be, the compromise effect only predicts that the share of television B relative to television A will increase, but not whether the absolute share of television B will increase or decrease (Simonson 1989).
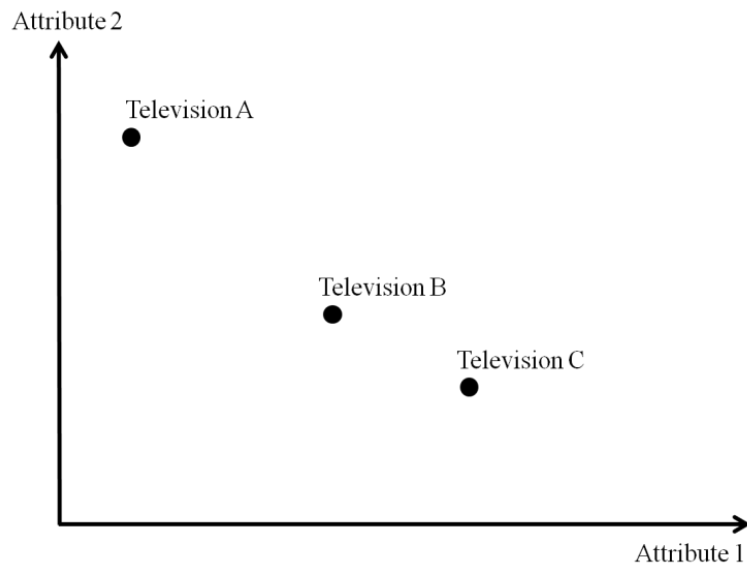
FIGURE 1
Television B becomes a compromise option when television C
is added to the choice set consisting of televisions A and B.

This research aims to expand the research on the compromise effect and will therefore first try to replicate the compromise effect itself, formally stated:

> **H1:** The choice probability of an option in a choice set will increase when it becomes a compromise option in the choice set.

Until now, the compromise effect has mainly been considered with regard to the choice set itself. In other words, the focus of previous research was on giving evidence that introducing a new option has a systematic effect on the relative preferences for choice options (Dhar et al. 2000, Simonson 1989). Consumer decisions are however seldom made in the abstract setting of merely choosing one product out of a choice set (Kirmani and Campbell 2004). A lot of other factors affect the decision to be made, such as the degree of cognitive busyness of the consumer (Campbell and Kirmani 2000), the consumers' mood (DeCarlo and Barone 2009), time pressure (Dhar et al. 2000),

personality characteristics and the mindset of the consumer (Kirmani and Zhu 2007), and all kinds of people with whom we have some relationship such as friends, lovers, spouses, social groups and family members (Simpson, Griskevicius and Rothman 2012). Another also important factor is the salesperson, of which the effect will now be discussed with regard to the compromise effect.

1.2   Impact of the Salesperson

1.2.1   Interaction Between the Salesperson and the Customer

Kirmani and Campbell (2004) have shown that consumers are active participants in interpersonal marketing persuasion and that they can react to persuasive attempts in two ways. The consumer can react by using seeker strategies, such as asking for information, establishing a personal connection, using positive reinforcement, testing the salesperson, directing his/her needs to the salesperson and accepting assistance. Alternatively, s/he can react by using sentry strategies such as ignoring the salesperson, resisting the assistance of the salesperson assertively, punishing the salesperson, negotiating with the salesperson, etc. The strategy usage depends inter alia on the kind of relationship between the customer and the salesperson, i.e. whether it is competitive or cooperative. In a cooperative relationship, the consumer sees the salesperson as someone who can help him/her in attaining his/her own goals, while the consumer tries to defend him/herself against unwanted persuasion influence in a competitive relationship (Kirmani and Campbell 2004).

It is therefore important to investigate how and whether a competitive or cooperative relationship is established. Deutsch (2006) has developed an integrated theory of

cooperation and competition in which he states that the relationship is determined by the type of interdependence and the type of action taken. The type of interdependence can be positive or negative and depends on whether the probability of goal attainment of both persons are positively or negatively correlated, e.g. if the salesperson wants to sell the most expensive option in a choice set, the consumer's probability of goal attainment is negatively correlated to the salesperson's probability of goal attainment, because the customer is looking for the product that best fulfills his/her needs. The two types of actions are effective actions which increase (e.g. asking for detailed information about the different options in the choice set) and bungling actions which decrease the probability of achieving the consumers' goals (e.g. following blindly the advice of the salesperson). The combination of the type of interdependence and the type of action taken influences three psychological processes: substitutability, attitudes and inducibility. Substitutability is the degree to which the salesperson can satisfy the customers' intentions, e.g. negative substitutability will lead the consumer to reject the advice of the salesperson. Attitudes are a natural and personal tendency to respond (un)favorably, e.g. the customer might have an inborn tendency to think negatively of the intentions of the salesperson. Inducibility refers to the willingness to accept fulfillment of what the salesperson wants, e.g. whether the customer is willing to buy the recommended option or not. Substitutability and inducibility complement each other. A relationship is considered as cooperative when it is positively interdependent in combination with effective actions or when it is negatively interdependent in combination with bungling actions, otherwise the relationship is competitive. Note that a relationship hardly ever is purely competitive or cooperative, but that most relationships are mixed, and that the nature of the relationship is determined mainly by

the relative strengths of the two types of goal interdependency (Deutsch 2006). This theory gives a valuable framework for discussing the ulterior motive of the salesperson, and its impact on consumer decisions.

1.2.2   Ulterior Motives and Persuasion Knowledge

An ulterior motive is defined as the motive of influencing the customer in order to make a sale or a commission (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). If an ulterior motive is accessible, the customer becomes aware that the salesperson has tried to persuade him/her and feels tricked. By consequence, the sales message will undergo a change-of-meaning (Friestad and Wright 1994), influencing substitutability and inducibility negatively, resulting in a relationship that is perceived as more competitive and less cooperative (Deutsch 2006), eventually leading to the use of sentry strategies by the customer (Kirmani and Campbell 2004). Thus, if the customer has the feeling that s/he is manipulated and that his/her freedom is limited, s/he might resist to persuasion attempts. This behavior is commonly known and illustrated in the literature as psychological reactance (Koslow 2000). This insight is very valuable to develop sales tactics: the use of sales tactics is inextricably linked with an evaluation by the consumer of the salesperson, which can be more or less favorable. Campbell and Kirmani (2000) have shown that the accessibility of ulterior motives results in a less favorable evaluation.

Up to now, most research in interpersonal marketing research suggested the presence of the ulterior motive by explicitly mentioning it, e.g. DeCarlo (2005) used the following sales message "I'm really excited to be able to share some information with you about this car you're interested in because all I need is one more sale to finally make it into the

Top-Gun Summer Intern Club." The present research aims to extend this research stream by suggesting the presence of the ulterior motive via the choice set and the recommended option within. Consider once again the choice set of televisions A and B. In this research, it will be supposed that the ulterior motive is highly accessible if television B is recommended, given that it is the most expensive one (Verlegh, Smidts and Tuk 2005). However, if an even more expensive option C is added, the recommended option is no longer the most expensive one, but is now a compromise option. By consequence, the ulterior motive is not that accessible anymore (Verlegh et al. 2005). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: The ulterior motive of the salesperson is less accessible when the recommended option becomes a compromise option in the choice set.

