The promotion of a unique product in times of economic recession. Are consumers more resistant to Scarcity or Social Proof?

A study on the resistance of consumers to Scarcity and Social Proof in advertising for an exclusive family day trip in a positive and negative economic news condition. In addition, the moderating role of Uncertainty Avoidance is measured.

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Keywords

Cialdini, Scarcity, Social Proof, purchase intention, financial crisis, economic news, consumer confidence, Uncertainty Avoidance

Abstract

In this study the contrasting situation of the promotion of an exclusive and relatively expensive purchase in times of economic uncertainty is researched by comparing the effectiveness of the promotion with either Scarcity or Social Proof manipulations in economic downfall and prosperity. In a three (Scarcity versus Social Proof versus control) by two (positive versus negative economic news condition) between subject experimental design the purchase intention of 193 respondents for an exclusive, family daytrip is measured, based on an online advertisement framed with economic news. In addition, the moderating effect of Uncertainty Avoidance is investigated, which is expected to especially influence the effect of Social Proof.

Which of these principles will have more influence on consumers than the other in this contrasting situation? One of Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion might have a greater fit to the persuasive message than another, since every persuasive message (advertisement) and situation is unique. Here, it is expected that Scarcity has a greater fit with the promotion of an exclusive purchase, whereas Social Proof is expected to be best applicable to a situation with economic uncertainty. In uncertain economic times, when UA levels are high, Social Proof reassures people by emphasizing on

how others behave (e.g. which products other people buy and are content about). Scarcity emphasizes on the exclusiveness of a product and addresses individuals' need for uniqueness, hereby making it more appealing to the consumer.

It was found that neither Social Proof or Scarcity, nor the framed economic news, or an interaction of the conditions affected purchase intention directly. However, the Social Proof and economic news manipulations were significantly successful. Also, it was found that high UA resulted in higher levels of attractiveness of the offer. Moreover, it was found that respondents confronted with the negative news condition with high UA had higher purchase intention and were more attracted to the offer as opposed to respondents with low UA. Still, the extent to which a person is attracted to an offer turned out to be the most influential predictor of purchase intention.

Introduction and literature review

The Dutch economy has been in an economic recession for the last couple of years and stands at a turning point in 2014. Consumers are informed by the media about every – sometimes contrasting – positive and negative economic changes on a daily basis. Will the fragile recovery be persistent or will things go downwards again?

The current Dutch economy

After two years of economic recession the Dutch economy grew 0.1 percent in the third quarter of 2013 (CBS, 2013; NOS, 2013) and the prime minister talked about 'a new beginning' for the Netherlands in his speech at a party congress in November 2013 (Nu.nl, 2013; VVD, 2013). The Dutch economy seems to recover – though very slowly – from the economic crisis in the coming years. However, it is presumed by the DNB (The Dutch Bank) that by the end of 2015 the economy will still not be as strong as before the crisis (DNB, 2013; NOS, 2013).

The confidence level of the Dutch consumers changed in 2013. From an historical low point of consumer confidence, as measured by CBS, in February 2013 to a shift in the number of pessimists and optimists in November 2013 (CBS, 2013). The number of Dutch consumers with a positive view on the economy is growing since mid 2013 and is higher than before the crisis. However, in 2014 there are still slightly more consumers with a negative view on the economy than economic optimists (CBS, 2014). The willingness to buy also shifted from negative in the beginning of the year to slightly more positive in November 2013. Dutch consumers feel that their own financial situation is getting better, however the consumer spending is still cautious (CBS, 2013; CBS, 2013). Since 2011 the Dutch consumers spend less money every month than they did the year before (CBS, 2013; Nu.nl, 2013). Also, in 2014 this trend does not seem to change (CBS, 2014). Due to this 'negative' purchase behavior of the Dutch consumers, a considerable recovery of the economy fails to appear (DNB, 2013; NOS, 2013). And, according to OESO (Dutch Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), this recovery will not occur until 2015. Moreover, OESO states that rock-bottom has not been reached yet and that the risks for the Dutch economy are still substantial. Banks getting into trouble and falling housing prices could influence consumer spending even more and the nil growth of 0.1% cannot be called a true recovery (NOS, 2013; Nu.nl, 2013).

Consumer confidence and economic media coverage

Today, Dutch consumers read ever changing messages about the economy of their country in the news papers and online every day. Popular Dutch news sites report positively about a growth in jobs in 2015 (Nu.nl, 2014), and overnight bring contrasting negative news about enduring high unemployment rates and decreasing household income (Nu.nl, 2014).

According to Casey and Owen (2013) being exposed to these messages can affect the individuals' level of economic expectations. In addition, the level of consumer confidence is affected by this media exposure (Alsem, Brakman, Hoogduin & Kuper, 2008; Hollanders & Vliegenthart, 2011). Consumer confidence as measured by CBS concerns the opinion of a person about the current and

future economic situation of the country and one's personal financial situation as well as the current and expected business and employment conditions (CBS, 2013). This consumer confidence is related to consumer spending and, in some cases, also predicts the spending of the consumer (CBS, 2013; Ludvigson, 2004). Negative economic news tends to influence one's reaction more strongly than positive coverage, but in both cases the economic expectations of the reader can be affected. It is suggested that negative news concerning the recent credit-crisis has (had) a strong influence on the durance of the crisis (Hollanders & Vliegenthart, 2011).

It is presumed that consumers and their confidence level are influenced by economic media coverage and the level of consumer confidence can influence consumer spending. Research has shown that consumers adapt their expenses and shopping patterns in times of recession (Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013). Consequently, it could be argued that consumer spending depends on the current economic situation, which could indicate different levels of purchase intention for situations of financial crisis and economic prosperity.

Leisure activities in times of financial crisis

When looking at the news coverage about the leisure sector within the Netherlands – specifically the amusement parks – it seems that there are growing signals that the effects of the crisis start to affect the leisure sector.

Amusement parks welcomed slightly more visitors in 2012 than they did in 2011. It was suggested by the amusement park sector that "the Dutch want to enjoy themselves, also in times of financial crisis". Also, it was suggested by the union of amusement parks that consumers tend to spend less on their holidays (abroad) and compensate this by going on day trips (Wieringen, 2013). Amusement park The Efteling showed very positive numbers with 4.2 million visitors in 2012 – a new record – and four years of more than 4 million visitors (Efteling.com, 2013).

However, in 2013 this growth turned around for the first time in seven years with 4.15 million Efteling visitors, 50.000 visitors less than the year before (De Groot & Den Hollander, 2014, Eftling.com, 2013). And, despite the fact that 2012 was a fairly good year for the tourism and recreation sector in the Netherlands, NTIT Media, CELTH and NBTC Holland Marketing already stated in their annual trend report that expectations for 2013 were negative considering the fact that consumers spend less and auction and discount websites become more popular (pretwerk.nl, 2013). Statistics from UWV showed a decline in job vacancies and an increase of people who receive unemployment benefits (the number doubled since 2009) in the recreation sector in 2013 (UWV, 2013). Furthermore, research by Jonge Gezinnen VoordeelPas amongst 3300 Dutch mothers showed that 85 per cent of the young families in the Netherlands would like to go on day trips (zoo's, attraction parks) with their families more often, but are restrained due to the financial crisis (pretwerk.nl, 2013).

In addition, the variety of attraction parks in the Netherlands is extensive, competition is fierce and consumers are cautious about their budgets. Entrance prices are under pressure and discounts are the rule rather than the exception (De Groot & Den Hollander, 2014). Consequently, the amusement park sector pulls out all the stops in order to attract consumers in these times of economic uncertainty and aftereffects of the financial crisis.

Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion

Advertising in general, as well as advertising for amusement parks, often consists of techniques and strategies carefully applied by marketers to persuade people of the message communicated in the advertisement. Common strategies in advertising can be assigned to one of the six principles of persuasion, formulated by Robert B. Cialdini. Consumers are often not aware of the techniques they are experiencing when watching a commercial or advertisement since people cannot always make elaborate decisions. Due to, for example, a lack of time or knowledge, one often bases decisions on heuristic or mental short cuts (Cialdini, 2007).

Based on this knowledge that people cannot always make an elaborate decision Cialdini stated that a

person can be influenced through using strategies involving one or more of the following principles:

Reciprocity, Liking, Commitment and Consistency, Authority, Scarcity and Social Proof (Cialdini, 2007)

(see Table 1). Knowing the general fundamentals of the principles of persuasion, means it is easier to

distinguish the most applicable technique for an intended message.

Table 1.   Cialdini's Six Principles of Persuasion and their fundamentals

Principle	General fundamentals of the principle
Reciprocity	people do not like the feeling of being in another persons' dept
Liking	people are inclined to be more easily influenced by someone they are fond of, is familiar to them or seems trustworthy to them
Commitment & Consistency	once people are committed and involved, they desire to be consistent
Authority	people tend to feel a sense of obligation to obey an authority
Scarcity	items and opportunities that are in short supply or unavailable tend to be more desirable to us than those that are plentiful and more accessible
Social Proof	people tend to base their decisions on social cues from their environment mainly in order to reduce uncertainty

Reciprocity is all about returning a favor to another. This strategy implies that people do not like the

feeling of being in another persons' dept. By reminding people about a favor that is given to them in

the past, or by implying what could be given in return if they help out with something, people can be

persuaded to cooperate with or buy something from the influencer. The *Liking* principle implies that

people are inclined to be more influenced by someone they are fond of, is familiar to them or seems

trustworthy to them, whereas the *Commitment and Consistency* principle is based on the strategy of

involving people. Once a person is involved and committed, he will continue to believe in a case or a

product. The *Authority* principle states that people tend to be persuaded by authorities because this

person or institution has substantial expertise and knowledge in a specific field. Also, people

generally tend to feel a sense of obligation to obey an authority (Cialdini, 2007). The *Scarcity*

principle indicates that 'items and opportunities that are in short supply or unavailable tend to be

more desirable to us than those that are plentiful and more accessible'. At last, the *Social Proof*

principle is based on the assumption that people tend to base their decisions on social cues from

their environment, mainly in order to reduce uncertainty (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002; Cialdini, 2007).

Every persuasive message (advertisement) and persuasive situation is unique and it is most likely that

not all Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion are equally applicable all the time. One principle might have

a greater fit to the persuasive message than another. In this study the contrasting situation of the

promotion of an exclusive and relatively expensive family day trip in times of economic uncertainty is

researched by comparing the effectiveness of the promotion with either Scarcity or Social Proof

manipulations in economic downfall and prosperity. It is expected that Scarcity has a greater fit with

the promotion of an exclusive purchase, whereas Social Proof is expected to be best applicable to a

situation with economic uncertainty. However, which of these principles will have more influence on

consumers than the other in this contrasting situation?

Social Proof in times of financial crisis

A strategy that seems to fit seamlessly tot the promotion of products in times of economic

uncertainty is the Social Proof principle.

Cialdini (2001) states that 'individuals often depend on social norms to gain an accurate

understanding of and effectively respond to social situations, ***especially during times of uncertainty***'.

It has been proven in different studies that behavioral choices of individuals can be affected by giving

individuals information about what others are doing (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002). For example,

research by Ablee and Bui (2012) on online Word-Of-Mouth via review sites concerning short e-

books showed that social validation can influence the reputation of a brand (e.g. the author) or a

product (e.g. the e-book), as well as the reputation of complementary goods (e.g. related books). The reviews were also related to the demand for the e-books (Amblee & Bui, 2012).

Research has shown that consumers adapt their expenses and shopping patterns in times of recession. Consumers spend less money and tend to become more conscious about their spending when things go downwards with the economy. Purchase planning is more common whereas impulse buying is more contained (CBS, 2013; NOS, 2013; Nu.nl, 2013; Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013). Especially when consumers have to be cautious about their budget due to economic uncertainty, avoiding a waste of money is of considerable importance. Considering the choices and opinions of the majority concerning purchases might become more important to consumers in that case, since it reduces uncertainty concerning a purchase (e.g. 'if others buy and/or are satisfied about this product, it must be good'). This also indicates, that consumers dare to risk more (e.g. base their purchases on their own opinion) when trust in the economy grows and consumer confidence enhances due to economic prosperity.

