

Stimulating Word-of-Mouth in Retail

A quantitative study of a salesperson's potential to stimulate
WOM through effort and asking customers to do so

Word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations is one of the most influential and sought after marketing tools for companies. The purpose of this thesis is to test if it is possible for a salesperson to stimulate WOM through effort and recommendation requests, and if strategic requests have a greater impact. Two quantitative studies were conducted using survey-based experiments. The data for Study 1 was collected manually using a self-completion paper survey and the data for Study 2 was collected online through a research company. The total number of respondents was 552. Results from Study 1 revealed that salesperson effort has a positive impact on customer attitude towards the salesperson and the intention to engage in WOM-activity, but were not supported by Study 2. Neither study supported that salesperson effort has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. WOM-requests, neutral and polite, were not found to have a significant impact on customer evaluations or WOM-intention in either study. The study thus finds that salesperson effort has the potential to impact WOM-intention, however a request does not, regardless if a polite request strategy is applied or not. The findings are of interest in practice and academically. A store manager can apply the knowledge as it shapes strategies for its sales personnel. Academically, the merge of WOM, request strategies, and effort should spark interest for researchers to dig deeper into the subject.

Key words: Salesperson Effort, Request Strategies, WOM-intention, Customer Evaluations

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Definitions

WOM

Word-of-mouth, informal communications between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services.

The Face

The positive social value an individual claims for himself, an image that others may share that is made up of approved social attributes.

FTA

Face threatening act, an act that inherently damages the face of the addressee or the speaker by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the other.

B&M

Brick & Mortar, refers to a company's physical store.

Request Strategies

Strategies applied to minimize the imposing nature of a request.

Customer Satisfaction

Referring to customers' satisfaction with the company

Customer Attitude

Referring to customer's attitude towards the salesperson

Salesperson effort

The effort that a salesperson puts into the sales encounter, includes but is not limited to time spent, persistence and energy exerted.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter will identify a gap in existing theoretical knowledge and present the purpose of the study. A discussion on the expected knowledge contribution will follow as well as delimitations of the study and the outline of the paper.

1.1 Background

We shop for entertainment or to keep up with everyday errands. Regardless of the intention of entering a store, it is important that the store fulfills, or exceeds, the expectations we bring with us as shoppers. Depending on how well expectations are met, we exit the store feeling unsatisfied, content, or even joyful. This may influence our actions subsequent to the visit. A dissatisfied customer may in the worst of cases warn others of the intolerable experience. On the other hand, a satisfied customer might become a company ambassador. These types of endorsements are often appreciated amongst individuals since they can help guide a decision at hand. It is therefore an efficient way to influence other people's future purchasing decisions. A third actor in the interaction are the companies about which the consumers are talking, and they are not ignorant of the power these conversations might have. Companies therefore make investments with the intention of sparking conversations. However, even though this could have an significant impact, it is still uncertain how it is efficiently achieved.

1.1.1 Word Of Mouth

Companies must consider the value each customer holds to the company beyond the products it purchases (Arndt, 1967; Kumar, Petersen, & Leone, 2007). Chevalier and Mayzlin were able to prove the importance of recommendations in a study that showed considerably higher sales in an online bookstore that put effort into stimulating a review behavior amongst their customers (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Additionally, studies have shown that Word-of-mouth (from hereon referred to as WOM) type brand publicity generates a higher liking than traditional media (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). Since companies have begun to understand the importance of it, the antecedents of WOM activity have been the center of attention of recent studies. Researchers have been able to draw conclusions on a number of contributing factors. For instance, studies have shown that customers with strong ties to a brand are more likely to engage in WOM than those with weak ties (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). Some argue that positive WOM behavior is due to social interaction reasons, to enhance one's self-worth, and in concern for others (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). In addition, some authors argue that drivers of

WOM activity also include service recoveries (Maxham, 2001) and trust (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). Several studies argue that satisfaction and dissatisfaction have a big impact on the likelihood of both positive and negative WOM activity (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003) (Anderson, 1998). However, it cannot be guaranteed that satisfaction always results in WOM, although WOM often stems from satisfaction. (Anderson, 1998).

1.1.2 WOM and the Salesperson

Individuals are exposed to thousands of commercial messages daily (Gibson, Nov 19, 2005), therefore, it is increasingly important for companies to break through the clutter efficiently. A store manager has a number of factors at its disposal to affect its customers' impressions, including the product assortment, the store atmosphere, and the salespeople. Several studies have focused on the importance of service in achieving high customer evaluations and the salesperson's role in doing so (Barger & Grandey, 2006) (Söderlund & Rosengren, 2008) (Darian, Tucci, & Wiman, 2001). Research also finds that profits are positively impacted when salespeople build relationships with customers. This is explained by how customers form a positive attitude towards the salesperson, which can lead to increase WOM. (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999) Through WOM, the company can efficiently stand out of the crowd. Researchers even argue that WOM referrals are the most powerful marketing tool a company has in its toolbox (Dobele & Ward, 2003; Reichheld, 2003). This is partly attributed to how awareness is effectively gained as satisfied customers talk to others (Oliver & Swan, 1999). Since WOM per se is free of charge for the company, it holds the potential to yield a higher ROI than any other marketing investment and can lead to superior economic performance (Fornell, 1992).

Although there are a large amounts of literature that indicates what factors and motivations lies behind WOM behavior, little emphasis has been put on specific actions a company can take to evoke it. Still, some tools with the specific intention to drive WOM activity have been developed, including incentive systems (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). However, disadvantages of these include high costs for the company and the risk of generating negative WOM from customers who feel as if they have sold their recommendation (Lenoir, Puntoni, Reed, & Verlegh, 2013). There is still a need to provide frameworks of concrete, low-risk, actionable steps a company can take in order to stimulate WOM-activities. Söderlund and Mattson wanted to find a cost efficient route to drive WOM behavior and took a closer look at a salesperson merely asking customers for a recommendation. It turns out simply asking a customer for a recommendation has a positive effect on WOM activity (Söderlund & Mattson,

2015). Although no negative effects on customers' overall evaluations were found, it was not the emphasis of their study. There is thus little known about the potentials and risks of the actual request.

Moreover, the salesperson, whilst in close contact with a customer during a transaction, has a unique opportunity to leave a lasting impression. Mohr and Bitner argue that the amount of effort a salesperson puts into a service encounter is correlated to the satisfaction with the transaction. This in turn leads to the customer's perceived service quality and in the end overall satisfaction with the firm (Mohr & Bitner, 1995a). As previously mentioned, satisfaction is commonly denoted an antecedent of WOM, making it plausible to believe that employee effort could lead to increased WOM-activity. However, there has only been a limited amount of studies on the impact of perceived salesperson effort on the consumer's likelihood to engage in WOM. In order to understand this phenomenon better, one needs to bridge the gap between salesperson effort and WOM activity.

