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Heribert Gierl, Silke Bambauer

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Effects of Consumers' Mood in a Personal Sales Conversation

by Heribert Gierl and Silke Bambauer

It is an everyday life experience that some retailers induce a positive mood in consumers before a sales conversation starts, but other suppliers do not use this practice, especially if products are expensive, complex, and utilitarian. However, there are no theoretical reasons for this discrepancy. In this paper, we argue that the advantage of inducing a positive mood in customers preceding a personal sales conversation does not depend on the differentiation between utilitarian and hedonistic products. In our empirical study we find support for this hypothesis. We also show that the customer's mood has a direct effect on the attractiveness of the recommended product as well as an indirect effect through the salesperson's credibility. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the strength of the indirect effect depends on the personal product benefit for the customer. In cases of a high personal benefit or of a positive mood, the indirect effect is comparatively strong. If the personal benefit is low, customers are likely to transfer their negative mood directly to the recommended product.

Keywords

Mood, personal sales conversation, credibility, trustworthiness, competence



Heribert Gierl is Professor of Marketing at the University of Augsburg, Universitätsstr. 16, 86159 Augsburg, Germany, Phone: +49-821-598-4052, Fax: +49-821-598-4216, E-Mail: heribert.gierl@wiwi.uni-augsburg.de



Silke Bambauer is Scientific Assistant at the Department of Marketing, University of Augsburg, Universitätsstr. 16, 86159 Augsburg, Germany, Phone: +49-821-598-4050, Fax: +49-821-598-4216, E-Mail: silke.bambauer@wiwi.uni-augsburg.de

1. Introduction

We consider the situation in which a customer requests a personal sales conversation in a retail store to obtain more detailed information about alternative products and a purchase recommendation. This situation normally occurs if customers intend to buy cars, to purchase expensive technical devices or to book holidays. Customers possibly have developed an attitude toward some products resulting from mass media advertising or brochures, but they often do not make their purchase decision until having had an intensive consultation. In such cases, the salesperson's recommendation influences the customer's decision. Having a high influence is beneficial for a salesperson if a high profit margin product is to be sold. The question we analyse is whether a customer's positive mood affects his willingness to accept the salesperson's recommendation.

In the literature, mood is defined as a person's current, subjectively experienced and non-object-related emotion (Gardner 1985, p. 282; Schwarz 1987, p. 2; Silberer 1999, p. 132). Mood effects on behaviour have been analysed in marketing and social behaviour sciences since the sixties (e.g., Berkowitz/Connor 1966). With regard to existing literature we find three established research areas:

1. There is research about how consumers mentally process *formal* media information, such as texts or print advertisements, depending on their mood (e.g., Breckler 1993, pp. 467; Silberer 1999).
2. There are experiments about people's mood-dependent reaction to *social* appeals such as demands for blood donation (e.g., O'Malley/Andrews 1983).
3. A further research focus deals with the questions of how people in different mood states judge other people (e.g., their competence) in a *direct personal contact situation* and whether they are polite and willing to help (e.g., Forgas 1995; Forgas 1998b, p. 566; Rusting 1998).

The issue discussed here belongs to the third research field. Although we already find some basic research in this area, an empirical investigation on the following question does not exist: Under which conditions should customers be put into a positive mood preceding the personal sales conversation? Silberer/Jaekel (1996a) only discussed this subject theoretically, and manuals for

practitioners only provide suggestions on how to induce a positive mood in customers without indicating such conditions.

It is generally agreed to be obvious that customers embrace a salesperson's recommendation if they are already in a positive mood (Silberer/Jaekel 1996b, p. 97). However, empirical evidence suggests that people in a negative mood can prove to be as helpful as people in a positive mood and that people in a negative mood are generally more polite than people in a positive mood. If a customer is being helpful and polite towards the salesperson, the latter might be motivated to give especially courteous advice to this customer and thus enhance his influence on the customer. Consequently, it seems to be necessary to test the general assumption that customers in a positive mood are easier to influence in a personal sales conversation.

Marketing practice is found to be inconsistent concerning the question whether customers should be put into a positive mood. We argue that only a few retail branches dealing with complex products aim at bringing customers into a positive mood preceding the sales conversation. This assumption is underlined by the results of the following study we conducted. Using open questions we asked 200 students to report situations where consumers had been put into a positive mood preceding a sales conversation. Students reported personal experience as well as recounted experiences from friends or family. They also were asked to describe the type of positive experience and surrounding circumstances. The completed questionnaires indicated an average of 1.3 shopping experiences characterised by induction of a positive mood in retail stores. These experiences were most often made at clothing stores (48 %), less often at shoe stores (10 %), sport equipment stores (10 %) and hairdresser's shops (8 %) and least often at car dealers (4 %), musical instrument stores (4 %), travel agencies (3 %) and perfumeries (2 %). Rarely, subjects also mentioned jewelry, arts and furniture stores. Considering these findings, consumers obviously experience mood induction almost only at stores for luxury goods. Such stores offer hedonistic upscale products, i.e. products designed for enjoyment and pleasure (Dhar/Wertenbroch 2000, p. 60; O'Curry/Strahilevitz 2001, p. 37). Obviously, suppliers of utilitarian products do not believe in a positive effect of mood manipulation before a sales conversation.