Social Proof reduces uncertainty and reassures people since it ensures them they are making 'safe' choices, because the strategy emphasizes on all the other people who made the same choice (e.g. bought the same product or went on the same day trip) and were satisfied with their choice. Consequently, the Social Proof principle is very applicable to promotions in times of economic uncertainty and perhaps less to promotions in times of economic prosperity.

Social Proof and Uncertainty Avoidance

"Individuals from cultures with high Uncertainty Avoidance often try to minimize risk by following established rules and norms " (Hofstede, 1993 in Ruiz-Mafe, Sanz-Blas, Hernandez-Ortega & Brethouwer, 2013). Uncertainty Avoidance indicates the extent to which an individual feels threatened by the unknown or uncertain situations. This leads to a need for predictability and might indicate stress reactions (De Mooij, 2010). In addition, subjective norms or 'third party opinions' are of a certain amount of importance to individuals with a high level of Uncertainty Avoidance since

those norms guide the individual on how to behave. People with a low level of Uncertainty Avoidance rely more on their own opinion and are less sensitive for the opinion of others (Ruiz-Mafe, et al., 2013).

In a study by Ruiz-Mafe et al. (2013) it was shown that subjective norms significantly influence airline ticket purchase intention of Spanish Internet users. The online shoppers were sensitive to the opinion and expectations of people familiar to them concerning using the internet for purchasing airline tickets. Though not directly related to Social Proof, this research does indicate that opinions of (familiar) others are more important to people with a high need for Uncertainty Avoidance than to individuals with a low level of avoidance. In this research the purchase intention of Dutch Internet users was not influenced by subjective norms, which is partly explained by the low level of Uncertainty Avoidance (Ruiz-Mafe, et al., 2013). From a cultural perspective, indeed Dutch consumers generally have quite a low level of UA compared to the high UA of the Spanish culture (Ruiz-Mafe, et al., 2013). It could be argued that in times of uncertainty due to financial crisis the UA level of Dutch consumers increases. Still, it is ambiguous whether this increased Uncertainty Avoidance will influence the way Dutch consumers process persuasive messages, since the general starting point is low.

Hwang and Lee (2012) investigated the role of Uncertainty Avoidance on online trust (integrity, ability and benevolence) and concluded that Uncertainty Avoidance could be used to predict purchase intention. Also it was shown that the influence of opinions from others about overall performance of the website in this study was significant when the level of avoidance was substantial.

It seems that subjective norms and opinions of others sufficiently affect consumers' choices, especially consumers with high UA. In times of economic downfall individuals face high uncertainty, which could potentially enhance their UA level. Social Proof is very applicable to uncertain consumers (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002; Cialdini, 2007). Again, it meets this need for predictability by reassuring consumers by giving information about what other individuals are doing (e.g. which products others

buy and are satisfied about). Consequently, the Social Proof principle seems very applicable to promotions in times of economic uncertainty, especially when Uncertainty Avoidance is high.

Scarcity and unique, high quality purchases

A strategy that seems to fit seamlessly to the promotion of unique, high quality purchases is the Scarcity principle.

Cialdini and Goldstein (2002) state that 'items and opportunities that are in short supply or unavailable tend to be more desirable to us than those that are plentiful and more accessible'. This is a thought that comes natural to people since we are taught that limited quantities are not easy to gain access to and these limited quantities seem better than things that can be accessed everywhere at every time. Also, people tend to be very fond of getting what they want and not being restricted in pursuing their desires. When this free choice is reduced because of limited availability of a specific desire, people tend to want it even more and, in case of a sold-out product, feel more urge to get it as fast as possible (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002; Messinger & Li, 2009). In that case a product similar to the sold-out product would be sufficient as well, since the attractiveness of these products may be enhanced when the consumer cannot gain access to his initial choice (Ge, Messinger & Li, 2009).

'Availability of goods influence consumers' preferences' (Verhallen & Robben, 1994). In general scarce products seem to be preferred over easy accessible products since they are perceived as more exclusive. However, when the consumer is not specifically attracted to the scarce product he will avoid buying it when the product has limited availability (Verhallen, 1982; van Herpen, Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2009). This was shown by Van Herpen, et al. (2009) in their scarcity research by instructing the experimental subjects to buy a bottle of rose wine or a shirt in a real life shopping environment. Also, prior preferences and price promotions seem to affect the effect that a scarce product has on its desirability by the consumer – the preference. The effect of scarcity on the preference and product choice of the consumer seems most significant in case of weak or no prior

preference, absent price promotions, or similar price promotions amongst all available options within one product group (Parker & Lehman, 2011).

Perception of uniqueness and the cost evaluation by the consumer also mediates the effect of Scarcity on the consumers' preference for a specific product (Verhallen & Robben, 1994). Research of Lynn (1989) showed that a product becomes more desirable due to Scarcity when participants are conscious of the expensiveness of the specific product, which in this case was accomplished by priming the subjects about expensiveness.

Unavailability of a product does not automatically signify that it is an exclusive item; it could also be scarce because many others have already purchased the product. We can distinguish two types of product scarceness, namely scarcity due to supply or due to demand. In practice these two types would imply scarcity due to a limited edition of a product or a situation in which there are only ten items left (Van Herpen, et al., 2009). This study will mainly focus on scarcity due to supply and the exclusiveness of the product.

In the study of Wu, Lu, Wu & Fu (2012) the Scarcity-Expensiveness-Desirability (S-E-D) model and the desire for uniqueness model by Synde and Fromkin are compared and a new model explaining purchase intention – in which both models are combined – is proposed. The study concludes that the perceived Scarcity that consumers assign to products or services is of positive influence on the perceived uniqueness of the purchase (Wu, et al., 2012). Through acquiring scarce items, individuals can also respond to their personal Need for Uniqueness: the scarce purchases make the consumer more distinct as well. Perceived uniqueness positively effects perceived value, which significantly effects Scarcity purchase intention. Also, it is stated that – according to the models – increased uniqueness results in higher prices of the product and consumers are willing to pay this higher price, as a token of their own uniqueness (Wu et al., 2012). An implication for the development of marketing materials according to Wu et al., (2012) would be to emphasize on the uniqueness of the product instead of the high price, when indicating quality.

In this study the promotion of an exclusive offer is researched. In general, a scarce product is more desirable than a product with unlimited supply (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002). Using Scarcity techniques in advertising is expected to emphasize the uniqueness of the offer and enhance its perceived value, which will make it more desirable and affects purchase intention. Consequently, Scarcity would be very applicable to the promotion of an exclusive purchase.

Promoting an exclusive purchase in times of financial crisis: Scarcity or Social Proof?

In this study the contrasting situation of the promotion of an exclusive purchase in economic uncertain times is researched. Finding out whether consumers are less resistant to Social Proof or Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase is the main topic. In addition, the moderating role of Uncertainty Avoidance is researched.

According to previous studies, being exposed to economic messages can affect individuals' level of economic expectations and consumer confidence. Also, consumer confidence is related to consumer spending and in some cases predicts consumer spending (Alsem et al, 2008; Casey & Owen, 2013; Hollanders & Vliegenthart, 2011; Ludvigson, 2004). Therefore, it could be argued that purchase intention depends on the economic situation. Consequently, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1.   *Consumer confidence is higher in the positive economic condition than in the negative economic condition*

H2.   *The level of consumer confidence predicts the level of purchase intention*

Furthermore, it is expected that a sufficient fit between an intended persuasive message and the applied Principle of Persuasion is important. It is expected that consumers are less resistant to an advertisement with a reasonable principle as opposed to a general persuasion technique:

H3.   Consumers are less resistant to either Social Proof or Scarcity techniques than to advertising

       without one of these principles

Following, it can be argued that a strategy such as the Social Proof principle would be very applicable to promotions in times of financial crisis. Uncertainty reduction and avoidance is a reasonable strategy when consumer trust is low due to economic uncertainty and the Social Proof principle meets this need for certainty of the consumer by emphasizing how others behave. In addition, it could be argued that an exclusive and high-quality product or service generally is best promoted via the Scarcity principle. This principle addresses the need for uniqueness of an individual and emphasizes on the scarceness and exclusiveness of a product or service and thereby making it more appealing to the consumer. It is expected that the Scarcity principle has a greater fit with a unique, exclusive purchase than the Social Proof principle, regardless of the economic situation. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H4.   Consumers are less resistant to Scarcity manipulations than to Social Proof manipulations in

       advertising for an exclusive purchase

It is expected that the general expected effect of Social Proof and Scarcity on purchase intention for a unique purchase will differ in the negative economic news condition. Consumer confidence of all consumers might be negatively influenced in times of economic downfall and therefore it is expected that consumers' resistance to the Social Proof manipulations will weaken in the negative news condition. Consequently, the following main hypotheses were formulated:

H5.   Scarcity is more effective than Social Proof in advertising for an exclusive purchase in the

       positive economic news condition as opposed to the negative economic news condition

H6.   Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase in the

       negative economic news condition as opposed to the positive economic news condition

Lastly, the moderating effect of Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) on purchase intention is analyzed. Regardless of the economic situation, it is expected that people with high UA need more reassurance before making choices and therefore are more sensitive to Social Proof manipulation techniques than people with low UA. Also, it is expected that people with high UA in general are less sensitive for Scarcity manipulation techniques. Individuals might experience Scarcity techniques as quite uncertain, because these stress uniqueness and scarceness instead of common, safe choices. It is expected that the negative economic situation intensifies the effects of UA, because UA levels tend to increase in uncertain economic situations. Consequently, the following underlying hypotheses were formulated:

H7.   *Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase for consumers with high UA as opposed to low UA*

H7a.   *Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase for consumers with high UA as opposed to low UA in the positive economic news condition*

H7b.   *Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase for consumers with high UA as opposed to low UA in the negative economic news condition*

Method

In this study the effects of Social Proof and Scarcity manipulations in advertising on purchase intention were tested via a three (Scarcity principle versus Social Proof principle versus control condition) by two (positive versus negative economic news condition) between subject experimental design.

Differences in purchase intention and desirability of the offer were measured for three manipulated advertisements for an exclusive family day trip to amusement park the Efteling with the 'luxury tickets' in two primed economic situations, that is economic downfall and economic prosperity. In

addition, the moderating effect of the individual characteristic Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) was

analyzed.

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                            ┌─────────────────┐
                            │ positive/negative │
                            │                   │
                            │ economic situation│
                            └─────────────────┘
                                     │
                                     ▼
┌─────────────┐                            ┌──────────────────┐
│  Scarcity   │                            │ purchase intention│
│ Social Proof│──────────────────────────▶│ desirability offer│
│   control   │                            │                   │
└─────────────┘                            └──────────────────┘
                            ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐
                            │ Uncertainty Avoidance │
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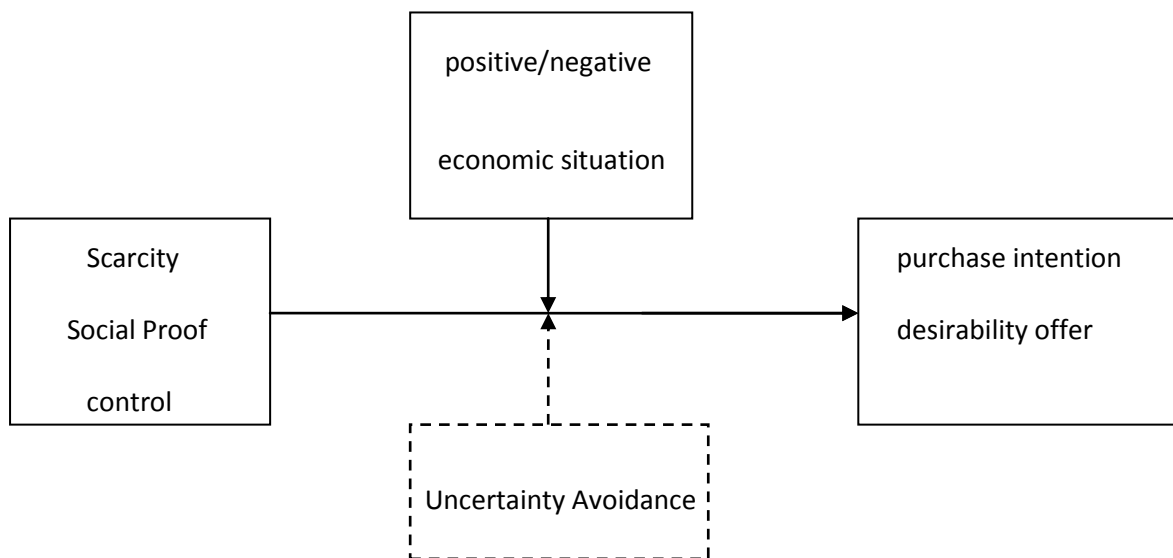
Respondents

An appeal for participating in this research was distributed via online newsletters of 27 different

primary schools in cities and villages in the south-west area of the Netherlands (Alphen a/d Rijn,

Bergambacht, Den Haag, Gouda, Haastrecht, Leiden, Reeuwijk, Rotterdam, Waddinxveen and

Zoetermeer). It was decided to only address people from the south-west area in order to keep the

travel distance to the promoted attraction park more or less equal and to prevent considerable

regional differences on Uncertainty Avoidance to occur. In addition, an appeal for participation was

published in a newsletter of a water polo club and on an internet forum for Dutch parents.