1.1.3 Problematization

It is clear that customers hold more value than the products they purchase. Since customers' WOM is highly influential it is crucial for companies to understand how they can convert customers into ambassadors. Traditionally studies have emphasized satisfaction as an antecedent, which is a fairly intangible factor. Recent studies have placed more emphasis on how a tangible action, such as asking for a recommendation, may increase WOM intention from customers. Other studies have started to look into the area of salesperson effort and its potential to drive satisfaction. Still, the connection has not been made between the salesperson's ability to increase WOM intention in general, and concrete steps the salesperson can take to do so.

The lack of knowledge concerning salesperson strategies in driving WOM-activity and their implications on customer evaluations is an unexplored theoretical area that calls for action. Theory indicates that salesperson effort may increase customer satisfaction, which in turn may lead to WOM-activities, and that simply asking for a request might increase a customer's WOM-intention. Further, no studies have looked into a potential trade-off between the two and if a WOM-request could affect customer evaluations. In addition, no studies have looked into the potential of formulating the request in accordance with request strategies. To better understand the implications of salesperson effort in combination with WOM-requests, this area must be further studied.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to add a new understanding to the theoretical field of WOM. The thesis will look closer at steps a salesperson can take in order to stimulate a WOM-intention with its customers by exerting effort and making request strategies. The thesis will take a quantitative approach and will examine the research questions through two survey-based experiments:

RQ1. Does salesperson effort increase WOM intention and customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store?

RQ2. Does a WOM request increase WOM intention and negatively affect customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store?

RQ3. Does a polite WOM request yield higher WOM intention and customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store than a neutral request does?

1.3 Expected Knowledge Contribution

By examining the research questions, this essay is expected to contribute knowledge to existing research on WOM and expand the theoretical field of employee effort.

First, the thesis will add to the understanding of employee effort, as well as its potential impact on customer evaluations and WOM intention. By doing so, we expect to open up for new opportunities on a retail managerial level in the quest for increased profits and achieving a high marketing ROI. Moreover, where there is little theoretical knowledge regarding salesperson effort, we expect to expand the theoretical field and strengthen previous findings.

Second, the thesis will add to research on WOM. It will expand the knowledge on actionable steps a salesperson can take in order to increase customers' WOM-intention. By further developing previous findings that a WOM request drives WOM intention, the thesis will contribute to knowledge of interest to both practitioners and academia. The thesis will also add to the knowledge regarding potential risks of requesting WOM. Moreover, the thesis will also contribute by merging psychological studies of request strategies with marketing research regarding WOM, which to the best of our knowledge has not been done before.

1.4 Delimitations

Due to time and resource restrictions, the study was subject of certain delimitations that will be accounted for in this section. The first delimitation concerned the context of the experiment. The experiment was to be conducted in a B&M setting although it is not uncommon for companies to sell their products through online channels as well. This was done since it would have been difficult to express salesperson effort physically through an online channel, something that was deemed an interesting component of salesperson effort.

A second delimitation concerns the data collection. The objective was to conduct two studies in order to achieve more generalizable results and therefore robust findings. However, due to the time constraint it was impossible to collect the data for both studies manually. For this reason the data for the first study will be collected manually whilst the data for the second study will be outsourced and collected through the research company NEPA.

The third delimitation was to conduct the experiment through a survey and not in a real life setting. There were several reasons why this approach was chosen. First, it would have been highly time consuming to collect enough respondents for the study's six treatment groups in a live setting and was thus deemed to be beyond the time constraints of this study. Secondly, recreating the same type of treatment in a live experiment would have been highly demanding for the salesperson if external factors were to be controlled for. It was deemed unlikely that the salesperson would have been able to produce the same type of treatments several times in a row, which meant the results would have been skew. Finally, since the study included treatments that could potentially have a negative effect on customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store, it was deemed unlikely that a company would accept conducting the experiment in their store. This was confirmed by the housing platform Qasa, through which the first pre-study was conducted, that did not allow us to include requests that could have negative consequences. Therefore, a paper-survey experiment was chosen to be able to replicate treatments and yield proper data.

The last delimitation regarded language and the wording of request. Since the part of the study concerning request strategies was highly sensitive to wording, it was imperative that it communicated an identical message in all treatments. For that reason the decision was made to strictly use one language throughout the experiment, since switching between languages might

alter the communicated message. For convenience reasons, Swedish was chosen as the official language of the study.

1.5 Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into 5 chapters. Following this introductory chapter is the theoretical framework, method, empirical findings, and lastly the discussion. The theoretical framework will present the theories the study builds its hypotheses on and the method will explain the scientific methods used to explore the subject and gather data. In empirical findings, the results from the study will be presented and analyzed. Finally, the thesis ends by discussing the results and what conclusions can be drawn, as well as suggest areas of further research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the theories that lay a foundation for the study's hypotheses will be presented. First is a summary of WOM literature that will be followed by sections focusing on the salesperson's potential in stimulating WOM behavior through effort and requests. Finally, the hypotheses of the study will be derived.

2.1 WOM

Word-of-mouth is a well-studied concept. Researchers have not only focused on the benefits WOM can offer but also what factors stimulate and increase the likelihood of it taking place. The phrase word-of-mouth was coined by William Whyte following a study he made on the effect of social influence on consumers. It was then defined as “informal communications between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services”. (Whyte Jr, 1954)

Since WOM offers a cost efficient opportunity to quickly diffuse information, companies have always been interested in understanding its antecedents. WOM can be negative, neutral, or positive, naturally companies aim to spark conversations that fall under the latter. (Anderson, 1998) Thus, it is possible to make a distinction between merely talking about a product or service, and a recommendation, talking in a positive sense (Ladhari, 2007). Therefore, the key question for a company will be how to stimulate positive WOM whilst avoiding to cause negative WOM.

Many authors have focused on satisfaction as a driving factor of WOM activity (Anderson, 1998). In a comparison between trust and satisfaction, the latter proved to have a larger impact on WOM (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). Given that satisfaction is accepted as an antecedent to WOM, the next natural step will be to investigate what antecedents lies behind satisfaction per se. Such influencers include arousal, pleasure (Ladhari, 2007), perceived value (Oh, 1999), and commitment (T. J. Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005). A new approach investigates the connection between salesperson effort and customer satisfaction in a service encounter (Mohr & Bitner, 1995a). The study concludes that salesperson effort affects customer satisfaction positively.