In this article we discuss possible effects of a consumer's mood in a personal sales conversation. We prove our hypotheses in a study using complex utilitarian products as objects of purchase (notebook computers). Additionally, we examine mood effects in the case of a low personal product benefit for the customer (booking holidays for relatives in the role of a purchase agent). This case is important because customers often act as purchase agents for other people and because research on mood postulates particular effects depending on the customer's shopping intention. However, it is not the intention of this article to provide a cost-benefit analysis of inducing

a positive mood or to discuss optimal mood induction measures (e.g., Silberer/Jaekel 1996a, pp. 168).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Overview

We assume that a salesperson's influence corresponds to the extent of how positively a customer evaluates the product recommended by the salesperson. Moreover, we argue that a customer's mood has two different effects on his evaluation of the recommended product:

1. *Direct mood effect.* A customer's mood affects his evaluation of the recommended product regardless of his evaluation of the salesperson's arguments.
2. *Indirect mood effect.* A customer's mood influences his evaluation of the salesperson's credibility consisting of the two components competence and trustworthiness, which causes an indirect mood effect on the evaluation of the recommended product.

Furthermore, we argue that the relevance and intensity of the indirect effect correspond to the personal benefit a customer gains from buying a product. This benefit depends on whether a customer acts as a purchase agent or intends to buy the product for his own purpose. In *Figure 1* we present an overview of both assumptions.

2.2. Direct Effect of Mood on Product Evaluation

A common assumption in the field of mood research is that a person's mood directly affects the person's judgments. This effect occurs without cognitive processing of product information. An explanation for this phenomenon is affective priming, a well-investigated and proven mental process (e.g., Fazio *et al.* 1986). According to Klauer/Roßnagel/Musch (1997), many current theories on emotions are based on the assumption that an emotion caused by any context stimulus affects the evaluation of a subsequently perceived stimulus with minimal cognitive effort. Yi (1993, p. 42) for example describes applications of affective priming to the field of advertising. Thus, mood can generally be interpreted as an affective reaction to mood induction procedures affecting the evaluation of subsequently presented stimuli. Similarly Forgas (1999a, pp. 851) argues in accordance with Clore/Schwarz/Conway (1994): "In some evaluative judgments, mood may also play a heuristic function, when people mistakenly use their unattributed mood as information, relying on a 'How do I feel about it?' heuristic." Petty *et al.* (1993, p. 5) also postulate that "a simple inference process might be responsible for the effect of mood on attitudes." These considerations lead to our first hypothesis:

H1: A customer's mood has a direct positive effect on his evaluation of the product recommended by the salesperson.

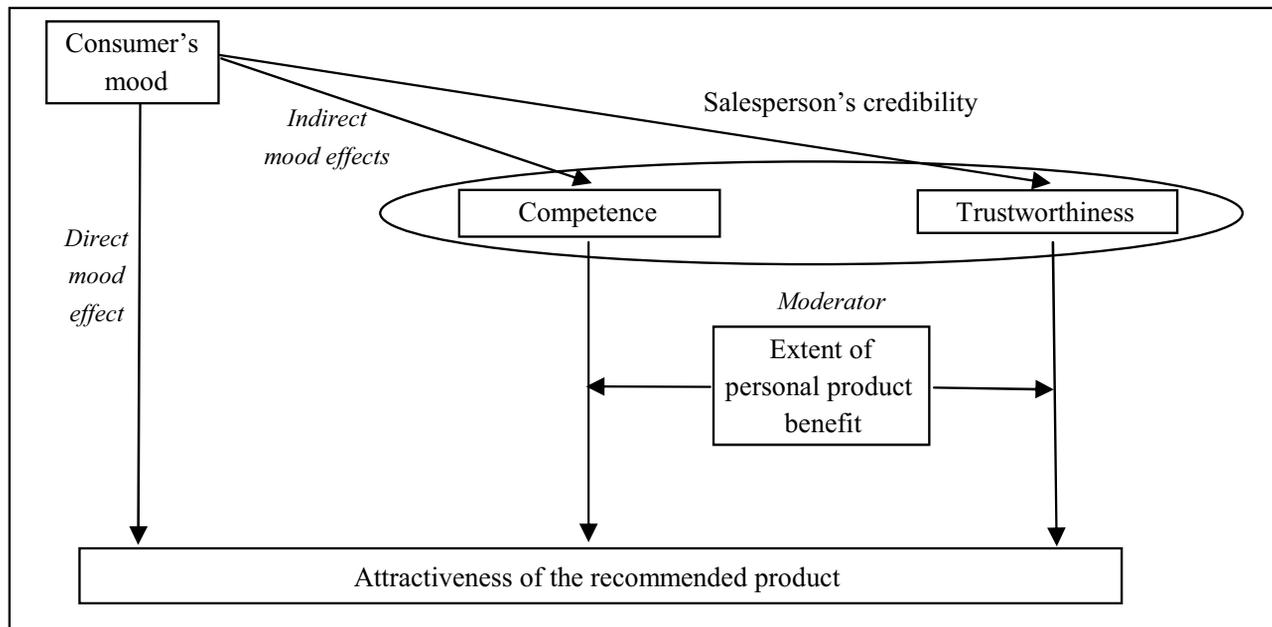


Figure 1: Mood effects in a personal sales conversation

2.3. Indirect Effect of Mood on Product Evaluation

In this section, we argue that a customer's mood could affect his evaluation of the salesperson's credibility. We assume that a positive evaluation of the salesperson's credibility additionally has positive effects on the evaluation of the product recommended by the salesperson.