The online Qualtrics questionnaire was started 390 times and completed by 193 respondents (73.6%

female) aged between 24 and 69 (M = 46.83, SD = 6.28). In addition, 87.6 per cent of the respondents

had one or more kids and 93.8 per cent lived in the Zuid-Holland province, furthermore there were

respondents from Utrecht (2.6%), Noord-Brabant (2.1%) and Groningen, Overijssel and Noord-

Holland (0.5%). 58.5 per cent of the respondents visits an amusement park once a year, other

respondents visit an amusement park two to three times a year (23.8%) or more than 3 times a year

(4.1%). Some respondents never visit an amusement park (13.5%).

<u>Material</u>

For this study one general advertisement (control version) was designed, which was manipulated

into an advertisement with Scarcity manipulations and an advertisement with Social Proof

techniques (see attachment 1). Also, positive and negative economic content for a fake news

webpage was created (see attachment 2). As can be seen in Figure 1, the advertisements were

framed with either positive or negative economic news content. This resulted in six versions, that is a

version with (1) a Scarcity advertisement with positive articles (Scarcity+, N = 32), (2) a Scarcity

advertisement with negative articles (Scarcity-, N = 36), (3) a Social Proof advertisement with positive

articles (Social Proof+, N = 29), (4) a Social Proof advertisement with negative articles (Social Proof-,

N = 30), (5) a control advertisement with positive articles (control+, N = 27) and (6) a control

advertisement with negative articles (control-, N = 39) (see attachment 3).

Subject of the manipulated advertisements was the famous and one-of-a-kind Dutch amusement

park the Efteling. This day trip was chosen due to the high quality of the park (top 5 Europe), the

unique character with the fairy tales theme and the relatively expensive entrance prices. Specific

subject of the advertisements were the partly fictive luxury tickets which are more expensive than

the regular tickets, because these tickets offer the visitor interesting extras.

The left side of all three advertisements was kept neutral with a neutral slogan '*An enchanting day

trip*' ('*Een betoverend dagje uit*') and a picture of the Efteling park. It was chosen not to mention a

price for the entrance tickets, since it was suggested by Wu et al. (2012) that emphasizing on the

uniqueness of the product instead of the high price is better when indicating quality. By emphasizing

all the benefits of the luxury ticket, its expensive and high quality character was stressed. In all

versions of the advertisement the same discount (10 Euros) was offered. To make the offer for the

luxury tickets extra interesting a fast lane ticket was included ('*Never longer than 10 minutes in line*

for every attraction').

Figure 1.   The general, control advertisement framed with positive economic news

Social Proof and Scarcity manipulations

The text on the right side of the advertisements was divided into four different sections, namely a

header, sub header, body and a slogan at the bottom. Subsequently, all texts from the four sections

from the general (control) advertisement were manipulated with Social Proof or Scarcity techniques.

Scarcity manipulations

In the Scarcity version of the advertisement (see Attachment 1) words like 'exclusively', 'unique' and

'special' were added in order to stress the exclusive character of the offer even more in this versions,

since this strengthens the perceived scarceness of the offer ('*exclusively for buyers of the luxury*

ticket', '*The most exclusive Efteling experience!*', '*access to all attractions via special priority lanes*', '*a*

unique day trip with the kids'). Also, the scarceness of the offer was stressed by adding a deadline to

the offer ('*Order before the 30th of April/31st of May*') and by adding a Dutch version of the text

'*While supplies lasts!*' (see Table 2). See Figure 2 for the original Scarcity advertisement.

Social Proof manipulations

In addition, the Social Proof version of the advertisement (see Attachment 1) was manipulated by

stressing the popularity of the day trip ('*Experience the most popular day trip of 2013 yourself*

together with your kids!', '*Best day trip package of 2013!*') and by suggesting last years' visitors were

very pleased about the luxury tickets ('*at many requests*', '*Visitors last year enthusiastic*'). In Table 2

an overview of all manipulations can be found.

Figure 2.   The Scarcity version of the advertisement

Table 2.   Manipulated items of the three versions of the Efteling advertisement (see

Attachment 5 for the original, Dutch manipulated text)

Advertisement items	Manipulated text
Header	
Control	Visit the Efteling this spring and enjoy an enchanting day trip with the kids!
Scarcity	Visit the Efteling this spring and enjoy a unique day trip with the kids with this luxury package!
Social Proof	Visit the Efteling this spring with the luxury tickets and enjoy the **most popular day trip of 2013** together with your kids!
Sub header	
Control	Choose the luxury ticket and enjoy lovely extras in addition to your visit of the Efteling park
Scarcity	Choose the luxury ticket and enjoy **exclusive extras** in addition to your visit of the Efteling park
Social Proof	Choose the luxury ticket and enjoy – on many request – also this year lovely extras in addition to your visit of the Efteling park
Body	
Control	And receive a free fast lane ticket! Never longer than 10 minutes in line for every attraction!
Scarcity	Order before the 30th of April/31st of May and receive a **unique fast lane ticket!** Exclusively for buyers of the luxury ticket Access to all attractions via special priority lanes Never longer than 10 minutes in line! Be quick, because… **While supply lasts**
Social Proof	And receive a free fast lane ticket! **Visitors last year enthusiastic:** "Never longer than 10 minutes in line for an attraction!"
Slogan (at the bottom)	
Control	An enchanting day trip!
Scarcity	The most exclusive Efteling experience!
Social Proof	Best day trip package of 2013!

Manipulated economic news

Respondents were faced with the Efteling advertisement in the context of a news webpage with economic news (see figure 1). Respondents were either framed with negative or positive news items about the Dutch economy (see attachment 2). Respondents were pointed at the news items by asking them to read the articles at the beginning of the questionnaire and subsequently asking them questions about the current and expected economic situation in the Netherlands (e.g. questions consumer confidence). All articles were retrieved from the Dutch news webpage www.nos.nl and slightly adjusted. For example, most texts were abbreviated and some information was somewhat aggravated in order to extend the differences between the positive and negative articles.

The positive condition consisted of four news items with content about a significant recovery of the construction sector, optimism about the EU economy, 2.5 billion net profit for a Dutch supermarket concern, and an item about positive consumer spending (see attachment 2).

The negative condition consisted of four news items with content about a growth of unemployment rates, a bad year for a Dutch department store, growth of unemployment support, and an item about negative consumer confidence (see attachment 2).

Pretest

Two pretests were carried out to check the manipulations applied in this study. An appeal for participating in the pretests of this study was spread via the personnel department of two companies in the South West area of the Netherlands (Stolwijk and Gouda).

Pretest 1

The first online Qualtrics pretest was started by 81 participants and completed by 56 respondents (51.8% male) aged between 18 and 64 ($M = 50.61$, $SD = 10.97$). Furthermore, 85.7 per cent of the respondents had one or more children. Via a between subject experimental design respondents were

asked about their opinion of the control+ condition (N = 12), control- (N = 13), Scarcity+ (N = 13), Scarcity- (N = 12), Social Proof+ (N = 12) or Social Proof- condition (N = 10).

Pretest 1 consisted of five sections, namely: (1) nine items concerning the attractiveness and trustworthiness of the advertisement (attractiveness, trustworthiness and persuasiveness), (2) four items about perceived uniqueness/exclusiveness of the offer in the advertisement, (3) three items on the desirability of the offer, (4) ten items concerning the economic news articles with five items concerning the manipulation check of the economic news, and five items concerning the trustworthiness and persuasiveness of the articles, and (5) a manipulation check for Social Proof (three scale items) and Scarcity principle (three scale items). All items consisted of 7-point Likert scales (1 = *totally disagree*; 7 = *totally agree*).

Attractiveness and trustworthiness *of the advertisement*

The scale 'attractiveness and trustworthiness of the advertisement' consisted of nine items (α = .84), namely: (1) '*The advertisement is attractive*', (2) '*The advertisement is temping*', (3) '*The advertisement is appealing*', (4) '*The advertisement is interesting*', (5) '*The advertisement is reliable*', (6) '*The advertisement is trustworthy*', (7) '*The advertisement is misleading*' (recoded), (8) '*The advertisement is convincing*' and (9) '*The advertisement is clear*'.

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects of the Social Proof and Scarcity manipulations and the economic news manipulations on the attractiveness and trustworthiness of the advertisement. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant main effect for Cialdini's principles ($F_{(2, 56)} < 1$), nor a significant main effect for economic news ($F_{(1, 56)} < 1$). In addition, no statistically significant interaction was found, ($F_{(2, 56)} = 2.04$, $p > .1$).

As can been seen in Table 3, participants were moderately positive concerning attractiveness and trustworthiness of the advertisement (M = 4.23, SD = 1.08).

The absence of significant differences in attractiveness and trustworthiness between the six conditions indicates that all advertisements are equally effective. This suggests that the design of the advertisements is successful and suitable for the main study. No adjustments are needed.

Table 3. Attractiveness & trustworthiness of the advertisement, uniqueness of the offer and desirability of the offer per Cialdini condition (control, Scarcity and Social Proof) and news condition (positive and negative) (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

	Scarcity				Social Proof				Control				Total	
	Positive		Negative		Positive		Negative		Positive		Negative		Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Attractiveness & Trustworthiness add	3.79	1.35	4.25	1.09	4.71	.88	3.99	.94	4.02	.80	4.53	1.23	4.23	1.08
Uniqueness offer	4.45	.96	4.59	.83	4.20	.96	4.19	.61	4.36	.84	4.59	.86	4.40	.84
Desirability offer	3.87	1.39	4.33	2.08	4.70	1.61	3.38	1.30	4.00	1.68	4.48	1.92	4.15	1.65

Uniqueness of the offer

The scale 'uniqueness of the offer' consisted of four items (α = .83), namely: (1) '*This advertisement is about an average day* trip' (recoded), (2) '*This advertisement is about an exclusive day trip*',(3) '*The content of the luxury Efteling package is unique*' and (4) '*The content of the luxury Efteling package is not extraordinary*' (recoded).

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects of Cialdini's principles and economic news on uniqueness of the offer. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant main effect for Cialdini's principles ($F_{(2, 53)} < 1$), nor a significant main effect for economic news ($F_{(1, 53)} < 1$). In addition, no statistically significant interaction was found ($F_{(2, 53)} < 1$).

As can be seen in Table 3, respondents were moderately positive about the uniqueness of the offer (*M* = 4.40, *SD* = .84). These results indicate a quite successful manipulation of the unique, high-

quality day trip. The subject of the advertisements was indeed indicated as a moderately exclusive

purchase in all conditions, which means that the study could be carried out with this product.