This effect should result in more favorable evaluations of the salesperson and thus a higher likelihood of buying the recommended option than in the basic compromise effect (Campbell and Kirmani 2000, DeCarlo 2005). This suggests that the compromise effect would be strengthened by using a sales message with positive advice, formally stated:

H3: When the salesperson uses a sales message with positive advice to persuade the customer to buy the compromise option, the compromise effect is strengthened in comparison to not using a sales message.

Although observing this effect would be interesting, an explanation for its occurrence would be even more valuable. Therefore, we suggest that persuasion knowledge might underlie this enhanced compromise effect. Persuasion knowledge consists of mental models of persuasion processes and of consumers' and salespersons' beliefs about how to persuade or how to cope with persuasion attempts. This also includes ideas about what the salesperson is trying to achieve and how (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Customers use their persuasion knowledge in order to cope with persuasion attempts and form an evaluation of the salesperson (Friestad and Wright 1994). Friestad and Wright (1994) have developed a theoretical framework, known as the Persuasion Knowledge Model, which suggests that people develop persuasion knowledge, especially during early adolescence. Persuasion knowledge accumulates over time and the customer uses it whenever s/he is confronted with a persuasive situation (Friestad and Wright 1994).

Elaborating on this topic, it is important to note that the use of persuasion knowledge depends on the specific characteristics of the choice context, and not only on the stage of development. This implies that although the consumer might have a well developed base of persuasion knowledge, s/he might in some situations almost not use it, and in other situations rely very heavily on it. There has been empirical evidence showing that when an ulterior motive is highly accessible, persuasion knowledge will be used more compared to a situation where the ulterior motive is less accessible, resulting in a suspicious consumer and eventually less favorable salesperson evaluations (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). An important implication of the Persuasion Knowledge Model is thus that an otherwise effective persuasion tactic might become ineffective when the

consumer uses persuasion knowledge and becomes suspicious about the motives of the salesperson (Oza, Srivastava and Koukova 2010).

These findings form a sufficient basis to hypothesize that persuasion knowledge will mediate the purchase behavior, for this research in particular with regard to the compromise effect. In other words, it is hypothesized that the activation and use of persuasion knowledge is affected by the composition of the choice set when using a sales message with positive advice, which in turn influences the strength of the compromise effect:

H4: The strength of the compromise effect is mediated by the use of persuasion knowledge when using a sales message with positive advice, i.e. the compromise effect is strengthened more when there is less use of persuasion knowledge.

This notion of suspicious consumers and unfavorable salesperson evaluations shows the relevance of investigating the role of the broader concept of consumer trust.

1.2.3   Trust

It is generally accepted that trust is very important, although it is not always clearly defined what trust encompasses. A meta-analysis by Swan, Bowers and Richardson (1999) offers several valuable insights concerning the importance of trust in developing and maintaining sales relationships.

In an attempt to define 'consumer trust', the concept can be approached from both an affective and cognitive point of view (Swan et al. 1999). Affect reflects whether the consumer feels (not) secure about relying on the salesperson. Cognition concerns the perception of the competency level of the salesperson and a sincere motivation to act in favor of the consumer. This definition suggests three elements which support trust. Whether the information provided by the salesperson is valid and reliable, depends on the salesperson competence which includes skills, expertise and ability. The second element is the salesperson's benevolence, i.e. his/her perceived honesty and sincerity. Thirdly, trust is more important in situations where the customer is exposed to a higher risk if the salesperson does not seem trustworthy (Swan et al. 1999). This research will only consider the benevolence of the salesperson, as our focus is on the accessibility of ulterior motives and hereto related the evaluation of the salesperson.

Customers use two types of cues to judge the benevolence of the salesperson. Direct cues relate to salesperson behavior, whereas indirect cues are cues that consumers use to impute trust, but that are not based on any behavior, but rather on for example the similarity or attractiveness of the salesperson. Given that the focus of this research is on the composition of the sales message, only direct cues will be considered (Swan et al. 1999).

The meta-analysis found that if salespeople are perceived as trustworthy, their sales should be noticeably higher than if trust was absent. In other words, trust mediates the purchase intentions of the consumers and thus sales (Swan et al. 1999). However, most of the literature currently available focuses on the development and maintenance of

long-lasting sales relationships by investing in the development of trust (e.g. Guenzi and Georges 2010; Kennedy, Ferrell and LeClair 2001). As not all buyer-seller relationships are long-term oriented, the aim of this research is to investigate whether there is a mediating effect of short-term trust in a single sales interaction.

The extent to which the salesperson seems to have an ulterior motive – which is hypothesized to be derived by the consumer from the composition of the choice set and the recommended option – might influence the perceived benevolence of and thus trust in the salesperson (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Trust is affected by the perception of the sincere motivation of the salesperson (Swan et al. 1999), referring back to the accessibility of ulterior motives. In other words, the establishment of short-term customer trust is affected by the composition of the choice set when using a sales message with positive advice, which in turn influences the strength of the compromise effect:

> **H5:** The strength of the compromise effect is mediated by short-term customer trust when using a sales message with positive advice, i.e. the compromise effect is strengthened more when the short-term customer trust is higher.

Thus, the accessibility of ulterior motives might play a crucial role in determining consumer trust, which in turn might influence the strength of the compromise effect. There are however numerous possibilities to determine the message content, influencing

the strength of the enhanced compromise effect, e.g. humor, fear (Mukherjee and Dubé 2012) and type of argumentation (DeCarlo 2005).

1.3   Impact of Giving Negative Advice

Besides the main effect of the salience of ulterior motives on salesperson evaluation, other factors should be taken into account. DeCarlo (2005) showed that a salespersons' message content is relevant to this evaluation. If suspicion of an ulterior motive is salient, the evaluation is more favorable if weaker sales messages are used, because the negative expectations of the consumer are violated. However, if the ulterior motive is not salient, it is in the interest of the salesperson to use stronger sales messages. The extent to which a sales message is strong or weak depends on the explicitness of the product claims: a weaker sales message consists of moderately positive product claims while stronger sales messages use only very positive product claims (DeCarlo 2005). This finding suggests that by determining an appropriate sales tactic, the customers' attitude toward the salesperson can be enhanced. The attitude toward the salesperson is particularly relevant, also because there is a direct relation between the favorableness of the salesperson and purchase intentions (DeCarlo 2005).