We suppose that a customer intends to gather arguments for and against purchase options during a sales conversation. The degree to which a customer accepts to be influenced by the salesperson's arguments might depend on the salesperson's credibility (Kelman 1961). A customer is not persuaded by the arguments if he judges the salesperson to be unreliable (Harmon/Coney 1982; Sternthal/Dholakia/Leavitt 1978). In addition, there is consensus about the fact that a person's credibility depends on how competent and trustworthy this person seems to be. These two components of credibility can be defined as follows (Hovland/Janis/Kelley 1953; Hovland/Weiss 1951; Triandis 1975, pp. 258; for details about possible interactions see Cox 1967):

- *Competence.* A customer's belief about a salesperson's capability of giving true information about the object of the sales conversation due to special experience and knowledge (DeBono/Harnish 1988; Ohanian 1990, p. 46).
- *Trustworthiness.* A customer's belief about a salesperson's willingness to give him useful information in order to avoid harmful incidents (Deutsch 1958).

2.3.1. Effect of Customer's Mood on the Evaluation of the Salesperson's Credibility

To our knowledge, no research exists regarding how a person's mood affects this person's evaluation of his conversation partner's personal attributes. Research can

be found on mood effects in non-personal contact situations, where subjects have been put into positive or negative mood states and have to judge other people based on formal media information. Veitch/Griffitt (1976) and Forgas/Bower/Krantz (1984) could not find support for mood effects in this constellation. Concerning the question whether and how a customer's mood affects his evaluation of the salesperson's credibility, i.e. perceived competence and trustworthiness, we derive the following theses from literature on mood research:

- (1) Due to the affect priming mechanism described above, we assume that a customer's positive (negative) mood actually has a positive (negative) effect on the evaluation of the salesperson's credibility.
- (2) According to the mood maintenance theory (Isen et al. 1982), we also expect a positive mood effect to occur because people in a positive mood generally judge objects or other people less rigorously (Cunningham et al. 1990, p. 17; Isen et al. 1982) and with less cognitive effort to maintain their positive mood (Bower 1991; Clark/Isen 1982, p. 79; Cunningham 1988; Cunningham et al. 1990, p. 17; Forgas 1995; Forgas 1998a, p. 174; Greenberg/Pyszczynski 1986; Milberg/Clark 1988). In contrast, people in a negative mood are expected to register even weakly negative signals from body language of other people (Clark/Isen 1982, pp. 79).
- (3) Furthermore, some authors postulate that a negative mood leads to a more negative self-assessment. As people take their own person as a reference for the evaluation of other people (Cervone et al. 1994; Forgas 1994; Forgas/Bower/Krantz 1984; Mayer/Hanson 1995; Sedikides 1995), a person in a negative mood compared to a person in a positive mood should judge another person more positively (Forgas

1999a, p. 930; Forgas 1999b, p. 852; Forgas/Bower/Krantz 1984).

- (4) Research on mood also provides the notion that people in a negative mood interact more politely with their conversational partners because they selectively remember having had negative experiences due to their own impolite behaviour in the past. Impolite behaviour of people in a positive mood is explained by the fact that these people underestimate the probability of hurting other people through their behaviour. Studies by Forgas (1999a, 1999b) provide support for this thesis. He found that people in a negative mood are generally more polite than people in a positive mood. If one person shows impolite behaviour towards another person in a dialogue, the latter person is expected to react impolitely as well. The first person might make inferences about the second person's personal attributes from this observed negative behaviour.

If we transfer these contradictory considerations to the link between a customer's mood and his evaluation of the salesperson's credibility, at first glance we cannot derive a clear hypothesis from the literature, because both positive and negative effects have been shown. On closer examination, the third aspect should be true if the customer feels responsible for his negative mood, but in a personal sales conversation the customer is supposed to ascribe the reason of his negative mood to the environment. The fourth argument also might hold generally, but for the special situation of a personal sales conversation we assume that salespeople are trained in interacting with impolite customers. Therefore, an impolite reaction of the salesperson is rather unlikely. Thus we assume that the positive effects of mood outweigh these two negative effects in the situation considered here:

H2: Mood has a positive effect on the perceived credibility of a salesperson, i.e. on his perceived competence and trustworthiness.

2.3.2. Effect of a Salesperson's Credibility on the Attractiveness of the Recommended Product

There is a general consensus that a recommendation from positively evaluated sources is judged to be positive as well. According to Kelman (1961), for example, credibility is one of three main motivations that lead people to adopt the attitude of another person. If one person (Person A) represents an information source for another person (Person B), B's evaluation of A's credibility corresponds to B's attitude toward A having an influence on B's willingness to accept the information. Therefore, B is expected to adopt the attitude of A if B judges A as being credible. Many authors provide evidence for this assumption (e.g., Griffin 1967; Horai/Naccari/Fatoullah 1974; Maddux/Rogers 1980; Mills/Harvey 1972; Woodside/Davenport 1974). The dual mediation hypothesis in the field of research on persuasive effects of formal media advertising is based on a quite similar assumption:

"The more favourable consumers feel toward the ad, the more receptive they are to its content" (MacKenzie/Lutz/Belch 1986, p. 132). One of the two remaining sources of persuasion is power, but power should not be very important in a personal sales conversation, because a salesperson usually does not have any power over the customer. The last aspect is the identification potential for the customer due to the attractiveness of the salesperson (DeShields/Kara/Kaynak 1996; Reingen/Kernan 1993), but this aspect is not a subject of this study.

Moreover, a salesperson's perceived competence and trustworthiness can initiate affective processes in customers. We expect a customer to feel comfortable if he is able to judge a salesperson as being competent or trustworthy. According to the affect priming mechanism described above, these emotions will have direct effects on the customer's evaluation of the product recommended by the salesperson. Thus,

H3: A salesperson's perceived competence and trustworthiness have direct positive effects on the evaluation of the product recommended by this salesperson.