However, the advertisements were expected to score even higher on uniqueness of the offer. This

might be explained by the fact that the advertisements were only shown to the respondents at the

beginning of the questionnaire instead of together with every question. A second pretest should test

this possible explanation.

Desirability of the offer

The scale 'desirability of the offer' consisted of three items (α = .88), namely: (1)'*I would love to enjoy*

a day at the Efteling with this package with my family', (2) 'A day at the Efteling with my family with

the extras of the luxury tickets is appealing' and (3) *'I think the extras of the luxury ticket are not*

interesting' (recoded).

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects of

Cialdini's principles and economic news items on the desirability of the offer. The ANOVA revealed no

statistically significant main effects for Cialdini's principles (F (2, 51) < 1) and the economic news

condition (F (1, 51) < 1). In addition, no significant interaction was measured (F (2, 51) = 5.00, p >

.10).

The desirability of the offer was moderately positive for all conditions (M = 4.15, SD = 1.65) (see

Table 3).

These results suggest that the offers in all conditions are equally desirable, namely moderately

desirable. It was expected that there would be some (significant) differences between the conditions

due to the manipulated advertisements. Again, a possible explanation for the moderate results might

be the fact that the advertisements were showed only once, at the beginning of the questionnaire, to

the respondents. A second pretest should further investigate this.

News manipulation check

The scale that measured the manipulation of the economic news articles consisted of five items (α = .82), namely: (1) '*The Dutch economy is fine*', (2) '*The crisis in the Netherlands is over*', (3) '*The crisis in the Netherlands is far from over*' (recoded), (4) '*The crisis in the Netherlands will be over soon*' and (5) '*The articles are positive about the Dutch economy*'.

Table 4.   News manipulation check and realistic value of the economic news articles per news condition (positive or negative) (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

	Positive		**Negative**	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
News check	4.67	.95	5.36	1.25
realistic value	4.66	.95	4.69	1.09

An independent samples T test was used to investigate the effectiveness of the manipulation of the positive and negative news condition. The T test revealed a statistically significant difference between the positive and negative news condition (t (55) = 2.41, $p < .05$). Both economic conditions scored moderately successful on the manipulation check, however the manipulation of the negative news condition (M = 5.36, SD = 1.25) was significantly more successful than the positive manipulation (M = 4.67, SD = .95) (see Table 4). These results indicated that no further research on the economic texts was needed and these texts could be used for the main study. This significant difference was expected since negative news tends to influence ones reaction more strongly than positive coverage (Hollanders & Vliegenthart, 2011).

Realistic value economic news conditions

The scale that measured the realistic value of the news articles consisted of five items (α = .83), namely: (1) '*The articles are reliable*', (2) '*The articles are trustworthy*', (3) '*The articles are misleading*' (recoded)*, (4) ' The articles are convincing*', and (5) '*The articles are clear*'.

An independent samples T test was used to investigate the difference between the realistic value of the positive and negative news articles. The T test revealed no statistically significant difference between the positive and negative news condition (t (55) = .12, p > .1). Both the positive news articles (M = 4.66, SD = .95) as well as the negative news articles (M = 4.69, SD = 1.09) were rated moderately positive on realistic value (see Table 4). These results indicated that both conditions were equally realistic, which meant that no adjustments were needed.

Scarcity check

The scale 'Scarcity check' consisted of three items, namely: (1) '*I think this offer for luxury tickets with priority pass is only temporarily*', (2) '*I think there are many priority passes available*' (recoded) and (3) '*This luxury ticket with priority pass is a scarce product*'.

The three items together did not form a reliable scale (α = .39). Consequently, the results had to be processed per item. Moreover, new scale items had to be formulated for the main study and were tested in the second pretest.

A one-way ANOVA was used to investigate the differences between Cialdini's principles (Scarcity, Social Proof and control) on the Scarcity check. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences between the three conditions for the 'temporarily tickets' item (F (2, 54) < 1), nor for the 'many passes available' item (F (2, 54) < 1) or the 'scarce product' item (F (2, 54) < 1).

It appeared that all conditions scored relatively low on 'many passes available' (recoded, M = 3.25, SD = 1.38) and 'scarce product' (M = 3.47, SD = 1.39). Only on the item 'temporarily tickets' (M = 4.95, SD = 1.27) moderately positive scores appeared (see Table 5).

Table 5.   Scarcity check (per scale item) and Social Proof check, per Cialdini condition (control, Scarcity or Social Proof) (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

	Scarcity		Social Proof		Control		Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Scarcity check								
temporarily tickets	5.13	1.20	4.95	1.39	4.82	1.26	4.95	1.27
many passes available*	3.44	1.41	3.21	1.48	3.14	1.32	3.25	1.38
scarce product	3.50	1.46	3.37	1.38	3.55	1.41	3.47	1.39
Social Proof check	4.73	.78	4.47	.83	4.50	.87	4.56	.83

*Item was recoded

No significant differences appeared between the conditions, while it was expected that the Scarcity condition would significantly rank higher than the Social Proof version. Also, the scores for the Scarcity condition were relatively negative, which was not expected since this version was specifically manipulated with Scarcity techniques. Again, the fact that the advertisements were only shown at the beginning of the questionnaire could be an explanation for these results. Consequently, the Scarcity check had to be carried out once more (with new scale items due to the lack of reliability of the current scale) in the second pretest. In addition, the Scarcity manipulations in the text of the advertisement were strengthened for the main study.

Social Proof check

The scale 'Social Proof check' consisted of three items (α = .54), namely: (1) '*I think (many) more luxury tickets have been sold already*', (2) '*I think people who bought these luxury tickets before were content*' and (3) '*I think the luxury tickets were very popular last season*'. In order to get an adequate reliability of the scale (α = .76), the item '*I think (many) more luxury tickets have been sold already*' was deleted.

A one-way ANOVA was used to investigate the differences between Cialdini's principles (Scarcity, Social Proof and control) on the Social Proof check. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences between the three conditions for the Social Proof check (F (2, 54) < 1).

It appeared that all three conditions were rated moderately positive on the Social Proof check (M = 4.56, SD = .83) and the average score for the Social Proof condition (M = 4.47, SD = .83) was not expected (see Table 5). The Social Proof check was tested again in the second pretest with the advertisement represented together with every question. Moreover, the Social Proof manipulations were slightly adjusted and strengthened for the main study.

Pretest 2

A second online Qualtrics pretest was set out to test if a questionnaire with manipulations showed together with every question would stimulate more distinct results. In addition, the new scale items for the Scarcity check were tested. The manipulated economic news articles were not tested again, since results from pretest 1 were satisfactory on these items.

The second pretest was started by 26 participants and completed by 21 respondents (61.9% female) aged between 28 and 66 (M = 30, SD = 12.16). Furthermore, 28.6 per cent of the respondents had one or more children. Via a between subject experimental design respondents were asked about their opinion of the Scarcity, Social Proof or control condition.

Uniqueness of the offer

The scale 'uniqueness of the offer' consisted of the same scale items as used in the first pretest. The offer was indeed observed as an unique offer (M = 5.41, SD = .98). Also, the results were more distinct than the mediocre results in the first pretest (M = 4.40, SD = .84), which indicates that showing the advertisement together with every question is better than showing it only once at the beginning of the questionnaire.

A one-way ANOVA was used to investigate possible differences between Cialdini's principles (Scarcity, Social Proof and control) on uniqueness of the offer. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences (F (2, 19) = 1.40, p > .10).

It can be concluded that the manipulation of the uniqueness of the offer was successful (*M* = 5.41, *SD* = .98) and equal for all three versions (see Table 6).

Table 6. Uniqueness of the offer and desirability of the offer per Cialdini condition (Scarcity, Social Proof or control) (1 = negative, 2 = positive)

	Scarcity		Social Proof		Control		Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Uniqueness offer	5.86	.98	5.38	1.06	5.00	.82	5.41	.98
Desirability offer	5.86	1.14	4.08	2.10	5.05	1.13	4.95	1.66

Desirability of the offer

In this second pretest the scale 'desirability of the offer' from the first pretest was slightly adjusted. The new scale (α = .90) consisted of the following three items: (1)'*I would love to enjoy a day at the Efteling with this package with my family*', (2) '*I think the extras of the luxury ticket are interesting*' and (3) '*I would go to www.Efteling.com for more information*'. This last scale item could also be used as an indicator for purchase intention in the main study.

A one-way ANOVA was used to investigate the differences between the Cialdini principles on desirability of the offer. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences between the Scarcity, Social Proof and control condition (F (2,19) = 5.92, p > .10).

Respondents indicated the offer as moderately positive in the first pretest (*M* = 4.15, *SD* = 1.65). It appeared that respondents were slightly more positive in the second pretest (*M* = 4.95, *SD* = 1.66) (see Table 6).

The advertised offer seemed quite desirable, which indicated that no further major adjustments to the offer were needed for the main study.

Scarcity check

Due to the fact that the 'Scarcity check' scale in the first pretest was not reliable and the fact that no significant differences between the scale items were found, a new scale was created. The Scarcity check (α = .49) consisted of four items, namely: (1) '*This luxury ticket is not for everyone*', (2) '*This luxury ticket with priority pass is a scarce product*', (3) '*Luxury tickets are only available for a select group of people*' and (4) '*Luxury tickets with priority pass are available all season*' (recoded).

Again, the scale was not reliable, however, this could be explained by the small sample size of the second pretest. Still, all scale items needed to be carefully reconsidered for the main study.

A one-way ANOVA) was used to investigate the differences between Cialdini's principles (Scarcity, Social Proof and control) on the Scarcity check. The ANOVA revealed a statistically significant different for the Scarcity condition on the 'scarce product' item (F (2, 19) = 6.45, p < .05). The Scarcity condition (M = 5.86, SD = .90) was significantly more scarce, than the Social Proof condition (M = 3.25, SD = 1.67) on this item (see Table 7).

The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences between the Cialdini principles for the 'not for everyone' item (F (2, 19) < 1), nor for the 'select group' item (F (2, 19) = 1.32, p > .1) or the 'all season available' (recoded) item (F (2, 19) = 1.61, p > .1).

The Scarcity condition was only rated significantly most scarce on the 'scarce product' item, indicating that the manipulation should be intensified for the main study.

Table 7.   Scarcity check (per item) and Social Proof check per Cialdini condition (Scarcity, social

proof or control) (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

	Scarcity		Social Proof		Control		Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Scarcity check								
not for everyone	5.71	.76	5.38	1.60	4.71	1.50	5.27	1.35
scarce product	5.86	.90	3.25	1.67	4.71	1.50	4.55	1.74
select group	4.00	1.63	2.75	1.75	3.71	1.25	3.45	1.60
all season available*	5.29	1.70	3.63	2.33	4.29	.76	4.36	1.81
Social Proof check	3.71	1.38	4.06	1.92	3.93	.19	3.91	1.34

*Item was recoded

Social Proof check

The scale 'Social Proof check' consisted of the same two scale items as used in the first pretest.

A one-way ANOVA was used to investigate the differences between Cialdini's principles (Scarcity,

Social Proof and control) on the Social Proof check. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant

differences between the Scarcity, Social Proof and control conditions (F (2, 19) < 1).

It appeared that the Social Proof condition (*M* = 4.06, *SD* = 1.92) was rated moderately positive on

the Social Proof check (see Table 7). However, the Social Proof advertisement was not significantly

more 'Social Proof' than the other advertisements. This should not be the case, therefore, more and

intensified Social Proof manipulations were added to the Social Proof condition for the main study.