2.2 Effort

Salesperson effort can be defined as the amount of energy a salesperson exerts in a customer encounter. It can be communicated and expressed in different ways, such as time spent and persistence (Mohr & Bitner, 1995a), but it is the aggregated effect of those actions that affect how the customer perceives the exerted effort in the meeting.

2.2.1 Signalling Effort

The suggestion that more effort is better can be traced down to research in biology as “the handicap principle”. It describes animals who signal biological fitness by using excessive resources, by communicating it afford to squander said resource. The idea is that reliable signalling must be costly to the signaller in a way that someone with less of the trait could not afford. (Zahavi, 1975) Research within advertising suggests that the principle has implications in that field as well. If individuals perceive the advertising cost of a company to be high and excessive, the advertisement is perceived as more persuasive. This has a spillover effect on brand quality that is perceived to be higher. (Ambler & Hollier, 2004) (Kruger, Wirtz, Van Boven, & Altermatt, 2004). Researchers have previously merged theories of advertising effort with WOM literature by showing that companies with creative advertisement that required much effort to produce generates more WOM than those produced with less effort (Modig, Dahlén, & Colliander, 2014). Thus, signalling effort seems to be an efficient way to communicate superiority in both biology and business. (Kirmani & Rao, 2000)

In accordance with the benefits stemming from an advertisement expressing effort, a salesperson can generate positive customer evaluations by signaling effort. The effort a salesperson puts into promoting a product or making a presentation has proved to have a positive impact on the perceived quality of the product (Kirmani & Wright, 1989) Moreover, as individuals form purchasing strategies, the aim is to minimize their own invested effort whilst maximizing the accuracy of the outcome. Since more effort is perceived to lead to more accurate choices (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1993) Activities that make individuals aware that more work has been done for them might make decision makers appreciate this effort more. Research concerning online shopping supports this and shows that electronic decision aids that remove effort from the customer are appreciated and increase satisfaction (Bechwati & Xia, 2003).

Researchers do not agree that effort always signals quality, leads to higher satisfaction, and stimulates WOM. When expenditure on advertising is perceived to be excessive and exceeding what is necessary for the communicated message, it might signal desperation. If customers believe the excessive effort is due to desperation, they may believe the products or services are of low quality. The same goes for high levels of repetition for advertisements. Repeating a message too many times may cause a customer to believe it is a cue for low quality. (Kirmani, 1997)

Another risk in exerting extra effort concerns time. Time is considered a precious commodity to customers who do not appreciate when it is wasted (Becker, 1965). This implies that the longer customers have to wait, the less satisfied they become. Research suggests that for intrusive advertisements, the more impatience they cause the reader, the more negative reactions appear (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1985). Thus, extra effort could be evaluated as an intrusive element to the encounter. The extra effort put into the service encounter could be perceived to be in conflict with what is expected of the service (Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002a). However, research has shown that people prefer websites with longer waiting times if the website can show that they are exerting effort (Buell & Norton, 2011). This indicates that visible effort might mitigate the risk of impatience.

2.2.2 Reciprocity

Research shows that the effort customers perceive the employee to perform is appreciated regardless of what the service outcome is. Since the definition of employee effort concerns the amount of energy it puts into customer interaction the more effort the salesperson exerts, the more one could expect the customer to reward the salesperson in return. Rewards may include customer satisfaction, repeat purchases and positive word of mouth. (Mohr & Bitner, 1995b) The line of reasoning is supported by theories reckoning that the time a salesperson spends on helping a customer can be equaled to a favor. If a salesperson spends a lot of time helping a customer, the store's costs and the consumer's benefits both increase. The imbalance makes consumers feel indebted to the store and motivated to restore the balance by reciprocating the favor. (Goranson & Berkowitz, 1966) When an individual feels someone else has put more effort into a relationship than itself, inequity appears, and the individual will feel the need to even out the imbalance. This is the underlying mechanism of the "norm of reciprocity" (Morales, 2005a).

Even though theory indicates that effort would make customers want to reciprocate, research has also shown that intentions are of importance. Even though people generally respond positively if

the outcome is positive, this is not the case if they suspect a hidden agenda (Jones & Davis, 1965). For instance, if the favor that is performed as part of a sales strategy, the behavior is instead perceived as a sales device. Consumers then no longer feel imbalance (Cialdini Robert, 1993) or the need to reciprocate and reward the firm (Morales, 2005b). Actions driven by strategic intentions affects reciprocity less than those that are not strategic, since they are not perceived as kind or fair. People will thus act according to what they think is a fair or kind intention of the agent, where kind actions will be rewarded and unkind actions will be punished. (Stanca, Bruni, & Corazzini, 2009) There is also a risk that comes with trying to stimulate customer satisfaction through salesperson satisfaction. The satisfaction could then be isolated to the salesperson and may not be transferred to become company satisfaction (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). Making the company dependent of the sales personnel, a risk that must be mitigated.

2.2.3 Impact of Effort

There are several underlying psychological mechanisms that comes into play when a salesperson exerts effort. These include cognitive evaluation of what the effort signals, as well as an evaluation of whether the imbalance in the relationship requires reciprocation. Theory supports how perceived employee effort in a face-to-face interaction has a positive effect on customer satisfaction (Mohr & Bitner, 1995a). There is thus support for how employee effort could lead to WOM. However, there are risks that must be accounted for. If the effort is seen as excessive, it could be interpreted as a sign of desperation and used as a cue for low quality. Excessiveness could also be seen as an intrusive and inappropriate element in a service encounter. Contrarily, the norm of reciprocity posits that the more effort a salesperson exerts, the more the customer will feel the need to give back. This may result in the customer rewarding the salesperson's effort with positive word of mouth (Mohr & Bitner, 1995b) Theory also argues that if the intentions behind the effort stems from ulterior motives, the urge to give back might not appear (Heider, 1979).

Theory provides indications that there are underlying mechanisms that comes into play when a salesperson exerts effort which would make it possible to hypothesize that:

TABLE 1
HYPOTHESES H1a, H1b & H1c

H1a	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction than with low effort</i>
H1b	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson than with low effort</i>
H1c	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention than with low effort</i>

2.3 WOM Request

Although salesperson effort could increase the likelihood of WOM by yielding customer satisfaction, it could also have effects on other variables (Anderson, 1998). Rather than stimulating general attitude factors, it would be preferable with those having pure implications WOM-activity. Such measures would be easier to control, execute and measure. In finding such a measure, recent studies have turned to academic psychology that often focus on various stimulus-response theories (Miron & Brehm, 2006). One such is the Question-Behavior effect, denoting how asking an individual about a future behavior will affect the subsequent behavior in the self-predicted direction. Söderlund and Mattson apply the Question-Behavior mechanism to the field of WOM. They find that merely asking a customer for a recommendation increases its intention to do so. (Söderlund & Mattson, 2015)

2.3.1 Attribution Theory

The Attribution Theory describes how individuals try to attribute causes to people's behavior (Heider, 1979). In order to do so the individual must experience the behavior and judge if the behavior was intentional. The conclusion will thus tell the individual if the behavior was forced, a result of the situation, or if it can be attributed to the person's intentions.