2.4. The Relevance of the Personal Product Benefit

In this section we argue that the strength of the indirect mood effect depends on the degree of personal benefit a customer ascribes to the object of purchase. We assume that the customer's benefit is higher if he buys the recommended product for his own purpose than buying it for other people in the role of a purchase agent. If consumers buy products as gifts to please other people, they also have a high personal benefit which results from sharing the other person's happiness. We do not examine this special case.

In the context of personal product benefit as a moderating variable on the strength of the indirect mood effect, we additionally consider the concept of "willingness to help" as an implicit mediator between mood and the customer's attention to the salesperson's credibility. In doing so, we have to differentiate between positive and negative mood states, because these different states are associated with different levels of willingness to help depending on the extent of the personal product benefit.

2.4.1. Willingness to Help as a Mediator

In the field of mood research there is a consensus about the fact that mood correlates with willingness to help. There are two theories regarding mood effects on willingness to help.

According to the attentional focus model, people in a positive mood are more willing to help other people than people in a negative mood (Carlson/Charlin/Miller 1988; Carlson/Miller 1987). As a reason for this assumption it is often argued that people in a positive mood overestimate the advantages of helpful behaviour compared to the disadvantages (efforts of helping) because

they systematically have positive thoughts (Blaney 1986; Clark/Isen 1982, p. 79, 89; Clark/Waddell 1983; Cunningham 1988; Forgas 1998a, p. 174; Isen 1984; Isen et al. 1978; Isen/Levin 1972; Levin/Isen 1975; Milberg/Clark 1988). In addition, some authors argue that people in a positive mood want to share their positive mood with other people (Manucia/Baumann/Cialdini 1984, p. 359) and intend to avoid dissonances with other people which could worsen their mood (Forgas 1998b, p. 567; Hertel/Fiedler 1994). In contrast, people in a negative mood are expected to only concentrate on solving their own problems which results in a low willingness to help (Crandall 1978; Cunningham 1988; Cunningham et al. 1990, p. 14; Greenberg/Pyszczynski 1986; Kidd/Marshall 1982; Thompson/Cowan/Rosenhan 1980). Empirical findings do not provide clear support for this simple-structured model. Some authors found a positive relation consistent with this model (Batson et al. 1979; Berkowitz 1987; Forgas 1998b; Isen/Levin 1972). Other authors identified a strong negative relationship between mood and willingness to help (Donnerstein/Donnerstein/Munger 1975). Isen (1970) did not find any correlation between mood and helping behaviour.

Some researchers have added a moderating variable to the attentional focus model, leading to the so-called separate process model. Both models are based on the assumption that people in a positive mood prefer actions which maintain their positive mood, but according to the separate process model, people in a negative mood pursue actions to escape their negative mood (Cunningham/Steinberg/Grev 1980). Thus, people in a negative mood should also be helpful in a personal contact situation (Aderman 1972; Cunningham et al. 1990, pp. 14; Fiedler 1991; Forest et al. 1979; Forgas 1992; Forgas 1998a, p. 175; Isen/Levin 1972; Isen/Simmonds 1978; Regan/Williams/Sparling 1972; Rogers et al. 1982; Weyant 1978), if helping is perceived to have a personal benefit which consists in a change of mood (Cialdini/Darby/Vincent 1973; Cialdini/Kenrick 1976: negative state relief model; see also Benson 1978; Berkowitz 1987, p. 721; Clark/Isen 1982; Forgas 1998a, p. 175; Kidd/Marshall 1982; Manucia/Baumann/Cialdini 1984; Schroeder et al. 1995; Yinon/Landau 1987). Thus, the personal benefit of the recommended behaviour is considered to be a relevant moderating variable. Existing empirical research provides support for the separate process model to a large extent (Cunningham et al. 1990; Manucia/Baumann/Cialdini 1984). Only Shaffer/Graziano (1983) did not find support for this model, probably due to their very small sample sizes.

Based on the separate process model, we assume the following for the case of a personal sales conversation: Customers pay more (or less) attention to the salesperson's credibility by giving him more (or less) opportunity to show his competence and trustworthiness (e.g., by asking detailed questions). The degree of attention offered by customers depends on their mood as well as on the personal benefit of the recommended product.

2.4.2. Personal Product Benefit as a Moderator of the Indirect Mood Effect

Transferring these general theoretical considerations to the situation of a direct personal contact between the salesperson and the customer, we assume that customers in a positive mood state are generally willing to help the salesperson. We also expect customers in a negative mood state to be helpful if there is an opportunity to escape their negative mood. Such an opportunity consists in buying a high value product for their own purpose. Based on the separate process model we assume, in contrast, that customers in a negative mood are not willing to help the salesperson if they will not obtain a high personal benefit from buying the recommended product. Specifically, we derive the following two conclusions about the moderating effect of personal product benefit:

If the personal product benefit is high, both positive and negative mood states are associated with a high willingness to help. A high willingness to help will lead to a high attention to the salesperson's credibility, which causes a strong indirect effect of mood. We assume:

H4a: If the product recommended by a salesperson is of high personal relevance for the customer, mood has a strong indirect effect through the salesperson's credibility on the attractiveness of the recommended product.