Based on the results of both pretests the Scarcity and Social Proof manipulations were slightly

intensified by positioning the main and most important manipulations more prominently in the

advertisement. The Scarcity manipulations ('while supply lasts' and 'exclusive extras'), as well as the

Social Proof texts ('visitors last season enthusiastic' and 'most popular day trip of 2013') were turned

into a bigger type size, which made the texts stand out more. In addition, it was decided to present

the advertisements together with all relevant questions in the main study to stimulate more distinct

results.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire of the main study consisted of eight question sections, namely: (1) consumer confidence, (2) purchase intention, (3) attractiveness of the offer, (4) a manipulation check for the Social Proof and Scarcity principle; (5) realistic value manipulated material and news manipulation check, (6) Need for Uniqueness (NFU), (7) Uncertainty Avoidance (UA), (8) background variables and personal information (see attachment 4 for the original Dutch questionnaire). All sections of the questionnaire consisted of 7-point Likert scales (1 = *totally disagree*; 7 = *totally agree*).

In order to make sure all respondents had the same reference point when answering questions about their purchase intention and the advertisement, the following was stated in the introduction of every relevant question: '*Imagine that you have just decided to go on a daytrip with your (grand)children the following holiday when you come across this Efteling advertisement (…)*'. By adding this information the respondents were stimulated to consider the offer as if they were actually considering a day trip like the Efteling.

Consumer confidence

The scale 'consumer confidence' consisted of five items (α = .70), namely: (1)'*How do you feel about the Dutch economic situation of the past twelve months?*, (2) '*How do you feel about the Dutch economic situation in the coming twelve months?*', (3) '*How do you feel about the financial situation of your household of the past twelve months?*', (4) '*How do you feel about the financial situation of your household in the coming twelve months?*' and (5) '*Do you think it is a favorable or unfavorable time to buy expensive purchases or neither favorable nor unfavorable?*'.

The scale consumer confidence was based on the CBS questionnaire and originally consisted of a 3-point Likert scale (CBS, 2013). In this study a 7-point Likert scale was applied to enable measuring subtle differences as well.

The items of the 7-point scales for consumer confidence differed from the other 7-point Likert scales (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*) in this study. The first four items of consumer confidence about the Dutch economic situation and the household situation consisted of the same scale items (1 = *much worse*, 7 = *much better*), whereas the fifth consumer confidence item about expensive purchases consisted of deviating scale items (1 = *very unfavorable*, 7 = *very favorable*).

Purchase intention

The scale 'purchase intention' consisted of six items (α = .92), namely: (1) '*I would consider taking advantage of this offer and buying the luxury Efteling tickets for me and my family*', (2) '*I would consider recommending this offer for luxury tickets to others*', (3) '*I would go to www.efteling.com for more information*', (4) '*I would immediately go to the website of the Efteling in order to take advantage of this offer*', (5) '*Based on this advertisement I would consider buying these luxury Efteling tickets for me and my family*' and (6) '*Based on the current economic situation in the Netherlands I would consider buying these luxury tickets for me and my family*'.

Attractiveness of the offer

The scale 'attractiveness of the offer' consisted of four items (α = .92), namely: (1) '*This is an interesting offer*', (2) '*This is an attractive offer*', (3) '*I would love to experience a day at the Efteling with my family with this luxury package*' and (4) '*I think the extras of this luxury package are interesting*'.

Social Proof manipulation check

The scale 'Social Proof manipulation check' consisted of two items (α = .86), namely: (1) '*Luxury tickets were very popular last season*' and (2) '*People who purchased the luxury tickets before were content*'.

Scarcity manipulation check

The scale 'Scarcity manipulation check' consisted of four items (α = .65), namely (1) '*This luxury ticket with fast lane ticket is a scarce product*', (2) '*This luxury package is not for everyone*', (3) '*This advertisement is about an exclusive day trip*' and (4) '*This advertisement concerns an average day trip*'.

Need for Uniqueness (NFU)

The scale 'NFU' consisted of seven items (α = .85), namely: (1) '*I am very attracted to rare objects*', (2) '*I tend to be a fashion leader rather than a fashion follower*', (3) '*I am more likely to buy a product if it is scarce*', (4) '*I would prefer to have things custom-made than to have them ready-made*', (5) '*I enjoy having things that others do not*', (6) '*I like to try new goods and services before others do*', (7) '*I enjoy shopping at stores that carry merchandise which is different and unusual*'.

The items measuring NFU were based on the Desire for Unique Consumer Products (DUCP) scale (Lynn & Harris, 1997). It appeared that respondents in this study had quite low NFU (M = 3.32, SD = 1.13). A median split (*med* = 3.43, SD = 1.13) was used to make two groups, i.e. low and high NFU.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)

The scale 'UA' consisted of five items (α = .84), namely: (1) '*I prefer not to take risks when the outcome of my choice is unclear*', (2) '*When people want to explain something to me'*, (3)'*I would like them to be as specific as possible, ensuring I always know what is expected of me*', (4) '*It is important to precisely follow orders and procedures (for example at work or in traffic)*', (5) '*Rules are important, because they tell me what is expected of me*' and (6) '*It is useful to work with standard (work) procedures, making sure everyone (within the company) knows how to perform their* tasks*'.

The scale items for UA were based on the Cultural Value scale (CVSCALE) by Yoo, Donthu and Lenartowicz (2011). It appeared that respondents in this study had quite high levels of UA (M = 5.08, SD = 1.01). A median split (med = 5.20, SD = 1.01) was used to make two groups, i.e. low and high UA.

Realistic value manipulated material

The scale 'realistic value manipulated material' consisted of five items (α = .72), namely: (1)'*The advertisement is reliable*', (2) '*The advertisement is trustworthy*', (3) '*The articles are reliable*', (4) '*The articles are trustworthy*' and (5) '*The advertisement is appealing*'.

News manipulation check

The manipulation of the economic news conditions was controlled via the item '*The articles are positive about the Dutch economy*'. This item was recoded for the negative condition.

Background variables

Respondents' visiting frequency of amusement parks in general and the possible possession of an annual subscription of The Efteling was asked. Also, it was asked if the respondents had visited the Efteling before. Lastly, personal information (gender, age, number and age of children, province) of the respondents was asked.

Results

Social Proof manipulation check

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effectiveness of the Social Proof manipulation in this study by comparing the Social Proof manipulation check of the Social Proof, Scarcity and control condition and both economic news conditions. The ANOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect for Cialdini's principles (F (2, 187) = 26.18, p < .001). No

main effect was found for the economic news condition ($F(1, 187) < 1$). In addition, no interaction effect was found ($F(2, 187) = 1.87$, $p > .10$).

It appeared that the Social Proof manipulation in this study was successful. As can been seen in Table 8, respondents in the Social Proof condition ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.29$) indeed indicated that the advertised luxury tickets were popular amongst previous, satisfied visitors of the amusement park, whereas respondents in the Scarcity ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.45$) and control ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.35$) condition did not.

Table 8.   Social Proof check, Scarcity check and realistic value of the manipulated material per Cialdini condition (Scarcity, Social Proof or control) and news condition (positive or negative) (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

	Scarcity						**Social Proof**						**Control**					
	Positive		Negative		Total		Positive		Negative		Total		Positive		Negative		Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Social Proof check	3.14	1.47	2.74	1.43	2.93	1.45	4.10	1.31	4.58	1.25	4.35	1.29	2.54	1.43	2.82	1.30	2.70	1.35
Scarcity check	4.36	1.22	4.58	1.31	4.47	1.26	4.53	1.19	4.43	1.05	4.48	1.11	4.10	.99	4.42	1.20	4.29	1.12
Realistic value	4.35	1.06	4.15	1.11	4.24	1.08	4.03	.91	4.39	.99	4.21	.96	4.22	.57	4.30	.92	4.27	.79

Scarcity manipulation check

A factorial between group analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effectiveness of the Scarcity manipulation in this study by comparing the Social Proof, Scarcity and control condition and both economic news conditions on the Scarcity manipulation check. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant main effects for Cialdini's principles ($F (2, 187) < 1$), nor for the economic news conditions ($F (1, 187) < 1$). In addition, no interaction effects were found ($F (2, 187) < 1$).

The Scarcity manipulation failed. It appeared that respondents in all conditions indicated the advertised luxury tickets as quite scarce and exclusive. As can be seen in Table 8, the Scarcity check was relatively positive for all manipulated conditions (M = 4.41, SD = 1.17) and differences were negligible. In the Discussion section of this article the failure of this manipulation is further discussed. The Scarcity condition will still be used in the coming analyses.

Realistic value manipulated material

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects of Scarcity, Social proof and control manipulations and economic news manipulations on the realistic value of the manipulated material. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant main effects for the Cialdini conditions (F (2, 187) <1) or economic news (F (1, 187) < 1). In addition, no interaction effects were found (F (2, 187) = 1.32, p > .10).

It appeared that respondents in all conditions rated the manipulated material as fairly realistic. As can be seen in Table 8, the respondents were moderately positive concerning the reliability, trustworthiness and attractiveness of the advertisements and articles with mean scores between 4.03 and 4.39 across the conditions.

News manipulation check

An independent samples T test was used to investigate whether significant differences between the negative and positive economic news condition appeared on the effectiveness of the manipulation of the news items. The T test revealed a statistically significant difference between the positive and negative condition (t (191) = 2.80, p < .05).

Both the positive as well as the negative manipulation of the news items was successful. Even so, the negative articles (M = 5.59, SD = 1.30) were significantly indicated as more negative about the economy than the positive articles were indicated as positive articles about the economy (M = 5.10, SD = 1.15).

Consumer confidence

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects of

Cialdini's principles (Scarcity, Social Proof and control), economic news conditions (positive and

negative) and the level of UA (low or high) on consumer confidence.

The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant main effects for Cialdini's principles (F (2, 181) < 1),

nor for economic news (F (1, 181) < 1) or the level of UA (F (1, 181) = 1.10, p > .10) on consumer

confidence. In addition, no interaction was found.

It appeared that respondents were neither positive or negative about the economy. Both

respondents in the positive news condition (*M* = 3.95, *SD* = .77) and respondents in the negative

news condition (*M* = 4.02, *SD* = .71) scored average on the consumer confidence scale (see Table 9).

Purchase intention

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects of

Cialdini's principles (Scarcity, Social Proof and control), economic news conditions (positive and

negative) and the level of UA (low or high) on purchase intention.

The ANOVA revealed no significant main effects for Cialdini's principles (F (2, 181) = 1.06, p > .10),

nor for economic news (F (1, 181) < 1) or the level of UA (F (1, 181) = 2.15, p > .10) on purchase

intention. It appeared that purchase intention was relatively negative for all conditions (*M* = 2.90, *SD*

= 1.43) (see Table 9).