The Attribution Theory can be applied to a retail setting. Retailers engage in different behaviors that the customer can attribute to positive or negative underlying intentions. If the customer interprets the intention as positive, it is more likely for the behavior to come into play. For instance, a reduced price that a customer attributes to a retailer as following a low-profit, high-turnover strategy will more likely be more accepted and deemed fair than if the attributed intention was to sell low quality products. (Lichtenstein, Burton, & O'Hara, 1989)

From a retailer's perspective it is key to act in a way that will stimulate positive attributions for the customer. Mismatching communication messages could be interpreted as being in contrast to the stores overall messages. For instance, a sale with heavily reduced prices could be attributed to low quality and undesirable products. Still, it is not only the store itself that is under scrutiny for attributions, but also the salesperson. Consumers evaluate an influencing agent, such as a salesperson, depending on knowledge of persuasion motivation. (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000) The salience of ulterior motives has an effect on suitable sales strategies. When salience is high, strong sales tactics will be attributed to selfish intentions, and a weaker strategy is thus more suitable. Correspondingly, when salience is low a stronger tactic will be attributed to consumer oriented efforts and be better suited than a weak one. The higher salience for ulterior motives, the more suspicious a customer will be towards the salesperson which will result in behavior being attributed to either selfish or customer oriented intentions. This in turn boils down to positive or negative satisfaction. (DeCarlo, 2005) Thus, if it seems as if the salesperson is aggressively acting on its own winnings it will likely be deemed as acting on ulterior motives. A request for WOM is thus risking to be attributed to ulterior motive. In such a scenario the customer would not believe that the behavior of asking for a WOM request is indeed in the best interest of the customer and it may not deem it fair.

2.3.2 Impact of a WOM-Request

There is reason to believe that in accordance with previous studies by Söderlund and Mattson ,merely asking the customer to engage in WOM-activities will yield a higher intention to do so. (Söderlund & Mattson, 2015), However, the salesperson's behavior will start a cognitive process within the customer to attribute the behavior to an underlying reason, which has an impact on the customer's evaluation of the salesperson. (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000) Therefore, we hypothesize that the request will be evaluated by customers as stemming from an ulterior motive, thereby negatively impacting the satisfaction with the store and the attitude towards the salesperson.

TABLE 3
HYPOTHESES H3a, H3b & H3c

H3a	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>
H3b	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>
H3c	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>

2.3.3 The Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987) introduce the concept of the Politeness Theory. One definition of the theory describes it as: “the expression of the speaker’s intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts (hereon referred to as FTA) towards another” (Mills, 2003). Face is the positive social value an individual claims for himself, an image that others may share that is made up of approved social attributes. A person maintains face when the chosen line of social value presents an internally consistent image of the individual. (Goffman, 1955) The English expression “To Save Face” stems from this definition (Brill, 2010). Face threatening acts are what could disrupt an individual’s face and thus cause the individual to “lose face”. Brown and Levinson distinguish between positive and negative face, where threats to the positive face indicate that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings and wants. Threats to the negative self indicate that the speaker does not intend to avoid impeding the addressee’s freedom of action, an example of such a threat are orders and requests. (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987)

In order to mitigate the risk of threatening the face, politeness can be used (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987). Leech describes politeness as the desire "to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place." (Leech, 1983) There are different types of strategies to manage face-threatening acts by redressing them, described by Brown and Levinson as “attempts to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it in such a way, or with such modification or additions, that indicate clearly that no such face threat is indicated or desired”.

Strategies to mitigate FTA can be on record or off record, which means you either clearly state what you want or in a way that it is not a direct question. An example of this is: “Can you pass the salt, please?” Vs. “I’m out of cash, and I have forgotten to go to the bank”. Blum-Kulka differentiates between conventional and non-conventional indirectness in requests. The latter is a description of Brown and Levinson’s off-record politeness whilst conventional indirectness refers to a precondition in order for the requests’ realization. This mitigates the need to be direct whilst still being clear and avoids being perceived as coercive. (Blum-Kulka, 1987) If you choose to be direct you then have the option of redressing the request in a polite manner or not. Positive politeness is approach based and is used to mitigate threats to the positive face by the speaker indicating it has the same wants as the addressee. Negative politeness, on the other hand, is

avoidance based and aims to not infringe on the addressee's right to act in one way or another. This might include apologizing for the transgression or offering the addressee an "out" and not expect action unless the addressee wants to. (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Different FTA strategies come with their own advantages and disadvantages. Going on record can, amongst other things, help gain credit for honesty and avoid being misunderstood. However, going on record without redressing may be seen as harsh and is most suitably used in case of urgency "Watch out" or where there is a small threat to the face "Have a seat" and not in situations when you are trying to convince someone to comply with your request.

Even though politeness seem to be a way to mitigate face threat and avoid triggering reactance, Fraser and Nolan state that there is no such thing as inherent politeness, but it rather has to do with the context if they are perceived to be polite or not. (Fraser & Nolen, 1981) The Relevance Theory places a high emphasis on context as base of the set of assumptions an addressee considers when evaluating verbal communication. (Sperber, & Wilson, 1986) Although politeness is important so is appropriateness and politics. Assuming an approach that is considered very polite would be perceived appropriate for one person but alienate another (Goodwin & Smith, 1990). Locher and Watts argue that sticking too hard to the politeness theory may lead to expressions that are overly polite and perceived as ironic to which the addressee may take offense. (Locher & Watts, 2005)

The indirect strategy, referred to as "off-record", is the most polite strategy and used when the perceived threat to face is the greatest (Gupta, Walker, & Romano, 2007). In these situations, bluntness and directness will be received negatively. However, going off-record opens a risk of being too vague. There is research investigating how speaker status influences how the audience understands an indirect request. The finding is that the non-conventional indirectness requires more effort to understand if the speaker was of higher status than the hearer. (T. Holtgraves, 1994) Thus, if it is the case that the hearer has difficulty in distinguishing what is actually being requested, there is reason to believe that the mechanisms would not come into play, thus missing out on the desired outcome.