In the case of a low personal product benefit, we have to consider two situations following the separate process model. First, positive mood leads to a general willingness to help. Furthermore, we expect that the higher the willingness to help, the higher is the attention to the salesperson's credibility, which causes a strong indirect mood effect. Second, negative mood is associated with a generally low willingness to help. The lower the willingness to help, the lower the attention to the salesperson's credibility, which results in a weak effect of credibility on the attractiveness of the recommended product (weak indirect mood effect). In summary, we postulate:

H4b: If the product recommended by a salesperson is of low personal benefit to the customer, positive mood has a strong indirect effect, whereas negative mood has a weak indirect effect on the attractiveness of the recommended product.

In the following section, we test our hypotheses concerning the direct mood effect, the effect of mood on the salesperson's credibility, the effect of credibility on the attractiveness of the recommended product (indirect mood effect), and the moderating role of personal product benefit on the strength of the indirect mood effect.

3. Empirical Study

3.1. Procedure

Our study was designed as a role-playing activity (for validity details of role-playing situations in negotiations see Armstrong/Hutcherson 1990). In October 2002, 120

students (56 women and 64 men) from a German university participated in the simulation playing the role of customers. Eight professional sales people took over the part of the salesperson. As each of the 120 subjects took part in two sales conversations, each of the eight sales people had to conduct 30 sales conversations. Subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental groups. The average age was 24 years. There were no age or gender differences between the two groups.

The sales conversations dealt with booking a trip to Paris and buying a notebook computer.

- Concerning the trip to Paris, we advised the subjects to imagine that their parents had asked them to book a four-day trip to Paris at a travel agency on their behalf. Using this manipulation we intended to create a situation of low personal product benefit. Furthermore, we informed the subjects that the trip to Paris was not meant to be a present, i.e. not intended to please the parents from the participants' point of view.
- In contrast to the situation of choosing a trip to Paris, in the situation of buying a notebook we instructed the subjects to assume that they intended to replace their old computer with a new notebook. Thus we tried to simulate the purchase of a product of high personal benefit.

We assume that both purchase objects are typically utilitarian because the buyer himself does not have a hedonic benefit. We chose these utilitarian purchase objects to test whether mood also has a significant effect on the purchase decision in this case, in contrast to the marketing practitioners' point of view.

One might see the choice of two different product categories as a critical point, but as our respondents were students which participated in the survey during their leisure time, we had to choose objects of purchase which were of general interest to them. In addition, it is difficult to generate sufficient variation in the personal relevance when choosing only one product category. Moreover, it might have not been very authentic if the respondents would first had to imagine the product was of high personal relevance and if they then had to imagine that a similar product was of low personal relevance.

In mood research, different methods of mood induction are applied. One common technique is to make subjects pass a screening test that is not relevant for the experiment and to give positive or negative feedback on test performance to the subjects (Bohner 1990; Isen *et al.* 1978; Isen/Means 1983). In other experiments, the experimenters present appropriate music, films, or texts to the subjects (Gerrards-Hesse/Spies/Hesse 1994). Another type of mood induction is to ask subjects to remember and to write down a very sad or a very happy experience (e.g., Schwarz 1990). There is evidence in the literature that the mood induction technique has no effect on successfully inducing positive or negative mood in test subjects (Isen 1993).

Thus based on feasibility considerations we decided to use the following mood induction before starting with the sales conversation. Subjects had to stay in a waiting room for 15 minutes before a sales conversation began. In one waiting room we put the waiting subjects into a positive mood, and in the other room into a negative mood.

- In the first waiting room, we ran a television channel showing a Mr. Bean episode. The room was huge and comfortable (plants, carpet, sun light, many comfortable seats). A helpful staff offered orange juice, champagne and cookies.
- In the second room, we ran a television channel showing scenes of a movie against war. The room was small, did not have any windows or plants and there were no seats. Contrary to the initial promise to offer the participants snacks and drinks, subjects in this room did not receive anything.

This type of mood induction can cause some data validity problems because offering juice etc. might initiate *cognitive* processes beyond *affective* processes resulting from mood, e.g., respondents might explicitly have tried to be nice (rude) to the salesperson because they had been treated nicely (rudely) before. As we intended to generate sufficient variation in the reported mood level and as our mood induction proved to be appropriate for this intention, we accepted the mentioned disadvantage.

We instructed the sales people either to recommend different trips to Paris or to offer different notebooks. On the basis of special guidelines we trained them to use special arguments to present the advantages of the alternatives. The sales people were told to interact with the customer and to jointly find an option which was convincing to the customer. The experimental rooms were decorated with materials typical to a travel agency or a computer retail store. Some computers were physically at hand. Presentation devices and interior equipment of the experimental rooms were neutral in order to change the customer's induced mood as little as possible. Concerning the conversation about the trip to Paris, we instructed the sales people to show the customers on a map where the different hotels were located.

Assisting staff welcomed the subjects at appointment time. One half of the subjects first had the sales conversation on the trip to Paris, and the other half of the people was first advised on notebooks. The participants had to wait in a waiting room, took part in a sales conversation on the first product and completed a questionnaire. They then had to wait another fifteen minutes in the same waiting room as before for the second sales conversation with another salesperson. After having participated in the second sales conversation subjects filled in the second questionnaire. At the end we informed the subjects about the purpose of the survey. Although we did not offer the subjects any remuneration before the role-play, every person who participated received a gift for their participation.

3.2. Measures

After receiving the salesperson's recommendation, the subjects had to complete a questionnaire containing statements (7-point scales). In this questionnaire we unsystematically varied the order of the statements which aimed at measuring the different theoretical constructs.