A marginally significant interaction appeared between economic news and level of UA (F (1, 181) =

2.90, p < .10). As can be seen in Figure 3, it appeared that respondents in the negative news

condition with high UA (*M* = 3.23, *SD* = 1.52) showed significant higher purchase intention than

respondents with low UA (*M* = 2.58, *SD* = 1.36) (see Table 9).
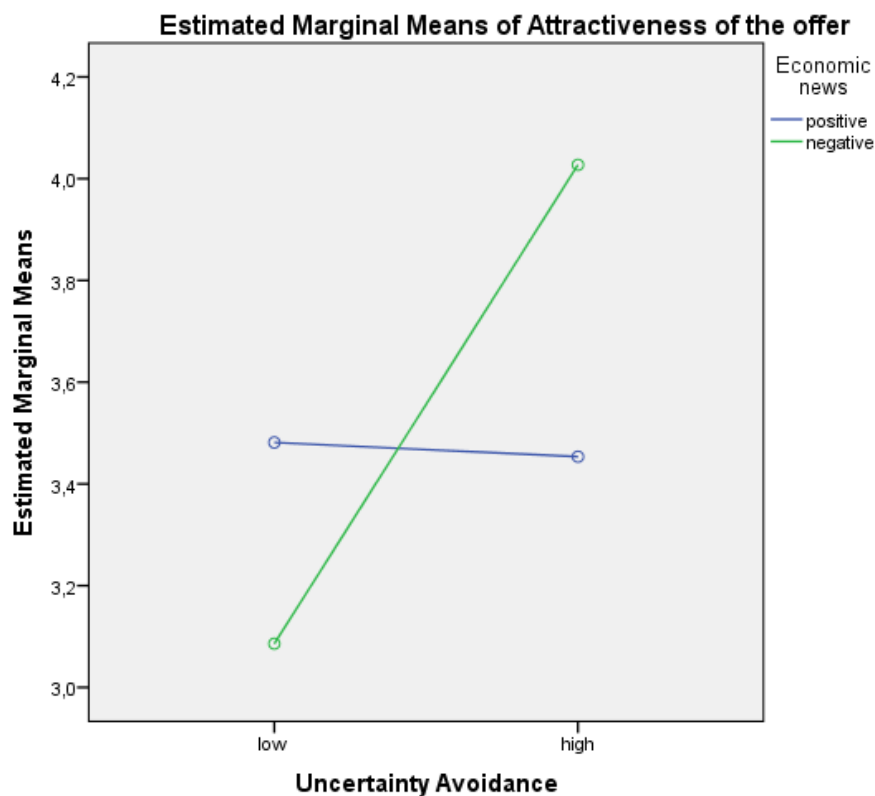
Estimated Marginal Means of Purchase Intention
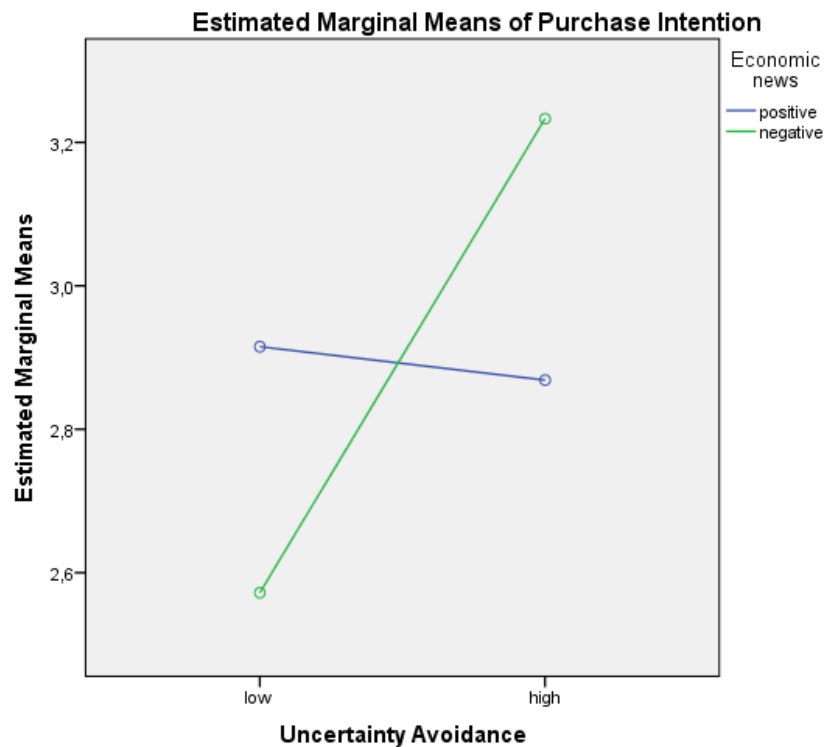
Figure 3.   A significant interaction between the negative economic news condition and UA level

(low or high) on purchase intention occurred (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

Attractiveness of the offer

A factorial between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the effects of

Cialdini's principles (Scarcity, Social Proof and control), economic news conditions (positive and

negative) and the level of UA (low or high) on attractiveness of the offer.

The ANOVA revealed no significant main effects for Cialdini's principles (F (2, 181) = 1.70, $p > .10$),

nor for economic news (F (1, 181) < 1) on attractiveness of the offer. It appeared that the

attractiveness of the offer was relatively negative (M = 3.50, SD = 1.65) for all conditions (see Table

9).

The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for the level of UA (F (1, 181) = 3.64, $p < .10$) on

attractiveness of the offer. It appeared that respondents with low UA (M = 3.27, SD = 1.58) were

significantly less attracted to the offer than consumers with high UA (M = 3.76, SD = 1.71) (see Table 9).

In addition, an significant interaction appeared between economic news and level of UA (F (1, 181) = 4.10, p < .05). As can be seen in Figure 4, it appeared that respondents in the negative news condition with low UA (M = 3.10, SD = 1.72) were significantly less attracted to the offer than respondents with high UA (M = 3.97, SD = 1.71) (see Table 9).

Figure 4.   A significant interaction between the negative economic news condition and UA level

(low or high) on attractiveness of the offer occurred (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

Table 9.　　Consumer confidence, purchase intention and attractiveness of the offer per Cialdini condition (Scarcity, Social Proof or control), per economic news condition (positive or negative) and per UA level (low or high, *median split* = 5.20) (1 = *negative*, 7 = *positive*)

	Scarcity						Social Proof						Controle						Total					
	Positive		Negative		Total		Positive		Negative		Total		Positive		Negative		Total		Positive		Negative		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Consumer confidence																								
Low UA	3.92	.72	4.11	.60	4.01	.67	3.99	.90	3.97	.66	3.98	.77	4.03	.64	4.29	.67	4.17	.66	3.97	.75	4.12	.64	4.05	.70
High UA	3.86	.53	4.13	1.01	4.02	.85	3.98	1.10	4.10	.36	4.04	.80	3.90	.77	3.65	.58	3.74	.65	3.91	.80	3.93	.76	3.92	.77
Total	3.89	.64	4.12	.84	4.01	.76	3.99	.97	4.02	.55	4.00	.78	3.97	.69	3.93	.69	3.95	.69	3.95	.77	4.02	.71	3.99	.74
Purchase intention																								
Low UA	2.51	1.40	2.39	1.24	2.45	1.31	2.89	1.21	3.05	1.65	2.97	1.43	3.34	1.29	2.28	1.02	2.78	1.26	2.88	1.32	2.58	1.36	2.73	1.34
High UA	2.90	1.66	3.01	1.59	2.96	1.59	3.03	1.46	3.32	1.97	3.17	1.70	2.68	1.44	3.37	1.19	3.13	1.30	2.87	1.49	3.23	1.52	3.08	1.51
Total	2.67	1.50	2.73	1.46	2.70	1.47	2.95	1.30	3.16	1.76	3.05	1.54	3.05	1.38	2.90	1.23	2.96	1.28	2.88	1.39	2.91	1.47	2.90	1.43
Attractiveness																								
Low UA	2.91	1.35	3.03	1.65	2.96	1.48	3.60	1.25	3.65	1.91	3.63	1.60	3.93	1.52	2.57	1.48	3.21	1.63	3.44	1.41	3.10	1.72	3.27	1.58
High UA	3.42	1.81	3.88	1.94	3.70	1.88	3.69	1.70	4.35	1.80	4.02	1.75	3.2	1.58	3.85	1.48	3.64	1.52	3.45	1.67	3.97	1.71	3.76	1.71
Total	3.12	1.55	3.50	1.84	3.32	1.71	3.64	1.42	3.93	1.87	3.79	1.66	3.63	1.56	3.29	1.59	3.43	1.57	3.45	1.51	3.55	1.77	3.50	1.65

Predictors of purchase intention

A regression analysis was used to investigate possible predictors for purchase intention.

As can be seen in Table 10, purchase intention was predicted for 62 per cent by attractiveness of the offer (F (1, 191) = 308.77, p < .001. The extent to which the respondents were attracted to the offer appeared to be a significant predictor for the purchase intention of the respondents (β = .79, p = .000). Furthermore, purchase intention was predicted for four per cent by NFU (F (1, 191) = 8.49, p < .05. The level of NFU of the respondents appeared to be a significant predictor for their purchase intention (β = .21, p = .004) (see Table 10). Purchase intention could not be predicted significantly through the level of UA of the respondents, not by the Social Proof, Scarcity or economic news conditions the respondents were faced with, nor by the respondents' consumer confidence level or the realistic value of the manipulated material.

Table 10.   Regression analyses of the variables predicting purchase intention

Variable	B	*SE B*	β
Attractiveness offer	.68	.04	.79*
R^2	.62		
F	308.77		
Need for Uniqueness	.26	.09	.21**
R^2	.04		
F	8.49		

* p < .001, ** p < .01

Predictors of attractiveness of the offer

A regression analysis was used to investigate possible predictors for attractiveness of the offer.

As can be seen in Table 11, attractiveness of the offer could be predicted for three per cent by NFU (F (1, 191) = 6.70, p = .01). The personal NFU level of the respondents turned out to be a significant predictor for attractiveness of the offer (β = .18, p = .01). Also, it was predicted for one per cent by the level of consumer confidence (low/high) (F (1, 191) = 3.19, p = .08). The level of consumer confidence turned out to be a significant predictor for attractiveness of the offer (β = .13, p = .08) (see Table 11). Attractiveness of the offer could not be predicted by the Cialdini or economic news condition respondents were faced with, nor the consumer confidence or UA level of the respondents.

Table 11.   Regression analyses of the variables predicting attractiveness of the offer

Variable	B	$SE\ B$	β
Need for Uniqueness	.27	.10	.18*
R^2	.03		
F	6.70		
Consumer confidence	.42	.24	.13**
R^2	.01		
F	3.19		

* p < .05, ** p < .10

Predictors of consumer confidence

A regression analysis was used to investigate possible predictors for consumer confidence. Consumer confidence could not be significantly predicted by the economic news condition respondents were faced with, nor by their personal NFU or UA levels.

Conclusion

It appeared that the Social Proof manipulation in this study was successful. Respondents indicated

the luxury tickets offer in the Social Proof condition as significantly more popular and satisfying

amongst previous visitors of the amusement park than the offer in the Scarcity and control condition.

Contrary to this, the Scarcity manipulation failed, since the offer was rated relatively scarce in all

three conditions and the difference between the Social Proof and Scarcity condition was negligible.

All manipulated material (advertisements and news articles) was indicated as quite realistic by the

respondents and the either positive or negative manipulation of the economic news articles was

successful in both news conditions. Even so, the negative articles were significantly indicated as more

negative about the economy than the positive articles were indicated as positive articles about the

economy.

Despite the successful manipulation of the economic news conditions in this study, it appeared that

reading the articles did not influence the respondents' consumer confidence level. Respondents were

neither positive or negative about the economy and the confidence levels did not significantly differ

between the positive and negative news condition. Also, the economic news manipulations did not

directly influence purchase intention or attractiveness of the offer. Nevertheless, a significant

interaction occurred between the negative news condition and UA (see discussed below).

It appeared that Social Proof and Scarcity manipulations did not significantly influence purchase

intention or attractiveness of the offer. Also, no significant interaction effects between Cialdini's

principles and the economic news conditions or UA appeared. Purchase intention of the respondents

and the extent to which they were attracted to the offer appeared to be successively negative and

moderately negative for all conditions.

Significant interaction did appear between the economic news condition and the level of UA on

purchase intention and attractiveness of the offer. In the negative news condition the respondents'

UA level influenced their purchase intention and the extent to which they were attracted to the advertised luxury tickets. Respondents with high UA had significantly higher purchase intention and were significantly more attracted to the offer than respondents with low UA.

Furthermore, a significant main effect was found for UA on attractiveness of the offer. Contrary of what was expected, it appeared that respondents with low UA were significantly less attracted to the offer as opposed to respondents with high UA. In general, respondents in this study appeared to have considerably high UA levels.

The level of the respondents' consumer confidence did not seem to affect purchase intention directly. However, it was found that purchase intention could be statistically significantly predicted by the extent to which respondents were attracted to the offer. Respondents who were attracted to the offered luxury tickets had significantly more intention to buy the luxury tickets as opposed to respondents who were less attracted to the offer. In addition, it was found that the level of consumer confidence had a significant effect on the extent to which the respondents were attracted to the offer. This could be an indication of a certain amount of indirect influence of consumer confidence level on purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis H2 was partly accepted (see Table 12).

Still, the extent to which respondents were attracted to the offer turned out to be the most influential predictor of purchase intention.

An overview of the researched hypotheses and their outcome can be found in Table 12.