2.3.4 The Reactance Theory

The Reactance theory focuses on social interaction that infringes on the other person's freedom to act or not act in a certain way. It is based on the assumption that individuals experience freedom

to act to begin with. If the individual feels that its freedom is eliminated or threatened to be eliminated, the individual will react in order to protect and restore its freedom. (Brehm, 1966) A commonly referred to example of reactance is the case of a parent telling its child what to do. In this case there is a high probability that the child will react and do the opposite of what it is told. (Miron & Brehm, 2006) The freedom could also be to do nothing, where encouragement to do something may result in resistance to comply. This is not only a mechanism for behavior, but also for opinions and attitudes. Therefore, a convincing effort to change someone's attitude may be met with resistance, even though the hearer agrees with what is being said. (Fogarty, 1997)

The level of reactance depends on four variables; the importance of the free behavior threatened, the expectation that the individual possessed freedom to begin with, the magnitude of the threat to the free behavior, and the implication of the threat to other freedoms (Brehm, 1966). Since the threat of freedom can be argued to be subjective, it is difficult to make a prediction on the amount of reactance one can expect from an addressee when making a request. Misjudging the grandness of the threat you are making could have dire consequences on the behavior you wish to simulate.

A large amount of literature finds that when important freedoms are not threatened, social influence is more successful. (S. S. Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Wicklund, 1974) If a message is threatening the hearer's freedom, the positive force to comply is weaker than the stronger force to react. The hearer will thus comply if the negative force to react is substantially reduced. Their study finds that interpersonal similarity between the speaker and the hearer affects both of these forces since it increases liking. (Silvia, 2005) Research has also shown that attraction or liking to the speaker is a force towards compliance (Byrne, 1971, 1997) as well as being known to enhance actions made by the liked person. (Regan et al., 1974) Where a polite approach aims to mitigate the threat to the hearer's face and thus being considerate about other people, there is reason to believe that a polite request would enjoy similar effects.

2.3.5 Politely Asking for WOM

Research reckons that a request, by nature, is imposing (T. Holtgraves & Joong-nam, 1990). The unconventional request for WOM could arguably be seen as a request with high intrusive characteristics. Since threats to freedom trigger an individual's motivation to react against the threat, it is important to mitigate the risk of reactance from the addressee when making a request, which can be done with politeness (T. Holtgraves & Joong-nam, 1990). Since the findings apply to all types of requests, this would include a request for a recommendation. Thus, applying

politeness to a case of a WOM request could make the likelihood of compliance higher. It is therefore hypothesized that:

TABLE 3

HYPOTHESES H3a, H3b & H3c

H3a	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>
H3b	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>
H3c	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>

2.3.6 Summary of hypotheses

TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis	
H1a	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction than with low effort</i>
H1b	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson than with low effort</i>
H1c	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention than with low effort</i>
H2a	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer satisfaction with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>
H2b	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer attitude towards the salesperson with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>
H2c	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer WOM intention with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>
H3a	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>
H3b	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>
H3c	<i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>

3. METHOD

The following chapter presents the scientific approach and method applied to conduct the empirical study. A description of pre-tests will be followed by a presentation of the main study. The last part of the chapter discusses the quality of the data including reliability and validity.

This study builds on the findings by Söderlund & Mattson (2015) that merely asking a customer to recommend will increase the likelihood of the customer doing so. The thesis examines how request strategies could have additional influence on the end result. Moreover, it is also examined how salesperson effort impacts WOM-intention and customer evaluations.

A quantitative approach laid foundation for two separate studies that empirically examined the purpose. The data pertaining to study 1 was collected manually by handing out self-completion paper surveys and the data for study 2 was gathered online through the market research company NEPA. This was done to yield more reliable results in order to draw generalizable conclusions. The approach to the study is deductive; hence the hypotheses are derived from a gap in existing theoretical knowledge. Therefore, the method is designed to empirically investigate and scrutinize the gap in order to approve or reject the hypotheses. (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Malhotra & Birks, 2007) The design of the study was shaped as an in-between subjects experiment. Söderlund (2010) defines an experiment as allocating individuals in random groups and exposing them to different treatments from which the results are measured and evaluated. The experiment follows a conclusive study design with a causal research design investigating the cause and effect of relationships. (Malhotra & Birks, 2007)

3.1 Pre-Studies

To properly examine the theories the study builds upon and their implications a number of pre-studies were followed through. Each pre-study served its own purpose in guiding decisions regarding what would eventually become the main study. These included experiment design, stimuli text, and questionnaire and will be discussed in the following section.

3.1.1 Pre-Study 1: Reactions to Recommendation Requests

In the outset of the study we wanted to examine if the Politeness Theory could work in a retail context or if it would cause reactance. For this reason the help of the housing platform Qasa was employed. Five recommendation requests were formulated (appendix 1) and sent out to

customers in Qasa's support chat. The test was conducted to see what reactions these caused and ensuring that they would not cause reactance, an online company was thus deemed fair for the pre-test even though the main study would be in a B&M setting. The requests were sent out in 50 different chats. The request did not yield a single negative response but 15 positive responses indicated they would recommend Qasa to others. The other 35 responses did not respond to the request. Thus, it was concluded that the Politeness Theory could potentially prove useful in a retail context.

3.1.2 Pre-study 2: Design of Requests

The intention with the first pre-study was to better understand the implications and applications of the politeness theory in a retail context. The respondents were made up of a convenience sample consisting of 15 students from Stockholm School of Economics. A semi-formal interview approach was applied to conduct the qualitative study.

Before the interview the respondents were asked to imagine a scenario where they had visited a store to purchase a gift to a friend and they were now standing at the counter ready to check out. The respondents were told that as they were paying, the salesperson asked them for a recommendation, and were presented with a number of different types of request wordings. Brown and Levinson's (Brown & Levinson, 1987) politeness strategies laid the foundation for developing eight requests (appendix 2) divided equally between positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on politeness, and off-record politeness to see which one had the most natural fit in the scenario.

Politeness

The results from investigating the fit of different politeness strategies in the context resulted in the following findings. A majority of respondents did find a WOM peculiar in the scenario. They did not, however, deem it unrealistic. Still, due to its unusual character politeness played an important role in making sure the politeness was well received. The bald-on requests, that had not been redressed with politeness, were considered blunt and the most intrusive. The negative politeness requests were not appreciated either. According to respondents, they were too exculpatory which awoke suspicion regarding why the salesperson was making excuses. Although off-record requests were appreciated for their indirectness and thereby low intrusiveness, they were found odd in the context. The request strategies that were built on positive politeness were deemed most suitable in the context. Out of the 15 respondents, 11

thought this was the most suitable strategy. Regardless of which strategy they preferred, 10 respondents suggested that adding “if you are happy with today’s visit” before the request would make it better. The conclusion was thus that a positive politeness request would be best suited for this study. An additional finding that came from the study was that in a retail scenario it is beneficial to add a pre-condition before making an intrusion. In this case, letting the customer know that they only had to comply with the request if they were happy with the visit and if they wanted to.