According to the suggestions of *Shaffer/Graziano* (1983, p. 273) and *Forgas* (1998a, p. 178) we asked the subjects to agree to the following statements, judging the mood state they experienced when entering the sales conversation:

- In this moment I was: not at all fine ... really fine (M1).
- I was: very unhappy ... very happy (M2).
- I felt: very uncomfortable ... very comfortable (M3).
- I perceived my situation: as oppressing ... as enjoyable (M4).

Using the *Ohanian* (1990) scale, the subjects judged the salesperson's competence based on the following statements:

- The salesperson has been: very inexperienced ... very experienced (C1).
- The salesperson knew: almost nothing about the product ... very much about the product (C2).
- The salesperson was: not at all competent ... very competent (C3).
- The salesperson was: not at all qualified ... very qualified (C4).
- The salesperson gave me: very poor information ... very good information (C5).

To measure trustworthiness, i.e. a customer's judgement as to what extent the salesperson was willing to provide valuable information, we applied the following statements based on the *Ohanian* (1990) scale. Similar scales are often applied to measure trustworthiness (e.g., *Bierhoff/Buck/Schreiber* 1983; *Götsch* 1994, p. 25; *Köhnken* 1990, p. 119; *Ohanian* 1991; *Platzköster* 1990):

- The salesperson was: not at all honest ... very honest (T1).
- The salesperson was: not at all straightforward ... very straightforward (T2).
- The salesperson was strongly interested: in own benefits ... in my benefits (T3).
- The salesperson seemed to be: not at all trustworthy ... very trustworthy (T4).
- I can rely on the salesperson's recommendation: not at all ... totally (T5).

To measure the attractiveness of the recommended product we applied a subjective difference scale. We were not

able to use a subtractive difference scale, because we did not know which option the salesperson would recommend. *Peter/Churchill/Brown* (1993) provide a general discussion of the quality of subjective difference scales. Subjects evaluated the attractiveness of the option recommended by the salesperson using the following statements:

- Compared to my opinion before the sales conversation I can imagine booking this trip (buying this notebook): less than before ... more than before (A1).
- After the sales conversation I have got the impression that booking the recommended trip (buying the recommended notebook) is a wrong decision: less than before ... more than before (recoded scale, A2).
- My aptitude to consider this trip (this notebook) as a preferable purchase option now is: less distinctive ... more distinctive (A3).
- After the sales conversation I assess this trip (this notebook) as an attractive offer: less than before ... more than before (A4).
- My willingness to recommend this trip to Paris (this notebook) to my friends now is: less distinctive ... more distinctive (A5).

To evaluate the quality of the measures presented above, we conducted a LISREL confirmatory factor analysis for the four model variables. We prove reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity following the suggestions of *Anderson/Gerbing* (1988); *Bagozzi/Yi* (1988), and *Fornell/Larcker* (1981). The measurement model provides an acceptable fit to the data. GFI is slightly below the sometimes postulated value of 0.9 (*Homburg/Giering* 1996, p. 13). The Tucker-Lewis-Index (TLI) also exceeds the recommended minimum value of 0.9. All factor loadings are statistically significant proving the existence of convergent validity because even the lowest t-value is highly significant (*Bagozzi/Yi/Phillips* 1991, p. 434). The item reliabilities exceed the arbitrary value of 0.5 (*Bagozzi/Yi* 1991), and the factor reliability of each construct is higher than 0.9. In the literature two methods are used to prove discriminant validity. One method consists in analysing whether each factor correlation (λ -value) plus or minus twice the standard error does not include 1. The other criterion is that the average variance extracted has to exceed the squared correlations between factors (*Fornell/Larcker* 1981, p. 46). The values of both methods display adequate discriminant validity. *Table 1* gives an overview of all relevant criteria.

3.3. Results

Our experiment aimed at inducing a positive mood in the first half of the subjects and a negative mood in the other half of the subjects. The manipulation check proved that the two experimental groups differed significantly in the participants' mood. People who were expected to experience a positive mood rated their mood at an average

Factor	Item	Factor loadings		Item reliability	Factor reliability	Average variance extracted	Coefficient alpha	Factor correlations ϕ -value (standard error of ϕ -value)			
		λ -value	t-value					C	T	A	
Mood (M)	M1	0.88	16.95	0.82	0.95	0.79	0.93	M	0.55	0.67	0.69
	M2	0.90	17.72	0.79					(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)
	M3	0.86	16.41	0.73					C	0.78	0.79
	M4	0.87	16.74	0.74						(0.03)	(0.03)
Competence (C)	C1	0.92	18.48	0.87	0.95	0.80	0.96	T			0.79
	C2	0.91	18.33	0.83							
	C3	0.95	19.61	0.89							
	C4	0.95	19.91	0.90							
	C5	0.86	16.54	0.73							
Trustworthiness (T)	T1	0.69	11.91	0.61	0.91	0.68	0.91				
	T2	0.78	14.21	0.59							
	T3	0.87	16.65	0.68							
	T4	0.75	13.46	0.67							
	T5	0.92	18.20	0.72							
Attractiveness (A)	A1	0.83	15.56	0.73	0.92	0.74	0.93				
	A2	0.72	12.79	0.52							
	A3	0.89	17.51	0.82							
	A4	0.92	18.64	0.82							
	A5	0.91	18.28	0.79							
								Goodness-of-fit measures $\chi^2 = 378.26$ ($p < .001$), $df = 146$ GFI = 0.85 AGFI = 0.81 CFI = 0.95 RMR = 0.048 RMSEA = 0.082 TLI = 0.942			

Table 1: Reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the model variables

item value of 4.98 on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, and people expected to experience a negative mood rated their mood with an average value of 3.11 ($t = 9.011$, $p < .0001$).