1.3.1   Including a Negative Advice in the Sales Message

The effect of a sales message will thus depend on its content (Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004). A lot of factors can be taken into account to develop a sales message. In our study, we will focus on whether to include a negative advice about the added option in favor of the compromise option, because this aspect is very specific to the compromise effect. In other words: should the salesperson refer negatively to the added option in

favor of the recommended option or is it wiser as a salesperson to not pay attention to the added option? As previously stated, the extent to which a sales message is strong or weak depends on the explicitness of the product claims: whereas making an explicit negative advice about a product is a strong sales message, making a negative advice about another product in favor of the recommended product is not a strong sales message. Including negative advice as a sales tactic could therefore be perceived as an element of a weak sales message (DeCarlo 2005), resulting in the following hypothesis:

H6: When the salesperson uses a sales message that includes a negative advice about the added choice option next to a positive advice about the compromise option, the sales message is perceived as weaker in comparison to a sales message with only positive advice.

The sales tactic of hypothesis 6 can be discussed with regard to the theory of DeCarlo (2005) who considers the salience of the ulterior motive of the salesperson. As previously mentioned, this research hypothesizes that the customer can infer to a given extent the ulterior motive from the choice set and the recommended option. Consider the television choice sets {A,B} and {A,B,C}. Giving a recommendation for product B in {A,B} will result in the ulterior motive being salient, given that this is the most expensive option. When an even more expensive option C is added, this ulterior motive is no longer salient, given that the recommended option B is no longer the most expensive one (Verlegh et al. 2005). As hypothesized, including a negative advice about the added option in the sales message with positive advice can be perceived as a component of a weak selling strategy, as the product claims become less explicit

(DeCarlo 2005). It was however hypothesized that the ulterior motive in the three options choice set is less accessible, and therefore a hard selling strategy is likely to be more effective. Hence, we expect the sales tactic with negative advice about the added option to be less effective in comparison to the sales message with only positive advice about the compromise option, and therefore we expect a weakening of the strengthened compromise effect in the former case (DeCarlo 2005). In other words, this account predicts that the salesperson should give advice about the recommended option without including negative advice about the more expensive option that was added. It might then be effective to add the more expensive option to the assortment, but without referring to it.

The implementation of this sales tactic can also be analyzed from reactance theory, which essentially means that a customer will resist to persuasion attempts when s/he feels tricked or when s/he interprets the sales tactic as a threat to personal freedom (Koslow 2000). Where the other account focuses on the accessibility of the ulterior motive, this account emphasizes the perception of the consumer of his/her personal freedom to choose. Referring to the added option in a negative way might give the customer the feeling that his/her freedom is limited, because an option was eliminated (Koslow 2000). This might cause a motivational state of psychological reactance, resulting in less favorable evaluations (Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004). Reactance is even likely to result in the so-called boomerang effect, meaning that reactance tends to cause behavior moving in the opposite way as intended (Clee and Wicklund 1980). Therefore, this account also predicts a weakening of the enhanced compromise effect when negative advice is present.

Summarizing, the sales tactic of including a negative advice about the added option in the sales message with positive advice is hypothesized to result in a weakening of the enhanced compromise effect, formally stated:

H7: When the salesperson uses a sales message that includes a negative advice about the added choice option next to a positive advice about the compromise option, the compromise effect is weakened in comparison to using a sales message with only positive advice.

As previously described, the choice behavior of consumers is mediated by persuasion knowledge and short-term customer trust when a positive sales message about the compromise option is used. Also when a negative advice about the added choice option is included, these mediators might be explanatory for the hypothesized behavior.

1.3.2 Persuasion Knowledge and Trust

The sales tactic with negative advice about the added option is expected to be less effective in comparison to the sales message with only positive advice about the compromise option, because the salesperson evaluation is less favorable. Both the use of persuasion knowledge and the establishment of short-term customer trust are affected by the composition of the choice set when using a sales message with negative advice about the added choice option next to a positive advice about the compromise option. This influences the strength of the compromise effect:

H8:   The strength of the compromise effect is mediated by the use of persuasion knowledge when using a sales message with negative advice about the added choice option next to a positive advice about the compromise option, i.e. the compromise effect is strengthened more when there is less use of persuasion knowledge.

H9:   The strength of the compromise effect is mediated by short-term customer trust when using a sales message with negative advice about the added choice option next to a positive advice about the compromise option, i.e. the compromise effect is strengthened more when the short-term customer trust is higher.

2 METHOD

In this section, the design of the experiment will be discussed and a formal procedure to collect the data will be described in detail.

2.1 Participants

Participants were 208 Belgians between 18 and 25 years old (37% male, $M_{age} = 22$ year, $SD_{age} = 1.34$ year). Participants were gathered via a group mail and social media, where they were asked to click on an internet link which randomly assigned them to one of six experimental conditions. The experiment was presented by an online survey using *Qualtrics* survey software and was conducted in Dutch.

2.2 Design

To test the hypotheses proposed above a 2 (choice set: 2 options vs. 3 options) $\times$ 3 (sales message: salesperson with minimal interaction vs. positive advice vs. positive + negative advice) between-subjects design was set up. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions.

2.3 Scenarios

Two scenarios were presented to each of the participants, one scenario about washing machines and one about digital cameras. The order in which the two products were presented to the participants was randomized.

Both these products are expensive items where interaction with a salesperson during the sales transaction is common. In addition, these products have several characteristics of which some are ambiguous, e.g. the turning speed of a washing machine and the optical zoom of a digital camera. Because of these ambiguous characteristics, no single option is obviously inferior to another option, being a requirement for the compromise effect to occur (Simonson 1989). Therefore, these products were selected as appropriate for this research.

Each scenario described a single sales transaction in which the composition of the choice set and the interaction with a salesperson was manipulated between conditions.

The composition of the choice set was manipulated by presenting a two or three-option choice set. In the scenario study about digital cameras for example, the three-option choice set consisted of camera A, B and C, while the two-option choice set consisted only of camera A and B, as presented in *Figure 2*. All options in the choice set were varied on one ambiguous product attribute, being the optical zoom, and on price, while kept identical on all other product attributes. A linear relationship between price and optical zoom was kept account for. An analogous approach was used for the composition of the washing machines choice set (Appendix A).

	Camera A	Camera B	Camera C
Price	€ 99	€ 149	€ 199
Number of effective megapixels	16 MP	16 MP	16 MP
Flash	yes	Yes	yes
Wide angle lens	yes	Yes	yes
Type of memory cards	SD / SDHC / SDXC	SD / SDHC / SDXC	SD / SDHC / SDXC
Touchscreen	no	no	no
Digital zoom	4x	4x	4x
Optical zoom	6x	10x	14x

FIGURE 2
Sample Choice Set

Also the interaction with a salesperson in the scenario study was manipulated between conditions. In order to replicate the basic compromise effect, some participants had minimal interaction with the salesperson, because they refused the advice of the salesperson. A second group of people allowed the salesperson to give some advice, after which the salesperson recommended product B (i. e., the compromise option). A last group of respondents also allowed the salesperson to give some advice, after which the salesperson recommended product B, but additionally gave a negative advice about product C – in a three-option choice set – or more expensive options in general – in a two-option choice set. For example for the experimental condition with a three-option choice set, a positive advice for camera B and a negative advice for camera C, the used sales message was "I think you should buy digital camera B: it has 16 MP and several other nice features. It also has a very nice optical zoom of 10. Digital camera C has an even higher optical zoom, but you should not buy that one. Digital camera B does not

have the highest optical zoom, but it should be fine for your needs. Besides, you get all that for only € 149."