3.1.3 Pre-study 3: Stimuli Text

The third pre-study was conducted quantitatively, using a convenience sample of 73 respondents sitting in the atrium at Stockholm School of Economics. The respondents were first exposed to a stimuli text about a store visit and were then asked to answer a set of questions regarding the visit. The aim of the pre-study was to see whether the stimuli text would be interpreted the way it was intended, which turned out not to be the case. Respondents found the scenario to be too unrealistic. The stimuli text was therefore changed before the next pre-test.

3.1.4 Pre-study 4: Stimuli Text and WOM Effect

The aim of the fourth pre-study was to see whether the new stimuli text would be interpreted the way it was intended, as well as to see whether a polite request would give rise to positive effects. The third pre-study was conducted quantitatively, using a convenience sample of 53 respondents from master classes at Stockholm School of Economics, receiving an online link via Facebook from March 4th to March 5th. The online survey tool Qualtrics was used, which randomly selected which survey the respondent would be exposed to. The respondents were first exposed to a stimuli text about a store visit to a sunglass shop and were then asked to answer a couple of questions.

Where the stimuli development for pre-study 3 fell short, we had learnt our lesson for pre-study 4. First of all, where pre-study 3 revealed that the scenario was too unrealistic and made them too eager to recommend regardless, the appeal of the store was slightly mitigated. The new purchase occasion took place in a store selling sunglasses, placing emphasis on how the mission of the store visit was to purchase a particular pair of sunglasses as a gift for a friend, thus not to exaggerate the store’s excellence. The salesperson was service-minded and helpful. The Polite Request-stimuli came with an positive polite request that contained a reservation for the

customer's satisfaction (*"If you are happy with today's visit, you are more than welcome to talk to your friends about us"*), as pre-study 3 indicated.

The survey following the stimuli text was very straightforward and consisting of 5 questions, measured on a 10-point scale (1= do not agree, 10= fully agree). However, because of the small samples, the results could not be statistically confirmed but rather be used as indications. Results from the pre-study revealed that the scenario was perceived to be realistic for all stimuli (No request: M= 7.31, Polite request: M= 7.94, Explanatory request: M=7.24). Satisfaction with the store was also high for all groups (No request: M= 8.13, Polite request: M= 7.94, Explanatory request: M=8.00), whereas we could conclude that the stimuli text was appropriate to use for the main study. However, the pre-study did not show that a polite request in isolation would increase the willingness to recommend or talk about the store. (Recommending the store, no request: M=7.94, Polite request: M= 7.75, talking about the store, no request: M=8.00, Polite request: M=7.94). These results however does not rule out this could potentially be the case in the main study that would include a larger sample of respondents. Thus, the decision was made to keep the polite theory in the study.

3.2 Main Studies

The pre-studies offered solid guidance for how to effectively design a main study to examine the purpose of the thesis. With input on request strategies, stimuli text design, and questionnaire layout a final stimuli text and questionnaire took shape (appendix 3 and 4). The objective was to investigate the impact of salesperson effort and WOM requests on a customer's evaluations towards a salesperson and a store and its intention to engage in WOM activity. By conducting the study twice we could with more confidence investigate whether the results were generalizable (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The method of the main studies will be presented in the following section.

3.2.1 Sample and Surveying Methods

The surveys, and thus the data for the two studies, were collected in two waves, one through handing out self-completion paper surveys ourselves, and one online through the market research company Nepa. The total number of respondents (N=552) was divided between 58.9% women and 39.7% men, and 1.3% who identified as "other". Ages of the respondents ranged from 10 to 77 years old.

Each respondent was randomly assigned to one out of six treatments. The treatments the groups were exposed to was a stimuli text where the level of salesperson effort and communicated WOM request was manipulated and differed between the groups. Following the treatments, the respondents were asked to fill out a questionnaire, which were identical to all groups. In order to assure the participants did not understand the purpose of the study, which could cause a bias (Malhotra & Birks, 2007), it was not disclosed prior to the experiment what would be tested and why.

All responses were treated anonymously in interest of protecting the integrity of the respondents and to open up the freedom for the respondents to reply completely truthfully without experiencing a risk of being judged. The respondents were not offered any reward as an incentive for participating in the study.. Considering that the stimuli text was fairly long and comprehensive, it was necessary to keep the questionnaire as straightforward and short as possible. This kept the risk of the respondents getting tired, which could cause them to lose interest and not complete the experiment or provide incorrect answers and thereby cause respondent bias (Söderlund, 2005).

The study comprises a 2 (high versus low physical effort) x3 (no request vs neutral request vs polite request) between-subject experimental design to test our predictions.

	No request	Neutral request	Polite request
Low effort			
High effort			

Model 1: The Between-Subject Experimental Design of the Study

Study 1: Data Collected Manually

The experiment of study 1 was conducted on Friday April 1st, between 12:00PM to 07:00PM at the Stockholm Central Station. It was conducted through handout of paper surveys and questionnaires to respondents. The total number of respondents added up to 250 and was divided

between 32.8% men, 64.8% women and 2% that identified as other. The ages of respondents ranged between 10 and 77. After having cleared for those not having provided accurate responses to the manipulation controls or not completed the questionnaire, the final number of respondents was 235. This resulted in a sample size well above 30 respondents in each cell, allowing us to obtain results that can be generalizable. (Bryman & Bell, 2011)

The location for the collection of responses in Study 1 were set to be the same for all respondents in order to avoid biases occurring from respondents being exposed to varying external factors. The same applied to time and the Study was conducted during one single afternoon. Additionally, the respondents that were asked were all in a similar context, sitting and waiting at waiting benches, which meant they were not in a rush. This further ensured they would carefully read the stimuli text and answer the questionnaire. The location also had to yield enough responses for the study, whereas Stockholm Central Station was chosen. Finally, paper surveys were shuffled before hand out to make sure there would not be skewed results stemming from the same treatment being handed out at the same time. Randomizing the sample can help increase the likelihood of being able to draw explicit conclusions (Söderlund & Rosengren, 2008).

Even though all researchers fight the problem whereby participants are unmotivated to follow survey instructions, correctly interpret item content or answer correctly, referred to as IER - Insufficient Effort Responding (Huang, Curran, Keeney, Poposki, & DeShon, 2012), a self-completion paper survey offers several advantages compared to other methods of collecting data. Compared to time consuming methods, where data is collected through online surveys distributed through social media and similar channels, that could take weeks, self collected methods are highly efficient. In this survey 250 responses were collected in only 7 hours. It also allows the experiment conductor to control external factors and make sure the respondents reply spontaneously. Secondly, when data is collected through social media it is not unlikely that respondents know the experiment conductor, which could affect their answers. By approaching the respondents in person, the risk of exaggerated answers can be kept at a minimum.