We estimated the path coefficients of the structural equation model shown in *Figure 1* using the generalized least squares LISREL-procedure (Jöreskog/Sörbom 1997) to separate these effects. We first estimated the coefficients based on the pooled sample and then separately for three subgroups. The results of the pooled analysis might be biased because the observations are not independent. The first subgroup consisted of the notebook data. The second and third subgroups resulted from the data we collected for the situation "booking a trip to Paris for the parents" differentiated for mood above or below median. We had to divide the "trip to Paris" sample into these sub samples to test hypotheses *H4a* and *H4b*. Incidentally, the median of the mood scale was exactly 4.0 on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 which indicates a clear interpretability of the second and third subsample. According to Ping (1995, p. 337) this procedure (dividing the pooled sample into subsamples) is adequate for testing a non-metric moderating variable. We have to mention that dividing the "trip to Paris" sample into two subgroups causes the problem that the criterion $N - q > 50$ ($N = 60$, $q = 24$ estimated coefficients in the measurement models and in the structural equation model) was not fully met (Backhaus et al. 2003, p. 364). The statistical results of the LISREL models are shown in *Table 2*.

There is no common standard for requested goodness-of-fit measures of a LISREL model. NFI, CFI, and TLI

values exceed the often recommended values of 0.9 (Homburg/Baumgartner 1996, p. 168). In two analyses, the RMSEA is higher than 0.05 (Homburg/Baumgartner 1995, p. 172; Homburg/Giering 1996, p. 13), but other authors refer to RMSEA values below 0.08 as being acceptable (Browne/Cudeck 1993). The squared multiple correlations for structural equations R^2 for the three endogenous variables (competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the product) are within the expected ranges. We consequently assume that we have chosen an appropriate model for our data which allows interpreting the parameters.

- First we analyse the direct effect of mood on the attractiveness of the product recommended by the salesperson. For the pooled sample, we estimated the coefficient $\gamma_{AM} = 0.268$ ($p < .01$). Thus there is support for hypothesis *H1*.
- We multiply the coefficients to determine the strength of the indirect effects of mood on product attractiveness via competence as well as via trustworthiness ($\gamma_{CM} \cdot \beta_{AC}$ and $\gamma_{TM} \cdot \beta_{AT}$). In the case of mood below median and trip to Paris the indirect mood effects are comparatively low.
- We also expected positive mood effects on the salesperson's perceived competence and trustworthiness. In the pooled sample, the parameters γ_{CM} and γ_{TM} are highly significantly positive, supporting hypothesis *H2*.
- The coefficients β_{AC} and β_{AT} , reflecting the strength of the paths between perceived competence and prod-

Structural equation model	Coefficient	Pooled sample (N = 240)	Subsamples			
			Notebook (N = 120)	Trip to Paris		
				mood above median (N = 60)	mood below median (N = 60)	
<p>M: Mood C: Competence T: Trustworthiness A: Attractiveness of the recommended product</p>	γ_{CM}	0.443 (t = 3.96)	0.318 (t = 3.47)	0.551 (t = 2.94)	0.207 (t = 0.96)	
	γ_{TM}	0.659 (t = 5.98)	0.456 (t = 4.42)	0.523 (t = 2.70)	0.358 (t = 1.73)	
	γ_{AM}	0.268 (t = 2.55)	0.180 (t = 1.23)	0.184 (t = 0.89)	0.724 (t = 3.26)	
	β_{AC}	0.381 (t = 3.18)	0.376 (t = 2.84)	0.349 (t = 1.69)	0.174 (t = 0.65)	
	β_{AT}	0.297 (t = 2.69)	0.337 (t = 2.72)	0.456 (t = 2.22)	0.210 (t = 0.93)	
	$\gamma_{CM} \cdot \beta_{AC}$	0.169	0.120	0.192	0.036	
	$\gamma_{TM} \cdot \beta_{AT}$	0.184	0.154	0.238	0.075	
	Goodness-of-fit measures					
	NFI	0.994	0.990	0.993	0.994	
	RMSEA	0.067	0.060	0.014	0.000	
CFI	0.997	0.997	1.000	1.000		
TLI	0.996	0.996	1.000	1.000		
R^2	C: 0.323 T: 0.450 A: 0.705	C: 0.214 T: 0.304 A: 0.565	C: 0.847 T: 0.739 A: 0.511	C: 0.262 T: 0.363 A: 0.816		

Table 2: Results of a LISREL model to analyse paths of mood effects on the attractiveness of the product recommended by the salesperson

uct attractiveness and between trustworthiness and product attractiveness, have positive signs and are significantly positive in the pooled sample, confirming hypothesis H3.

- Before testing the moderating effect of the personal product benefit, we analyse whether there are any differences in the strength of the direct path between mood and product attractiveness (γ_{AM}) and in the strength of the paths between competence/trustworthiness and product attractiveness (β_{AC} and β_{AT}) in our subsamples. Using t-statistics we only find significant differences in the case of γ_{AM} . This coefficient is higher in the subsample of mood below median and low personal product benefit (trip to Paris) than in the subsample “notebook” ($0.724 > 0.180$, $t = 2.045$, $p < .05$) and in the subsample trip to Paris/mood above median ($0.724 > 0.184$, $t = 1.780$, $p < .05$).
- In hypothesis H4a, we postulated for the case of a high personal benefit from buying the product that mood has a strong indirect effect through the salesperson’s credibility on the attractiveness of the recommended product. Considering the situation “buying a notebook for own use” the coefficient γ_{AM} for the direct mood effect is not significant ($\gamma_{AM} = 0.180$, $p > .1$) and the coefficients γ_{CM} , γ_{TM} , β_{AC} and β_{AT} for the indirect mood effect are highly significant. Thus there is also statistical support for hypothesis H4a.
- In hypothesis H4b, we expected for the case of a low personal product benefit a strong indirect mood effect in the situation of mood above median and a weak indirect mood effect in the case of mood below