By consequence, six scenarios were possible, resulting in six experimental conditions to which participants were randomly assigned. In the Appendix, both the product choice sets (Appendix A) and the scenarios (Appendix B) can be found.

2.4   Procedure

2.4.1   *Introduction*

After clicking on the survey link, participants were thanked for their participation and were informed that the experiment would last at most ten minutes. It was also stressed that the required age for the survey was between 18 and 25 years old.

2.4.2   *Mood Check*

First, participants completed a PANAS scale (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) in order to be able to control for mood (Watson, Clark and Tellegen 1988), as a positive mood might have a neutralizing effect on the effects hypothesized above (DeCarlo and Barone 2009).

2.4.3   *Product Familiarity*

Next, participants indicated their product familiarity with washing machines and digital cameras, the two product categories used in the experiment, by answering the following question: "How much do you think you are familiar with washing machines [digital

cameras] in terms of product-usage experience?" Participants indicated their product familiarity on a scale ranging from 1 (very unfamiliar) to 5 (very familiar) (Park 1976).

2.4.4   *Scenarios*

Participants were instructed to read the first scenario carefully and to empathize with it as well as possible, similar to previous research (Campbell and Kirmani 2000, DeCarlo 2005). After reading the scenario, participants were asked to make a product choice and to rate the overall attractiveness of each product in the choice set on a scale ranging from 0 (very unattractive) to 10 (very attractive) (Simonson 1989).

It was hypothesized that the ulterior motive is less accessible when the recommended option becomes a compromise option in the choice set. The accessibility of the ulterior motive was thus manipulated by the choice set. In order to check the effectiveness of this manipulation, the following Likert scales, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), were averaged into a manipulation check: "The salesperson recommended product B because s/he was trying to make a sale.", "The salesperson had an ulterior motive for recommending product B." and "The salesperson's comments are suspicious." (Campbell and Kirmani 2000, DeCarlo 2005, DeCarlo and Barone 2009). These questions were only asked to participants of experimental conditions in which the salesperson has given some advice.

It was hypothesized that when a negative advice about the most expensive option in favor of the recommended option is included in the sales message, the sales message is perceived as weaker in comparison to a sales message without negative advice. The strength of the sales message was thus manipulated. Whether the sales message is

perceived as weak or strong was measured by the following question which served as a manipulation check: "The salesperson presented strong arguments in favor of product B." on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (DeCarlo 2005). This question was only asked to participants of experimental conditions in which the salesperson has given some advice.

In order to test for the mediation effect of persuasion knowledge and short-term customer trust on the strength of the compromise effect, some additional questions were asked. The activation and use of persuasion knowledge was measured by the following single question: "I thought it was pretty obvious that the salesperson was trying to persuade me." on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Short-term customer trust was measured by the average of eight statements, on which agreement was measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 (not at all) to 7 (totally)), e.g. "I'm not sure if trusting the salesperson is a good idea." (Swan et al. 1999).

After the first scenario, a filler task was presented, in which participants were asked to choose the store they preferred the most for each of four pairs of store logos.

Subsequently, participants read the second scenario about the second product, completely analogous to the procedure in scenario 1.

2.4.5 *Demographics*

At the end of the experiment, participants were asked to indicate their gender and their date of birth. Participants could also optionally leave their e-mail address if they wished to be informed of the results of the research. Participants were once more thanked for their participation.

3   RESULTS

Before analyzing the strength of the compromise effect, the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations (and the accompanying hypotheses) will be analyzed. The manipulation checks in this study were the accessibility of the ulterior motive and the strength of the sales message.

3.1   Accessibility of Ulterior Motive

Hypothesis 2 suggested that the ulterior motive of the salesperson is less accessible when the recommended option becomes a compromise option in the choice set. Accessibility of ulterior motives was measured on three items for both washing machines (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$) and digital cameras (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$). A full factorial mixed ANOVA was run with choice set and sales message as independent between-subjects variables, product type as a repeated-measures independent variable, and the accessibility of ulterior motive as the dependent variable. The accessibility of ulterior motives was lower in the three-option choice set ($M = 4.39, SE = .13$) than in the two-option choice set ($M = 4.98, SE = .12$) and this difference was statistically significant ($F(1,131) = 11.89, p < .001$) (*Figure 3*). None of the other effects were significant ($p > .05$). These findings give support for hypothesis 2, suggesting that both the manipulation was successful and that the hypothesized effect holds.
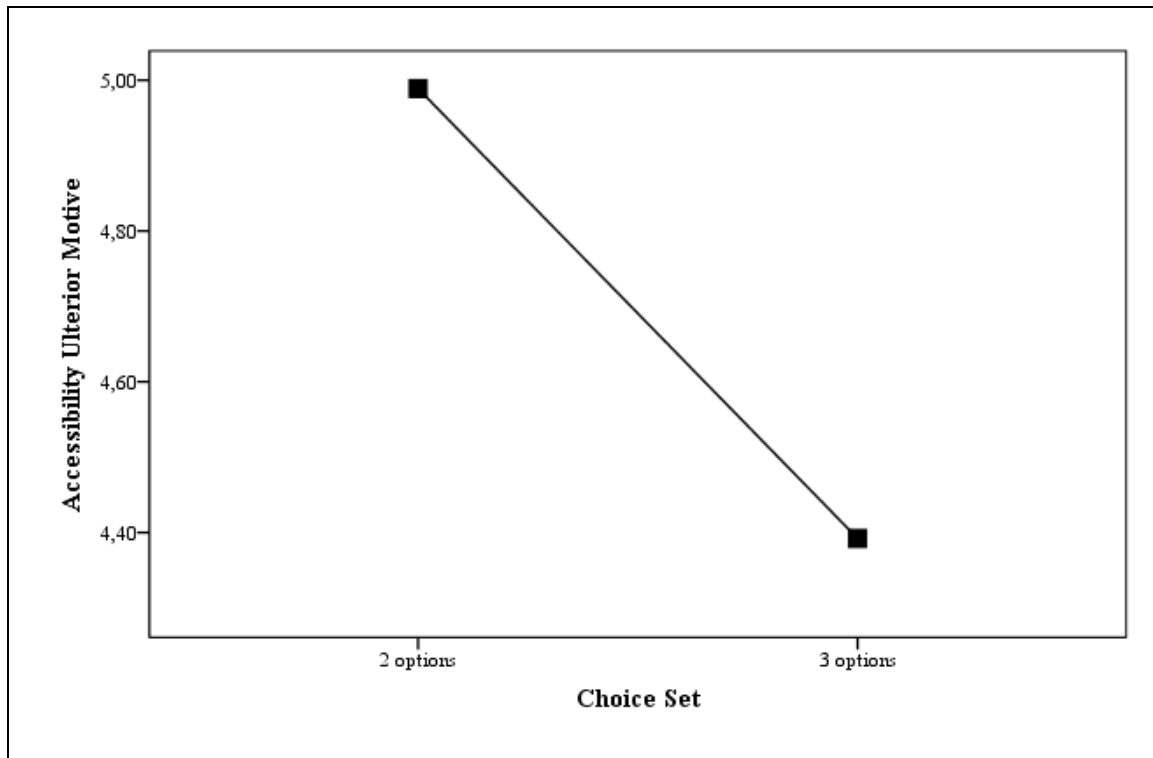
FIGURE 3
Accessibility Ulterior Motive