Table 12.   Overview of the researched hypotheses and their outcome

Hypothesis	Description	Confirmed
H1.	Consumer confidence is higher in the positive economic condition than the consumer confidence level in the negative economic condition	not accepted
H2.	The level of consumer confidence predicts the level of purchase intention	partly accepted
H3.	Consumers are less resistant to either Social Proof or Scarcity techniques than to advertising without one of these principles	not accepted
H4.	Consumers are less resistant to Scarcity manipulations than to Social Proof manipulations in advertising for an exclusive purchase	not accepted
H5.	Scarcity is more effective than Social Proof in advertising for an exclusive purchase in the positive economic news condition as opposed to the negative economic news condition	not accepted
H6.	Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase in the negative economic news condition as opposed to the positive economic news condition	not accepted
H7.	Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase for consumers with high UA as opposed to low UA	not accepted
H7a.	Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase for consumers with high UA as opposed to low UA in the positive economic news condition	not accepted
H7b.	Social Proof is more effective than Scarcity in advertising for an exclusive purchase for consumers with high UA as opposed to low UA in the negative economic news condition	not accepted

Discussion

In this study the effects of Social Proof and Scarcity manipulations in advertising for an exclusive day trip on purchase intention were investigated in a positive and negative economic news condition. It was expected that consumers in a negative economic situation would be less resistant to Social Proof manipulations whereas Scarcity manipulations would have more effect on consumers in a more positive economic situation. Also, the moderating role of Uncertainty Avoidance was measured, which was expected to especially influence the effect of Social Proof.

It was found that neither Social Proof or Scarcity, nor the framed economic news or an interaction of the conditions affected purchase intention directly. However, the Social Proof and economic news manipulations were significantly successful. Also, it was found that high UA resulted in higher levels of attractiveness of the offer. Moreover, it was found that respondents confronted with the negative news condition with high UA had higher purchase intention and were more attracted to the offer as opposed to respondents with low UA. Still, the extent to which a person is attracted to an offer turned out to be the most influential predictor of purchase intention.

Social Proof and Scarcity manipulations

Now, why did the Social Proof and Scarcity manipulations did not have any significant influence on the consumers in this study? The lack of attractiveness of the offer, the failed Scarcity manipulation, and perhaps the product choice, among others, might explain this to a certain extent.

Respondents were not attracted and had an overall negative purchase intention concerning the luxury tickets offered in the manipulated advertisements in this study. When consumers are not specifically attracted to a scarce product, they will avoid buying it when the product has limited availability (Verhallen, 1982; van Herpen, et al., 2009). Indeed, the offer in this study was rated quite scarce in all conditions. This might explain the overall negative purchase intention. Also, it was found that purchase intention was substantially predicted by attractiveness of the offer. Consequently, the

negative attitude towards the offer might have overruled any possible influence from Cialdini's

principles.

The fact that respondents were not attracted to the offer might be explained by prior preferences of

the respondents and other price promotions, since these could influence the effect of the Scarcity

principle (Parker & Lehman, 2011). Indeed, during this study numerous other price promotions for

the Efteling and other attraction parks were to be found in the Dutch media (De Groot & Den

Hollander, 2014). In addition, the perceived expensiveness of the luxury tickets might have been too

high due to the fact that no entrance price was given in the advertisements. Also, the regular Efteling

entrance tickets are already quite expensive compared to other amusement parks in the

Netherlands. Furthermore, the desirability and attractiveness of the offer in the pretests was rather

moderate. In addition, knowing that perceived uniqueness positively affects perceived value (Wu et

al., 2012) and knowing that the level of need for uniqueness (NFU) of the respondents in this study

was predominantly low, it would be reasonable to think that the respondents thought the advertised

luxury tickets were too expensive to be attractive at all. And perhaps the Dutch consumer simply

does not prefer a special package over the standard amusement park experience.

Another explanation for the fact that any influence from Scarcity or Social Proof failed to appear

might be the failed Scarcity manipulation – contrary to the successful Social Proof manipulation – in

this study, which limited the research. The advertised luxury day trip had a highly exclusive character

and was perceived quite scarce in all conditions; a significantly scarce condition was absent. The

subtle character of the manipulations might have complicated a successful Scarcity manipulation to

occur. Also, as shown in the pretests, the advertised day trip on its own had a highly exclusive

character. Influencing this perceived scarceness and uniqueness even more with subtle Scarcity

techniques was challenging and difficult to measure. Formulating decent scale items in the pretest

was also challenging and the scale items might have focused too much on general uniqueness of the

offer instead of the specific Scarcity manipulations.

Furthermore the product choice in this study might have complicated the research. Due to, for example, a lack of time or knowledge, one often bases decisions on heuristic or mental short cuts. Based on this knowledge that people cannot always make an elaborate decision, Cialdini stated that a person can be influenced through using strategies involving one or more of the Principles of Persuasion (Cialdini, 2007). However, going on a day trip with the whole family is a relatively expensive purchase and a time consuming activity, which indicates that it is probably elaborately considered before taking place. This might have challenged the influence of Scarcity and Social Proof, especially because the manipulations in this study were quite subtle.

Other studies also show that focusing on other product groups might have stimulated the influence of Cialdini's principles. Concerning Scarcity effects, Van Herpen et al. (2009) focused on rose wine and t shirts in their research; less expensive products which need less elaborate consideration than the day trip in this study. However, the design of the study was different. Respondents were asked to perform an actual shopping task in a virtual environment in which they were confronted with shelf scarceness. Being personally confronted with scarceness in a shop has more influence than being confronted with subtle Scarcity manipulations in an advertisement. Related to Social Proof, the study of Amblee and Bui (2012) did show that respondents were influenced by opinions of others. In their study on the influence of online Word-of-Mouth also products with a low price were subject, that is short e-books. Contrary, based on research by Ruiz-Mafe et al. (2013) it was expected that Social Proof would show some significant influence. In that research also a product which needs more involvement – airline tickets – was researched and it was shown than opinion's of others influence purchase intention. However, the study focused on subjective norms and influence from people familiar and important to the respondents. In this study the Social Proof manipulations only focus on the popularity amongst anonymous, last years' visitors, which are unfamiliar to the respondents. Perhaps a more personal approach with a combination of the Social Proof and Liking principle might have influenced purchase intention, as the *Liking* principle implies that people are inclined to be

more influenced by someone they are fond of, is familiar to them or seems trustworthy to them (Cialdini, 2007).

Lastly it could be discussed if a 'normal' persuasive text without specific techniques related to Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion would be sufficient – or even better – in terms of stimulating purchase intention. Based on the results of this study there is no evidence found for this assumption. The control advertisement did not affect respondents' purchase intention more than the Social Proof and Scarcity versions did. Further research could focus on this question. For now, it is still expected that a fit between the persuasive situation or message and the persuasion technique is of sufficient importance, since it addresses the consumer more specifically by addressing specific personal needs (e.g. need for certainty, need uniqueness).

Economic news manipulation

The negative news articles in this study were significantly seen as more negative than the positive articles were indicated as positive articles about the economy. These results support research by Hollanders and Vliegenthart (2011) in which was stated that negative economic news tends to influence one's reaction more strongly than positive coverage.

Respondents' consumer confidence level was not affected after being exposed to the manipulated economic news in this study. This was unexpected since the economic news manipulations were successful and the realistic value of the economic texts was positive. Also, theory suggested that being exposed to economic news messages is assumed to affect economic expectations and the level of consumer confidence (Alsem, et al., 2008; Casey & Owen, 2013; Hollanders & Vliegenthart, 2011). Furthermore, the economic news manipulations did not directly affect purchase intention, nor did they influence the effect of Social Proof or Scarcity on purchase intention for the luxury day trip arrangement. Especially the fact that negative economic news did not enlarge the effect of the Social Proof manipulation was unexpected. Theory suggests that consumers – especially in times of

uncertainty – tend to rely more on the behavioral choices of others, which is exactly what the Social

Proof principle focuses on (Cialdini, 2001; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002).

Negative economic news and Uncertainty Avoidance

Results did show evidence of the influence economic news can have on consumers, that is the

interaction that appeared between UA and the negative news condition. Respondents in the

negative news condition with high UA had higher purchase intention and were more attracted to the

offer as opposed to respondents with low UA. This was unexpected, because it was thought that

respondents with high UA would actually be more cautious about their spending than consumers

with low UA, especially in the negative economic condition. An explanation might be that this is not

about actual higher purchase intention for consumers with high UA, but a less negative purchase

intention than the respondents with low UA. People with a low level of UA rely more on their own

opinion and are less sensitive for the opinion of others (Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2013), and, as a result,

might be more resistant to any kind of manipulation in advertising. They feel more confident about

their decisions than consumers with high UA, even though the economy is uncertain. The

respondents with high UA might have felt out of balance due to the negative economic situation they

found themselves in, which might have resulted in simply not knowing what to do. They did not dare

to be explicitly negative, but choose the 'safe' option by giving moderate answers. Even though, the

purchase intention of all respondents was low, the intention of respondents with high UA is

moderately negative, whereas respondents with low UA are explicitly negative. Respondents with

low UA were simply more determined and explicit in their answer as opposed to respondents with

high UA.

Influence current economic situation

The economic news manipulations did not influence respondents' answers as considerably as

expected. Besides the interaction with UA there was no evidence found that showed an influence of

economic news on purchase intention or consumer confidence. Perhaps respondents should have been exposed to more messages and should have been more extensively pointed at the manipulated texts than only at the beginning of the questionnaire by asking them to read the articles and answer questions about the Dutch economic situation. Perhaps adding questions concerning the content of the articles could have increased the influence of the economic news manipulation. Another explanation for the minor influence of the economic news condition could be the current economic situation in the Netherlands, which can be seen as a negative situation due to all economic uncertainty. This influence might be so sufficient that the influence of the manipulated economic news is too little in this situation, even though the manipulations were successful. People might be 'numb' due to being faced with contrasting economic news every day. Is it OK and safe to spend some more money already or would it be wiser to stay cautious about our spending? The moderate results for consumer confidence and throughout the questionnaire show that people simply do not know. In addition, the overall NFU level in this study was quite low and the UA level was high. Indicating that these respondents are cautious in life (and their answers in the questionnaire) and generally not specifically interested in unique (and expensive) day trips as offered in this study.

Further research and practical implications

Further research should ensure using a significantly scarce advertisement. The attention drawn to the economic news articles should be intensified, which might enlarge its effect and stimulate significant differences on consumer confidence and consequently on purchase intention. In addition, further research should pay attention to existing price promotions when choosing the subject of the manipulated offer. Also, it might be reasonable to use a non-existing amusement park (or other product/service) to avoid the possible influence of prior preferences. Naturally, researching the differences in resistance of consumers to Social Proof and Scarcity in promotions for other product groups or services would be interesting as well. Especially low involvement products would be interesting, since it is expected that the effect of Cialdini's principles for these products is greater.

More research on the influence of marketing strategies on consumer behavior in changing economic times would be very interesting. In addition to other product groups, this study could be extended with other Cialdini principles (e.g. Social Proof versus Liking or the combined influence of these principles) or other common marketing strategies. Moreover, the influence of negative news on consumer behavior could be further investigated, as could the strong influence of UA and other individual characteristics (e.g. Are consumers indeed more resistant to marketing strategies when a technique is used that does not fit their personality?).

Practical implications for amusement parks would be address the need for predictability and certainty of the apparently highly uncertainty avoiding Dutch consumers in this uncertain economic times. The amusement park sector should stress in their advertising that it is safe to spend money at their specific park because people get value for their money and previous visitors were content. Combining Social Proof and Liking in their advertising by, for example, creating a family that appears in all commercials. The audience will get fond of them and will like the Consistency of it. Also, give visitors the opportunity to write testimonials on the website and social media of the attraction park and share their testimonial with their personal network. Their friends and family will be more influenced by the opinion of a familiar person and the visitors will be more involved. Lastly, paying special attention to regular visitors that still visit the park in times of economic downfall would be wise.. For example, give them little incentives and pay attention to for example birthdays with a (e-)card or present to keep them committed and consisted.