median. To test this hypothesis, we compare the findings from the two “trip to Paris” subsamples. If mood is above median, we observe a strong indirect mood effect through credibility (γ_{CM} , γ_{TM} , β_{AC} and β_{AT} are highly significant), supporting the first part of H4b, and a weak direct effect ($\gamma_{AM} = 0.184$). If mood is below median, the indirect mood effect is comparably weak, which is in accordance with the second part of H4b. In comparison, the direct mood effect is strong ($\gamma_{AM} = 0.724$, $p < .001$).

3.4. Discussion and Limitations

Our study proved empirically that it is advantageous to induce a positive mood in customers who intend to buy expensive utilitarian products to be able to influence them during the sales conversation. We also showed that the effect of a customer’s positive mood is also positive if the customer does not have a high personal benefit from buying an expensive product.

Given these results we have to ask to what extent the results depend on the method we applied as well as whether we can transfer the results to other segments of the population or to other products. We chose a role-playing setting to simulate a real purchase situation. As our subjects did not spend their own money or their parents’ money in buying these products, we assume that consumers pay more attention to the arguments mentioned by the salesperson in a real purchase situation than in our laboratory situation. Thus we may have overestimated the mood effect in our experiment, but our study only aimed at testing whether positive mood has a positive or a negative effect on the extent to which a cus-

customer accepts to be influenced by a salesperson. According to our results, the induction of a positive mood is advantageous. We derived the hypotheses presented above from general considerations on mood effects in the situation of a sales conversation in retail stores, i.e. the hypotheses were not specifically formulated with regard to the examined products or the chosen sample. Thus we assume that our results can be extended to other products and other samples.

We must note however that our results cannot be extended to rationally acting people who have to give other people reasons for their decision, e.g., purchasing agents in industrial companies who are advised by their suppliers' sales representatives.

4. Conclusions

The motivation of our study was the paucity in empirical research about how mood affects the influence of a salesperson on a customer's purchase decision. Many authors agree on the general hypothesis that people in a positive mood are easier to influence than people in a negative mood, but other authors assume that positive mood can have negative effects in the case of a personal contact situation. The latter authors point out that people in a positive mood are less willing to help and are less polite. Therefore, it seems of interest to test the general hypothesis in the commercial environment of a sales conversation in a retail store.

Many act on the assumption that inducing a positive mood is only profitable if one intends to sell expensive hedonic products. In the case of offering expensive utilitarian products, almost no efforts are made by practitioners to induce a positive mood in customers. Given this situation, marketing practice should be interested in the question of whether mood induction might be helpful in the case of expensive utilitarian products as well. Furthermore, we consider a purchase situation of an expensive product characterised by a low personal benefit for the customer. Up to now there have been no findings on the question of whether positive mood is beneficial in this latter case.

In our experiment, we used notebook computers to represent typical expensive utilitarian products with a high personal benefit for the customer and booking a trip to Paris for the parents as an example of an expensive product with low customer benefit. The theoretical considerations suggested that on the one hand, mood has a direct positive effect and, on the other, an indirect effect through the evaluation of the salesperson's credibility on the attractiveness of the product recommended by the salesperson. Our empirical study provides the result that mood has both postulated effects. In conclusion, the contribution of our article consists in showing the advantage of a customer's positive mood in the cases we have analysed.

Based on our results, we offer the following recommendations for selling complex products in retail stores which require an intensive sales conversation:

- In general, vendors of expensive utilitarian products should try to induce a positive mood in customers before a sales conversation starts.
- If the personal customer benefit of an expensive product is low and the customer is put into a positive mood, it is also necessary to have quite competent and trustworthy salespeople. Even if a positive mood results in a tendency to overestimate the salesperson's credibility, there is no direct mood effect on the evaluation of the recommended product.
- If the personal customer benefit of an expensive product is low and the customer asks for a sales conversation in a negative mood, customers might make strong inferences from their mood to the attractiveness of the recommended product. Thus, suppliers should take appropriate measures to avoid a negative mood in this constellation – even more than in the two situations described above.

For further research, it would be interesting to test the relevance of other moderating variables in addition to the extent of personal product benefit. In research of the effects of mood on processing information provided by formal media, some authors mention argument quality as a possible moderating variable (Batra/Stayman 1990; Bless et al. 1990; Bohner/Chaiken/Hunyadi 1994; Bohner/Hauschildt/Knäuper 1993; Howard/Barry 1994; Wegener/Petty/Smith 1995). It would also be interesting to analyse whether the mood effect also depends on the strength of arguments in a personal sales conversation. In addition, other authors argue that information processing under time pressure differs from information processing without time pressure. As many sales conversations take place under time pressure, this aspect may moderate the mood effect too (Mackie/Worth 1989). However, we did not manipulate these variables in our study.

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Schriftleitung: Verantwortlich: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Lutz Hildebrandt, Institut für Marketing, Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Unter den Linden 6, 10099 Berlin, Tel. 030/2093-5698, Fax 030/2093-5675, editor@marketing-jrm.de. Redaktion: Dr. Dirk Temme, Tel. 030/2093-5751

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