3.2 Strength of the Sales Message

Hypothesis 6 suggested that the sales message is perceived as weaker when a negative advice about the most expensive option in favor of the recommended option is added to the positive sales message in favor of the compromise option. A full factorial mixed ANOVA was run with sales message and choice set as independent between-subjects variables, product type as a repeated-measures independent variable, and the strength of the sales message as the dependent variable. The strength of the sales message including negative advice was not significantly different from the strength of the positive sales message ($F(1,131) = .37, p > .05$) (*Figure 4*). Hypothesis 6 is therefore not supported, and we can conclude that the manipulation of message strength was not successful. No other main or interaction effects were significant ($p > .05$).
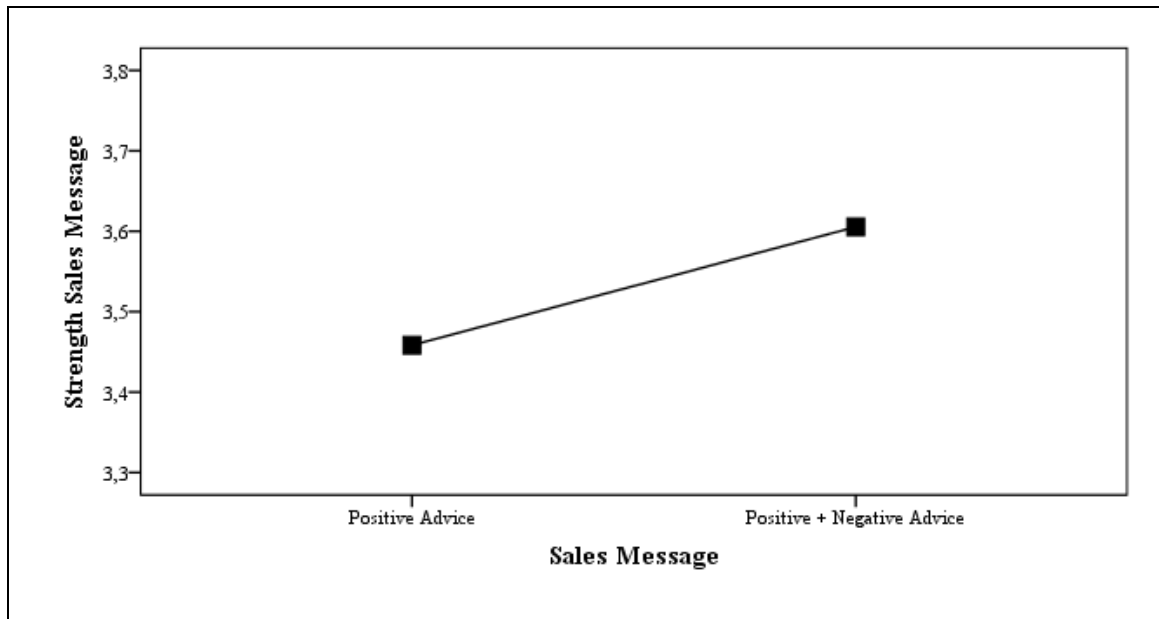
FIGURE 4
Strength Sales Message

3.3   Strength of the Compromise Effect

In this section, the strength of the compromise effect across the different conditions will

be analyzed. For all three possible sales messages (no advice, positive advice, positive

and negative advice) the compromise effect can be calculated as the relative choice

share of option B in the three-option choice set minus the choice share of option B in

the two-option choice set. The relative choice share of option B is the choice share of

option B relative to the total choice share of options A and B. This increase in relative

choice share is visually represented in *Figure 5*.[1] The (relative) choice shares and the

strength of the compromise effects are also summarized in *Table 1* for the washing

machines and *Table 2* for the digital cameras. Eventually, the strength of these

compromise effects can be assessed by a logistic regression model, and be compared

with test statistics for proportions, analogously to the analysis methodology of previous

research (Dhar et al. 2000, Simonson and Tversky 1992).

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[1] The compromise effect is defined as the increase in relative choice share of option B. Therefore it is
possible that the compromise effect is positive while the absolute choice share of option B decreases.

TABLE 1
Washing Machines: Strength of the Compromise Effect (CE)

Options	Salesperson with minimal interaction			Positive Advice			Positive + Negative Advice		
	2 options	3 options	3 options (relative)	2 options	3 options	3 options (relative)	2 options	3 options	3 options (relative)
A	80.55	48.65	50.00	87.88	46.67	50.00	82.05	42.42	50.00
B	19.44	48.65	50.00	12.12	46.67	50.00	17.95	42.42	50.00
C		2.70			6.67		0	15.15	
CE	+30.56			+37.88			+32.05		

Note. Share of respondents choosing each option is shown in percentages (choice shares).

Note. For all three sales messages, the relative choice shares of options A and B in the three-options choice set are 50 percent. These figures are purely coincidental.

TABLE 2
Digital Cameras: Strength of the Compromise Effect (CE)

Options	Salesperson with minimal interaction			Positive Advice			Positive + Negative Advice		
	2 options	3 options	3 options (relative)	2 options	3 options	3 options (relative)	2 options	3 options	3 options (relative)
A	75.00	24.32	27.27	75.76	53.33	61.54	51.28	27.27	36.00
B	25.00	64.86	72.73	24.24	33.33	38.46	48.72	48.48	64.00
C		10.81			13.33			24.24	
CE	+47.73			+14.22			+15.28		