Study 2: Data Collected Through NEPA

The data for Study 2 was collected from April 5th through April 21st by the research company NEPA. The experiment was identical in terms of stimuli text, manipulation, and questionnaires, but differed in it was conducted diffused via email and conducted online. Respondents were

randomly assigned to the six treatments in order to attain comparable groups. The number of respondents added up to 302 and was divided between 54% women, 45.4% men and 0.6% who identified as other. Out of these respondents, 188 provided satisfactory answers to the manipulation checks and were thereby included in the empirical study. Although it was not intended to be examined empirically, there seemed to be a discrepancy between the data collected manually and that collected through the research company NEPA. This triggered a curiosity to better understand what implications it may have to collect data manually or through a research company.

Panel surveys has been used in several fields for many years and within marketing for studying consumer expenditures among others (Kalton & Citro, 1995). One of the benefits of online survey panels is that they are considered cheap (Duffy, Smith, Terhanian, & Bremer, 2005) and efficient with the potential to attain longitudinal data with a lot of analytical potential (Kalton & Citro, 1995). Even though these types of panels been pointed out to have a positive influence on marketing academia, some authors argue that there are problems when relying on these data for academic purposes. Some authors reckon that panels attract respondents with a high opportunity cost of time (Lynch, 1999), and others bring up the point that the companies operating the panels are profitable enterprises fighting off competition, making panel data sufficiently accurate for some purposes but not all. (Telser, 1962) Even though all researchers fight the problem whereby participants experience survey fatigue, scholars have also concluded that the respondent burden in panel surveys is higher than normal surveys, since panel surveys often involve several survey iterations (Lohse, Bellman, & Johnson, 2000). Moreover, there is the risk of panel selection bias, the notion that people participating in the survey panels differ largely from the rest of the population. It could also be that panelist responses give rise to conditioning effects, referring to how the findings of a panel survey can become affected by the process of conducting the panel itself. One example of this is a respondent who learns that a yes-response leads to follow-up question whereas a no-response does not, making the respondent give a no-answer just to avoid the extra questions (Lohse et al., 2000). Still, for this study, collecting responses through NEPA was seen as beneficial. NEPA is an established research company on the Swedish market that could offer a high number of respondents within a short amount of time.

3.3 Research Methods

Since the intention of the study was to study a specific customer-salesperson interaction that had to be identical in all treatments, it was decided to conduct the experiment through a survey rather

than a real life experiment. The latter was deemed risky and unlikely to produce enough satisfactory scenarios within the limited time that was at disposal. Another risk was relying on the salesperson's ability to produce a specific scenario and duplicate interactions with customers in a natural way. Additionally, the likelihood of a store accepting a live experiment with treatments that might produce low customer evaluations was highly unlikely. This was confirmed in pre-test number one by the housing rental platform Qasa. Therefore, the study made use of a text-based role-play scenario approach, which has been frequently used in service research (M. J. Bitner, 1990) as well as word-of-mouth research (Söderlund & Rosengren, 2007). Moreover, the approach allows an increased control over the manipulated variables and reduces random "noise" in the experimental setting, as well as shortening the time span of the experiment. This is particularly important when testing for word-of-mouth which is difficult to study as it occurs.

3.3.1 Stimuli Development

Following the decision to conduct a survey experiment the next step in the process was to develop the stimuli text itself. The text was to describe a scenario of a customer visiting a store with sunglasses in order to purchase a gift for a friend. In the customer encounter, the salesperson will vary in the level of effort it exerts and in making a WOM request or not.

The Scenario

In the stimuli text the respondent was asked to imagine a scenario where it was going shopping to purchase a birthday present to a friend. The reason for this was that in a situation of purchasing gifts, research shows that individuals are less price sensitive than otherwise (R. W. Belk, 1982a). Because we did not want price to affect the customer's WOM intention we adapted the text to those findings. Moreover, it was important that the customer did not find the salesperson pushy. Since studies suggest that a customer seeks more input from a salesperson when it purchases a gift (Grønhaug, 1972), and thus would be less likely to find it pushy, it further strengthened the decision to choose a gift-giving scenario.

Scholars have found that when shopping for a gift the customers' behavior differ from when they are shopping for personal use (Scammon, Shaw, & Bamossy, 1982). Some argue that shopping for a gift is especially involving (R. W. Belk, 1982b). A possible explanation could be that a gift-giver must put effort into choosing "the right" gift that will be interpreted right by the gift-receiver (Scammon et al., 1982). Thus, setting a gift-giving scenario would supposedly make the respondents more attentive and thorough when answering the survey.

Finally, it was of importance that the customer had a clear mission in mind that it would accomplish throughout the stimuli text. By stating that there was a need to purchase to the following day the need was established and by purchasing the glasses in the text, the goal was accomplished. This is in accordance with research by (Mohr & Bitner, 1995), stating that consumers are more likely to recognize employee effort if they receive the desired service outcome.

The Product

The choice of product in the stimuli text was set to a pair of sunglasses. The aim was to find a neutral product that is used and purchased by all genders. Still, there are other factors that influence the choice of product as well. One of them being if it should be utilitarian, to solve problems, or hedonistic, for enjoyment (Childers, Carr, Peck, & Carson, 2001). Sunglasses given to a friend were chosen as a balance between the two. The need to purchase a birthday present represented the utilitarian need whilst the want to give a good present and be perceived well by a friend represented the hedonistic need. The combination meant the respondent would indeed need some interaction and service offered by the salesperson which would make it less likely to feel that the salesperson pushy in a way that could affect the results of the study.

3.3.2 Manipulations

In order to assure the treatments in the groups were not only comprehended but would test the different levels of effort and request strategies, findings from pre-studies and literature was consulted. This helped form the way request strategies and effort was communicated in the stimuli text and control questions that would ensure the treatments were comprehended.

Manipulating Requests

Three different WOM-request scenarios would be tested; one lacking a request, one with a neutral request, and one with a polite request. When developing the various scenarios, the results from the pre-studies were used to make improvements for the main study. First of all, to see whether the stimuli produced the desired effects, one scenario did not contain any request and thus functioned as a control group.