All in all, it is still expected that Scarcity and Social Proof do have significantly different effects on consumers purchase intention (i.e. consumers resistance against Scarcity and Social Proof principles) for exclusive purchases in changing economic times. In this study it could not be verified due to the failed Scarcity manipulation, the low attractiveness of the offer and perhaps the wrong product choice. In addition, the influence of the economic situation is considered very high due to the fact that the economic news manipulations in this study did not influence the respondents' consumer

confidence level – despite the successful manipulations – probably due to consumers' existing

uncertain perspective of the economy.

Ultimately, the extent to which a person is attracted to a product still influences purchase intention

the most. A reassuring thought for all consumers: 'we are not entirely subject to marketing

strategies'.

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Attachments

Attachment 1.1: Scarcity advertisement

Attachment 1.2: Social Proof advertisement

Attachment 1.3: control advertisement

Attachment 2.1: positive news items

Articles all based on existing news items, retrieved from NOS.nl (2013).

CBS: herstel zichtbaar in bouw

Het herstel van de economie is nu ook duidelijk zichtbaar in de bouw. In het laatste kwartaal van

2013 steeg de omzet met bijna 1 procent ten opzichte van dezelfde periode in het jaar daarvoor.

Optimisme over economie EU groeit

De economische groei in Europa zet dit jaar flink door. De Europese Commissie is veel optimistischer

dan drie maanden geleden en gaat nu uit van een groei van de Europese economie van 3.5 procent.

2.5 miljard nettowinst Ahold

Ahold. het moederbedrijf van Albert Heijn behaalde in 2013 een nettowinst van ruim 2.5 miljard. De

jaaromzet kwam uit op 32.6 miljard euro. Ahold haalt steeds meer omzet uit online verkopen.

inmiddels ruim 1 miljard euro. Beleggers zijn te spreken over de cijfers.

Het aandeel wint aan het begin van de middag ruim 4 procent. Volgens Ahold belooft 2014 een nog

beter jaar te worden. Het bedrijf denkt in ieder geval dat de online verkoop flink gaat groeien.
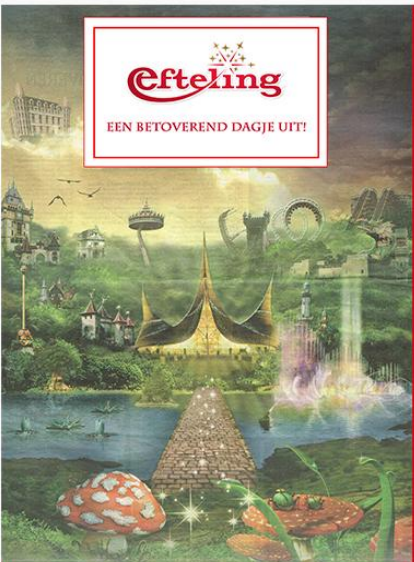
Huishoudens geven steeds meer uit

In februari is er weer meer geld uitgegeven door huishoudens. Er werd 2.5 procent meer gekocht dan

in dezelfde maand in 2013. In januari stegen de bestedingen ook al met 1.3 procent en dat was al de

derde toename van de uitgaven van gezinnen op rij sinds eind 2013.

Het vertrouwen van consumenten blijft stijgen. Mensen zijn steeds vaker bereid zijn om grote

aankopen. zoals wasmachines en televisies. te doen. Ook zijn consumenten positiever over hun eigen

financiële situatie.

Attachment 2.2: negative news items

Hema: 2013 was slecht jaar

Hema verkoopt steeds minder en moet daarom reorganiseren. De winkelketen schrapt 65 banen op het hoofdkantoor. bij bakkerijen en in het distributiecentrum.

Nog altijd negatief consumentenvertrouwen

De indicator van het Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. die het consumentenvertrouwen meet. staat nog steeds op -10. Consumenten blijven somber over de Nederlandse economie. De min betekent dat er nog altijd meer pessimisten zijn dan optimisten. De laatste keer dat het consumentenvertrouwen in de plus stond was in 2006 en 2007. vlak voor de financiële crisis uitbrak.

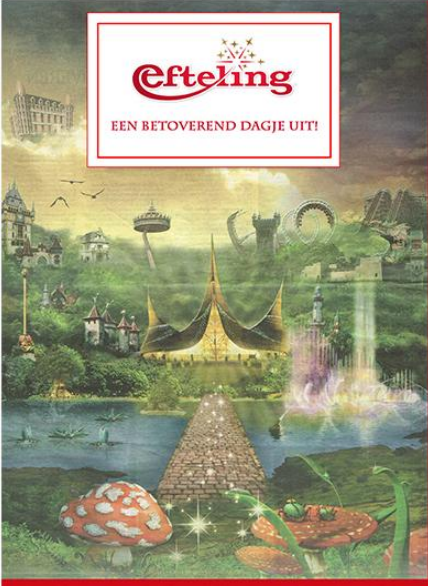**Steeds meer mensen in de bijstand**

De bijstand groeit sterk. Uit cijfers van het Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS) blijkt dat het aantal mensen met een bijstandsuitkering vorig jaar met 33.000 is gestegen. Die toename is volgens het CBS veel groter dan in de jaren 2012 en 2011. In december 2013 zaten 413.000 mensen in de bijstand.

De toename van het aantal mensen met een bijstandsuitkering is de grootste sinds 2009 en hangt samen met de economische malaise. "De ontwikkeling van de bijstand loopt in de pas met de verslechterde arbeidsmarkt". schrijft het CBS.

Werkeloosheid in januari gestegen

De werkeloosheid is in januari voor de tweede maand op rij gestegen. Dat meldt het CBS. Er kwamen 10.000 werkelozen bij. In totaal zitten er nu 678.000 mensen zonder baan. Dat is 8.6 procent van de beroepsbevolking.

Ook het aantal mensen dat werkloos is en een WW-uitkering aanvraagt is fors gestegen. Er vroegen

23.000 mensen een werkloosheidsuitkering aan. Het totale aantal WW-uitkeringen is nu 460.000. In

een jaar tijd zijn er een kwart meer WW'ers bijgekomen.

Attachment 3.1: Scarcity advertisement in the positive economic condition

Attachment 3.2: Social Proof advertisement in the negative economic condition

Attachment 4: Original Dutch questionnaire

Consumer confidence

1. Vindt u dat in het algemeen de economische situatie van ons land de afgelopen twaalf maanden beter is geworden, slechter of hetzelfde is gebleven?

2. En wat denkt u van de komende twaalf maanden? Zal in het algemeen de economische situatie van Nederland dan beter worden, slechter worden of hetzelfde blijven?

3. Is de financiële situatie van uw huishouden de laatste twaalf maanden beter geworden, slechter of ongewijzigd gebleven?

4. Wat verwacht u van de financiële situatie van uw huishouden? Zal deze in de komende twaalf maanden beter worden, slechter of ongewijzigd blijven?

5. Als het gaat om meubelen, een wasmachine, een televisie of andere duurzame artikelen. Vindt u dat het nu voor de mensen een gunstige of ongunstige tijd is om zulke grote aankopen te doen of noch het een nog het ander?

Purchase intention

1. Ik zou overwegen gebruik te maken van deze aanbieding en luxe Efteling tickets voor mij en mijn familie aan te schaffen

2. Ik zou overwegen deze aanbieding voor luxe tickets aan anderen aan te bevelen

3. Ik zou naar www.efteling.com gaan voor meer informatie

4. Ik zou direct naar de site van de Efteling gaan om gebruik te maken van deze aanbieding

5. Gebaseerd op deze advertentie zou ik overwegen deze luxe Efteling tickets voor mij en mijn familie aan te schaffen

6. Gebaseerd op de huidige economische situatie in Nederland zou ik overwegen deze luxe tickets voor mij en mijn familie aan te schaffen

Attractiveness of the offer

1. Dit is een interessante aanbieding

2. Dit is een aantrekkelijke aanbieding

3. Ik zou graag een dagje Efteling beleven met mijn familie met dit luxe arrangement

4. Ik vind de extra's van het luxe arrangement interessant

Social Proof manipulation check

1. Luxe tickets waren vorig seizoen erg populair

2. Mensen die eerder luxe tickets kochten waren tevreden

Scarcity manipulation check

1. Dit luxe ticket met voorrangspas is een schaars product

2. Dit luxe arrangement is niet voor iedereen weggelegd

3. Deze advertentie gaat over een exclusief dagje uit

4. Deze advertentie gaat over een standaard dagje uit

Reliability manipulated material

1. De advertentie is mooi

2. De advertentie is betrouwbaar

3. De advertentie is geloofwaardig

4. De artikelen zijn positief over de Nederlandse economie

5. De artikelen zijn betrouwbaar

6. De artikelen zijn geloofwaardig

Need for Uniqueness (NFU)

1. Ik voel me heel erg aan aangetrokken tot zeldzame dingen

2. Ik ben meer een trendzetter dan een trendvolger

3. Ik ben eerder geneigd een product te kopen wanneer het schaars is

4. Ik heb liever op maat gemaakte dingen dan een standaard product

5. Ik geniet ervan wanneer ik dingen bezit die anderen niet hebben

6. Ik vind het leuk om nieuwe producten en services uit te proberen voordat anderen dat doen

7. Ik houd ervan om te shoppen in winkels met een ongewoon aanbod, anders dan in andere winkels

Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)

1. Ik neem liever geen risico's wanneer onduidelijk is wat de gevolgen van mijn keuze zullen zijn

2. Als mensen mij iets willen uitleggen, wil ik graag dat ze zo gedetailleerd mogelijk zijn, zodat ik altijd weet wat er van mij verwacht wordt

3. Het is belangrijk om instructies en procedures (bijvoorbeeld op het werk of in het verkeer) nauwlettend te volgen

4. Regels zijn belangrijk, omdat ze vertellen wat er van mij verwacht wordt

5. Het is handig om met standaard (werk)procedures te werken, zodat voor iedereen (binnen het bedrijf) duidelijk is hoe taken uitgevoerd moeten worden

Control questions

1. Bent u wel eens in de Efteling geweest?

2. Heeft u een abonnement op de Efteling (gehad)?

3. Hoe vaak bezoekt u normaal een pretpark?

Personal information

1. Ik woon in de provincie…

2. Ik ben een… man/vrouw

3. Wat is uw geboortejaar?

4. Heeft u (klein)kinderen? (→ Wat is de leeftijd van uw (klein)kinderen?)

Attachment 5: Original Dutch text of manipulated items in the advertisements

Advertisement items	Manipulated text
Header	
Control	Bezoek dit voorjaar de Efteling en geniet van een betoverend dagje uit met de kinderen!
Scarcity	Bezoek dit voorjaar de Efteling en geniet van een uniek dagje uit met de kinderen met het luxe arrangement!
Social Proof	Bezoek dit voorjaar de Efteling met de luxe tickets en geniet samen met de kinderen van het **populairste uitje van 2013!**
Sub header	
Control	Kies voor het luxe ticket en geniet naast jouw bezoek aan het Efteling park van fijne extra's
Scarcity	Kies voor het luxe ticket en geniet naast jouw bezoek aan het Efteling park van **exclusieve extra's**
Social Proof	Kies voor het luxe ticket en geniet naast jouw bezoek aan het Efteling park - op veler verzoek - ook dit jaar weer van fijne extra's
Body	
Control	Én ontvang een gratis voorrangspas! Nooit langer dan 10 min in de rij voor een attractie!
Scarcity	Bestel vóór 30 april/31 mei en ontvang **een unieke voorrangspas!** Uitsluitend bij aankoop van een luxe ticket Toegang tot alle attracties via speciale voorrangspoortjes Nooit langer dan 10 min in de rij! Wees er snel bij, want **op = op**
Social Proof	Én ontvang een gratis voorrangspas! **Bezoekers vorig seizoen enthousiast:** "Nooit langer dan 10 min in de rij voor een attractie!"
Slogan (at the bottom)	
Control	Een betoverend dagje uit!
Scarcity	De meest exclusieve Efteling ervaring!
Social Proof	Verkozen tot beste uitjes arrangement van 2013!