Note. Share of respondents choosing each option is shown in percentages (choice shares).
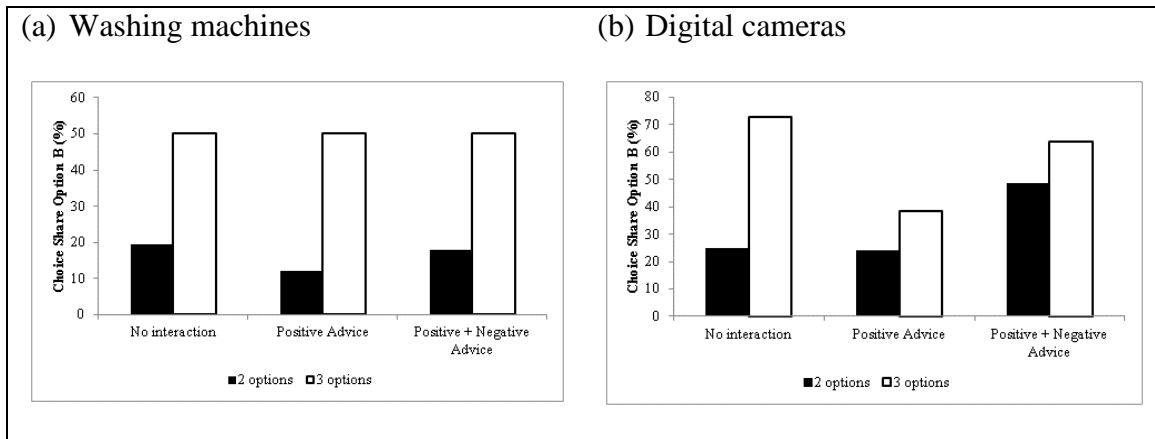
(a) Washing machines   (b) Digital cameras

FIGURE 5
Relative Choice Share of Option B

A comprehensive full factorial binary logit model was run for both washing machines and digital cameras with choice set and sales message as independent between-subjects variables, and the choice of the compromise option as the dependent variable. In the case of washing machines, the probability of choosing the compromise option was significantly higher in the three-option choice set than in the two-option choice set (Wald $= 7.00, p < .01$), giving evidence for the basic compromise effect. The sales message and the interaction effect of choice set and sales message were not significant ($p > .05$), although the parameters had the expected direction. In the case of digital cameras, the probability of choosing the compromise option was significantly higher in the three-option choice set than in the two-option choice set (Wald $= 14.37, p < .001$), giving evidence for the basic compromise effect. The interaction effect of choice set and sales message was marginally significant (Wald $= 4.56, p < .10$) indicating that the probability of choosing the compromise option decreased when a positive advice or a positive and a negative advice was given in the three-option choice set. The main effect of sales message was significant (Wald $= 6.30, p < .05$). In order to test the specific

hypotheses with regard to the strength of the compromise effect, each hypothesis will now be consecutively discussed.

3.3.1   Basic Compromise Effect

To check whether the basic compromise effect is replicated, we compared the market share of the compromise option in the two and three-option choice sets in which no advice was given. As mentioned earlier, there was a significant main effect of choice set: as represented in the first column of *Table 1* and *Table 2,* and as shown in *Figure 5,* the relative market share[2] of alternative B increased when becoming a compromise option. The relative market share of option B increased from 19.44% to 50% for the washing machines and from 25% to 72.73% for the digital cameras. These findings confirm that the basic compromise effect was replicated in both scenarios, consistent with hypothesis 1.

3.3.2   Impact of a Sales Message

It was hypothesized that the compromise effect could be enhanced by using a sales message with positive advice in favor of the compromise option. Therefore, we compared the market share of the compromise option in the two and three-option choice sets in which no advice was given and in which a positive advice was given. As mentioned earlier, the main effect of the sales message was not significant for both washing machines (Wald $= .68, p > .05$) and digital cameras (Wald $= .01, p > .05$).

In the case of washing machines, the interaction effect of choice set and sales message was not significant (Wald $= .44, p > .05$) although the parameter estimate had the right

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[2] In the remainder of this paper, the relative market share of an option is defined as the market share of that option, relative to the total market share of the original choice set consisting of options A and B.

direction. However, we decided to look at the data in somewhat more detail by comparing the strength of the compromise effect using test statistics for proportions based on analogous research (Dhar et al. 2000, Simonson and Tversky 1992). As shown in *Figure 5*, when a positive advice was given, the relative market share of washing machine B increased from 12.12% to 50% when becoming a compromise option and this difference was statistically significant $(t(59) = 3.49, p < .001)$. The compromise effect is 7.32% greater in comparison to the basic compromise effect and this difference is statistically significant $(t(131) = 3.89, p < .001)$, consistent with hypothesis 3.

In the case of digital cameras, the interaction effect of choice set and sales message was marginally significant (Wald $= 3.16, p < .10$) although the parameter estimate was not in the hypothesized direction, indicating that the compromise effect was smaller when a positive advice was given. Indeed, when a positive advice was given, the relative market share of digital camera B increased from 24.24% to 38.46% when becoming a compromise option, as shown in *Figure 5*, and although this difference did represent a small effect in the right direction it was no longer statistically significant $(t(57) = 1.17, p > .05)$. This implies that the compromise effect is 33.51% smaller in comparison to the basic compromise effect, and this difference is statistically significant $(t(126) = -16.57, p < .001)$. These findings contradict what is expected by hypothesis 3, i.e. that the compromise effect could be enhanced.

3.3.3   *Impact of Negative Advice*

The strength of the compromise effect was analyzed when a negative advice about the added option was included in the sales message next to the positive advice about the compromise option. It was expected that the compromise effect would be weaker in

comparison to when only a positive sales message was used. Therefore, we compared the market share of the compromise option in the two and three-option choice sets in which a positive advice was given and in which both a positive and a negative advice was given.

As mentioned earlier, in the case of washing machines, both the main effect of sales message (Wald $= .46, p > .05$) and the interaction effect of choice set and sales message (Wald $= .29, p > .05$) were not significant, although the parameter estimate of the interaction effect was in the expected direction. Therefore, we decided to look at the data in somewhat more detail by using test statistics for proportions. As shown in *Figure 5*, when a negative advice about the added option was included in the sales message, the relative market share of washing machine B increased from 17.95% to 50% when becoming a compromise option, and this difference is statistically significant $(t(65) = 2.92, p < .01)$. The compromise effect is 5.83% smaller in comparison to the compromise effect where the positive sales message was used and this difference is statistically significant $(t(126) = -3.02, p < .01)$, consistent with hypothesis 7.

In the case of digital cameras, the main effect of sales message was statistically significant (Wald $= 4.42, p < .05)$, suggesting that the choice of the compromise option increases when negative advice is included in the sales message, regardless of the the choice set under consideration. Both the main effect of choice set (Wald $= 1.37, p > .05$) and the interaction effect of choice set and sales message (Wald $= .00, p > .05$) were however not significant, indicating that the strength of the compromise effect is not significantly different in the conditions where a positive

advice was given versus where a positive and a negative advice was given. In the previous section, we found that the compromise effect disappeared when a positive sales message was used. This finding is also observed when a negative advice is included in the sales message, explaining these findings. Indeed, when a negative advice about the added option was included in the sales message, the relative market share of digital camera B increased from 48.72% to 64% when becoming a compromise option, as shown in *Figure 5*, and although this difference did represent a small effect in the right direction, it was not statistically significant ($t(62) = 1.19, p > .05$). This implies that the compromise effect is greater in comparison to the compromise effect that occurs due to the positive sales message with 1.06%, but this difference in compromise effect is not statistically significant ($t(129) = 0.49, p > .05$). Therefore, this finding does not give evidence for hypothesis 7, but neither does it contradict hypothesis 7.

3.4   Underlying Mechanisms

It was hypothesized that activation of persuasion knowledge and short-term customer trust would mediate the effect of the choice set and the sales message on the strength of the compromise effect. The methodology that Baron and Kenny (1986) have lined out to test for mediation includes showing that the experimental manipulations significantly affect the dependent variable, in concreto the probability of choosing the compromise option. Secondly, we have to show that the suggested mediators are affected in the same way by the treatments as the dependent variable. Finally, in a combined model, the effect of the treatments should no longer be significant because of the explanatory power of the mediators in the model.

3.4.1   Persuasion Knowledge

Hypotheses 4 and 8 stated that persuasion knowledge mediates the strength of the compromise effect in the conditions in which a positive advice was given and in which a positive and negative advice was given, respectively.

As already discussed, choice set had a statistically significant effect on choosing the compromise option for both product categories. In addition, in the case of digital cameras, the main effect of sales message was significant and the interaction effect of choice set and sales message was marginally significant. All other effects were not statistically significant.

To test whether the activation of persuasion knowledge is affected in the same way by the experimental manipulations, a full factorial mixed ANOVA was run with choice set and sales message as independent between-subjects variables, product type as a repeated-measures independent variable and persuasion knowledge as the dependent variable. None of the main or interaction effects were significant $(p > .05)$, by consequence not supporting hypotheses 4 and 8 that persuasion knowledge mediates the strength of the compromise effect.

3.4.2   Short-Term Customer Trust

Short-term customer trust was suggested in hypotheses 5 and 9 as a second mediation path when a positive advice was given and when a positive and negative advice was given, respectively. Short-term customer trust was measured on eight items for both washing machines (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) and digital cameras (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

As already discussed, choice set was statistically significant for choosing the compromise option for both product categories. In addition, in the case of digital cameras, the main effect of sales message was significant and the interaction effect of choice set and sales message was marginally significant. All other effects were not statistically significant.

To test whether the activation of short-term consumer trust is affected in the same way by the experimental manipulations, a full factorial mixed ANOVA was run with choice set and sales message as independent between-subjects variables, product type as a repeated-measures independent variable and short-term customer trust as the dependent variable. Both the main effect of choice set $(F(1,202) = 7.67, p < .01)$ and sales message $(F(2,202) = 4.75, p < .01)$ were statistically significant, as well as the interaction effect of choice set and sales message $(F(2,202) = 3.58, p < .05)$. In addition, there was a significant three-way interaction effect of product type $\times$ choice set $\times$ sales message $(F(2,202) = 3.52, p < .05)$, indicating that the interaction effect of choice set and sales message, i.e. the strength of the compromise effect across the different conditions for sales message, is significantly different between the two product scenarios. This is consistent with the contradicting results of both scenarios we found earlier. These findings support the second criterion for mediation.

Finally, in a combined model, the effect of the experimental manipulations on the strength of the compromise effect should be no longer significant because of the explanatory power of short-term customer trust. To test this final criterion for mediation, a binary logit model was run for both product categories with choice set,

sales message, and short-term customer trust as independent variables and the choice of the compromise option as the dependent variable. In the case of washing machines, short-term customer trust was statistically significant (Wald $= 12.89, p < .001$), but choice set also remained highly significant (Wald $= 8.53, p < .001$). This finding gives no evidence for mediation of short-term customer trust, although short-term customer trust is statistically significant for choosing the compromise option. In the case of digital cameras, short-term customer trust was not significant (Wald $= .98, p > .05$), whereas the main and interaction effects of choice set and sales message remained significant, not supporting the hypothesis that short-term customer trust mediates the strength of the compromise effect.

4   GENERAL DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to investigate whether the compromise effect can be influenced by the salesperson through the use of a sales message, i.e. whether the salesperson can boost the sales of the compromise option by using a sales message. In addition, it was questioned whether it is wise to refer to the added option in a negative way next to the positive advice for the compromise option when using the compromise effect as a sales tactic. Finally, this research wanted to give evidence that these effects are mediated by persuasion knowledge and short-term customer trust. All of these hypothesized effects were checked for two product categories, in concreto washing machines and digital cameras.

4.1   Strength of the Compromise Effect

For both the washing machines and the digital cameras, we were able to replicate the basic compromise effect, being that the relative choice probability of option B increased when option C was added to the choice set consisting of options A and B.

The compromise effect could be strengthened for the washing machines by using a positive sales message. The ulterior motive of the salesperson also was less accessible when option B was recommended in the choice set {A,B,C} than in the choice set {A,B}. When a negative advice about more expensive options was included in the sales message, next to the positive advice for option B, however, the compromise effect was weakened, even though the sales message was perceived as equally strong as the positive sales message. Although the manipulation of the strength of the sales message

was thus not effective, this outcome is still consistent with reactance theory. In addition, this research gave evidence that short-term customer trust influences the choice of the compromise option, although it does not mediate the observed effects. Also persuasion knowledge is no candidate for mediation.

These effects were however not observed for the digital cameras. The compromise effect disappeared when a positive sales message was introduced, even though the ulterior motive of the salesperson was less accessible when option B was recommended in the choice set {A,B,C} than in the choice set {A,B}. The same observation holds when a negative advice about more expensive options was included in the sales message, next to the positive advice for option B. This indicates that the hypothesized effects might only occur under certain circumstances. In the design of the experiment, product familiarity was included as a control variable, based on previous research (Sheng, Parker and Nakamoto 2005). Product familiarity for washing machines ($M = 2.31, SE = .08$) was lower than for digital cameras ($M = 3.49, SE = .06$) and this difference was highly significant ($t(207) = -13.61, p < .001$). This could suggest that a basic requirement for the enhanced compromise effect to occur is limited familiarity with the product category. Although not within the scope of this research, this observation might be explanatory for this discrepancy, opening the way for further research.

4.2   Managerial Implications

These findings give evidence in favor of extending product assortments with more expensive options and subsequently giving positive advice about the target product without including negative advice about the more expensive option that was added. It might thus be effective for marketers to add a more expensive option to the assortment, but without referring to it, when there is limited familiarity with the product category.

4.3   Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

In this research, scenario studies were used. Therefore, the results of this research should be nuanced in the sense that there are still a lot of other factors influencing the purchase intentions of the customer. DeCarlo and Barone (2009) gave evidence for the neutralizing effect that a positive mood, for example created by the shopping environment, can have on the attributions that a suspicious customer makes about a salesperson. In addition, personal characteristics of the salesperson can moderate these effects. Attractive salespersons are less likely to be perceived as acting in their own interests when they make their desire to influence the customer explicit. It seems that attractive salespersons can profit from explicitly trying to persuade the customer, while this is not the case for dislikeable salespersons (Reinhard, Messner and Sporer 2006). The interactions in scenario studies are not as rich as in the real world and are also less cognitively demanding. Therefore, further research could investigate these effects in combination with the strength of the compromise effect to set up a more comprehensive and integrated theory. With regard to this research however, scenario studies were very appropriate: experimental manipulations can be performed very precisely, resulting in a

very controllable experiment. In addition, scenarios with salespersons have proven to be believable and understandable by participants (Campbell and Kirmani 2000).

Another point of interest is the accumulation of persuasion knowledge. Adolescence is a very crucial period in the development of persuasion knowledge: Boush, Friestad and Rose (1994) have shown that knowledge about advertiser tactics develops in the direction of adult knowledge during the adolescent years, and especially in the period between late childhood and early adolescence. However, there is a continuous accumulation of persuasion knowledge over the entire lifetime. This implies that people whose persuasion knowledge is at a different stage of development may disagree in their evaluations of a salesperson. Another implication is that the use of persuasion knowledge will increasingly become an automatic process instead of a deliberative process, implying that more experienced consumers will need less cognitive resources in order to form valid salesperson attitudes based on persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994). In this research, all participants were between 18 and 25 years old ($M_{age} = 22$ year, $SD_{age} = 1.34$ year), therefore the age was pretty homogeneous. It may thus be interesting to investigate the effect of age with regard to the strength of the compromise effect in future research.

This research has tried to manipulate the strength of the sales message by including a negative advice about the added option next to the positive advice for the compromise option, as sales messages are weaker when moderate product claims are used (DeCarlo 2005). This manipulation seemed however not to be effective. Therefore, an interesting

path for further research is to investigate the dimensions that determine the strength of a sales message, and eventually their impact on the strength of the compromise effect.

Finally, this research gave some evidence that short-term customer trust can explain the observed behavior whereas it does not mediate the observed effects. Persuasion knowledge also is no candidate for mediation in these analyses. However, trust has multiple antecedents, and one of them is the perception of the sincere motivation of the salesperson to act in favor of the consumer. The perception of the sincere motivation of the salesperson will be affected by the activation and use of persuasion knowledge (Swan et al. 1999). Therefore, investigating the relationship between persuasion knowledge and short-term customer trust is very promising to explain the observed behavior in this research stream.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Product Choice Sets

	Washing machine A	**Washing machine B**	**Washing machine C**
Price	€ 399,98	€ 499,98	€ 599,98
Energy class	A+	A+	A+
Noise centrifugation	79 dB	79 dB	79 dB
Possibility of connecting hot water	no	no	no
Child lock	yes	yes	yes
Delayed start	yes	yes	yes
Steam function	no	no	no
Spinning speed	1.200 tr/min	1.400 tr/min.	1.600 tr/min.

	Camera A	Camera B	Camera C
Price	€ 99	€ 149	€ 199
Number of effective megapixels	16 MP	16 MP	16 MP
Flash	yes	yes	yes
Wide angle lens	yes	yes	yes
Type of memory cards	SD / SDHC / SDXC	SD / SDHC / SDXC	SD / SDHC / SDXC
Touchscreen	no	no	no
Digital zoom	4x	4x	4x
Optical zoom	6x	10x	14x

Appendix B: Scenarios

Product 1: Washing machines

All experimental conditions

Imagine that your washing machine broke down this week. You need a new one, and you go to the local electro shop. Picture yourself walking into the section of the store with washing machines and seeing a wide array of choices. After looking at a few washing machines, you narrow it down to two [three] choices.

Experimental condition 1 [2]

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You reply "Maybe later. Right now, I'm just looking."

Experimental condition 3 [4]

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You give permission to the salesperson to give some advice: "Hi, yes: I need a new washing machine because my old one broke down, and I am doubting between these two [three]."

The salesperson gives you the following advice: "Well, washing machine B is a very good one: it has several nice features and has a great spinning speed. Besides, you get all that for a very decent price."

Experimental condition 5

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You give permission to the salesperson to give some advice: "Hi, yes: I need a new washing machine because my old one broke down, and I am doubting between these two."

The salesperson gives you the following advice: "Well, washing machine B is a very good one: it has several nice features and has a great spinning speed. You should not buy washing machines with a spinning speed that is even higher. Washing machine B does not have the highest spinning speed, but it should be fine for your needs. Besides, you get all that for a very decent price."

Experimental condition 6

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You give permission to the salesperson to give some advice: "Hi, yes: I need a new washing machine because my old one broke down, and I am doubting between these three."

The salesperson gives you the following advice: "Well, washing machine B is a very good one: it has several nice features and has a great spinning speed. Washing machine C has an even higher spinning speed, but you should not buy that one. Washing machine B does not have the highest spinning speed, but it should be fine for your needs. Besides, you get all that for a very decent price."

Product 2: Digital cameras

All experimental conditions

Imagine that you are planning a trip with some friends to Barcelona next week. To make some lovely pictures, you want to buy a digital camera. Therefore, you are going to the local multimedia store. Picture yourself walking into the section of the store with digital cameras and seeing a wide array of choices. After looking at a few digital cameras, you narrow it down to two [three] choices.

Experimental condition 1 [2]

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You reply "Maybe later. Right now, I'm just looking."

Experimental condition 3 [4]

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You give permission to the salesperson to give some advice: "Hi, yes: I'm going to Barcelona next week with some friends and I'm looking for a digital camera to make some pictures. However, I'm doubting between these two [three]."

The salesperson gives you the following advice: "Well, I think you should buy digital camera B: it has 16 MP and several other nice features. It also has a very nice optical zoom of 10. Besides, you get all that for only € 149."

Experimental condition 5

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You give permission to the salesperson to give some advice: "Hi, yes: I'm going to Barcelona next week with some friends and I'm looking for a digital camera to make some pictures. However, I'm doubting between these two."

The salesperson gives you the following advice: "Well, I think you should buy digital camera B: it has 16 MP and several other nice features. It also has a very nice optical zoom of 10. You should not buy digital cameras which have an even higher optical zoom, because you don't need all that. Besides, you get all that for only € 149."

Experimental condition 6

While considering these options, a salesperson walks up to you and says "Hi, may I help you find something?"

You give permission to the salesperson to give some advice: "Hi, yes: I'm going to Barcelona next week with some friends and I'm looking for a digital camera to make some pictures. However, I'm doubting between these three."

The salesperson gives you the following advice: "Well, I think you should buy digital camera B: it has 16 MP and several other nice features. It also has a very nice optical zoom of 10. Digital camera C has an even higher optical zoom, but you should not buy that one. Digital camera B does not have the highest optical zoom, but it should be fine for your needs. Besides, you get all that for only € 149."

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