The neutral request scenario was kept from the pre-study; “*So recommend us to your friends!*”. The respondents perceived this particular wording in the qualitative interviews as realistic, but

somewhat impolite. Still it was deemed acceptable in a retail setting. The polite request was developed in accordance with what the Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) would define as a positive polite strategy. The reason behind it being the findings from Pre-Study 2 that ruled out negative, bald-on, and off-record politeness strategies. The positively polite strategy was seen as most natural in a retail setting and in the pre-test, the respondents did not find it particularly intrusive. In accordance with theory on conventional and non-conventional indirectness (Blum-Kulka, 1987), a precondition was added before the request to make it feel less intrusive. The precondition to the polite request was worded as: “If you are happy with today’s visit..”. The second part of the request was the actual request. Pre-studies showed that clarity was appreciated in combination with politeness that made the request less intrusive. Thus, in order to minimize intrusiveness the wording was set to be “talk about us” instead of “recommend us”. The indirectness indicated the customers were free to say whatever they wanted about the strong and was not forcing them to make a recommendation. In the end the polite request was set to be: “*If you are happy with your visit today, you are more than welcome to talk about us with your friends*”.

Manipulating Salesperson Effort

In manipulating salesperson effort, two factors were influenced: firstly how much effort the salesperson put into conversing with the customer, and secondly how much effort the salesperson exerted physically to help the customer. First, in the high effort treatments the salesperson climbed a ladder to collect the glasses and almost broke a sweat trying to provide the best service possible. Secondly, effort was expressed through communication. The high effort treatments differed from the low effort ones in the salesperson’s engagement in providing information about the product to the customer. Also, the high effort scenarios offered an explanation to why the request for WOM-activity was occurring: “We just opened shop and work hard to offer our customers a wide assortment of models and brands”. Providing an explanation could also be a way to mitigate a service failure and turn it into a satisfying incident (M. J. Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994), in this case an explanation could mitigate the negative effects of a service failure in the shape of a WOM-request. If the customer would perceive the request to be annoying, an explanation could then restore the satisfaction.

Reading Apprehension

To make sure that the respondents read the full stimuli text and comprehended the manipulations, some additional elements were added that were measured in the questionnaire. The elements filled a second purpose of removing attention from the purpose in order to minimize the risk of respondent bias. First, in the second paragraph of the text it was stated that the salesperson was wearing a black t-shirt. It was assumed that such a statement would stand out in the text, whereas anyone who read the text should comprehend the color. No further information regarding the salesperson, in order to avoid biased answers due to gender, looks, or any other characteristic. The price of the glasses was revealed as 850 SEK. It was a fairly high price in general, but deemed normal for a pair of sunglasses. To make sure the respondents would not react negatively to the price, the intention was to give away the sunglasses as a gift, which was previously discussed. Finally, to confuse the reader and make the text even more memorable, a section was added where the salesperson attempts to persuade the customer of purchasing a pair of glasses for themselves but without pushing the subject further when the customer rejected the offer.

3.4 Measures

Theories were consulted in order to find measures that would capture the effects of the stimuli. The measures will be presented in the following section.

3.4.1 WOM

Intention for WOM-activity

To measure the customer's intention to engage in WOM-activity two questions were applied. The reason being that there might be a difference between the intention to merely talk about something and recommending it. Therefore, the question: "How likely is it that you would recommend the store to someone?" from research by (Reichheld, 2003), was used to measure the recommendation intention. To measure the intention to talk about the store the question "How likely is it that you would talk about the store with someone" as used. Both questions were measured on a 10-point scale (1= does not correspond, 10= corresponds completely). The two questions were averaged to form an index, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,891.

WOM-Tonality

To gain further insight on the customer WOM-intention and difference in motivation to recommend or simply talk, which could imply both positive or negative conversations, a question

on WOM-tonality was added. The question, that was open-ended, was formulated: “If you were to tell others about this store, what would you tell them?”.

3.4.2 Salesperson Evaluation

Attitude Towards the Salesperson

With the intention to investigate if salesperson effort and WOM-request would have an impact on how the salesperson was perceived, questions regarding the customer’s attitude towards the salesperson were included. The question: “What is your impression of the salesperson” was followed by three commonly used statements (Söderlund & Mattson, 2015) measured on a 10-point scale: “good-bad”, “dislike-like”, and “unpleasant-pleasant”. The three questions were averaged to form an index with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0,931, which indicates a high level of internal consistency.

Politeness

Since the experiment concerned the Politeness Theory a question regarding how polite the respondent found the salesperson was also added: “What is your impression of the salesperson?”, which was measured on a 10-point scale (1=impolite, 10=polite). Since there were no preexisting measures of the politeness of a request this question had to be manufacture for the study. Also, in order to not give away the purpose of the study, no further questions were included on the subject.

Perceived Employee Effort

To empirically ensure that the respondents did perceive the high-effort treatments as more effortful, measures of perceived employee effort were included (Mohr & Bitner, 1995). Due to space-limitation and context inappropriateness, only three out of five original measures were included: “The employee put a lot of effort into this situation.”, “The employee spent much time in this situation”, and “The employee exerted a lot of energy in this situation”.

The questions were measured on a 10-point scale (1= does not correspond, 10= corresponds completely). The Cronbach’s Alpha for the indexed questions was 0,951, and was therefore deemed to be a reliable index.

Ulterior Motives

To measure the customer’s suspicion of ulterior motives from the salesperson two statements were averaged to form an index (DeCarlo, 2005). "The salesperson has an ulterior motive for his

behavior" and "The salesperson's comments are suspicious". The statements were measured on a 10-point scale (1= does not correspond, 10= corresponds completely).

Intrusiveness

In accordance with the Reactance Theory, the perceived threat to the customers freedom was measured by the level of intrusiveness by the salesperson that the respondents experienced. The ad intrusiveness scale (Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002) was adapted to fit a salesperson-customer interaction. Respondents were asked "To what extent do you agree that the salesperson was...", followed by the four statements "Disturbing", "Forced", "Intrusive", and "Infering". These were measured on a 10-point scale (1= does not correspond, 10= corresponds completely). The ad intrusiveness scale originally includes seven statements, however only four were used in the questionnaire. This was due to space limitations and the adaption to fit a salesperson encounter rather than an advertisement. The questions were averaged to form an index with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,915.

Reciprocity

Most established measures on reciprocity look at how likely someone is to reciprocate in general, and not in specific situations. Therefore, the study uses measures of perceived indebtedness (Dorsch & Kelley, 1994) to measure a respondent's will to reciprocate in the experiment. Although the original study used five statements, only three were included in the questionnaire due to space limitations and appropriateness in the context. The three statements were: "I felt that I wanted to do something more for the salesperson than just buying sunglasses", "I experienced that I owed the salesperson something" and "I felt that I wanted to repay the salesperson somehow" and were averaged to form an index with a Cronbach's alpha of 0,888. The statements were measured on a 10-point scale (1= does not correspond, 10= corresponds completely).

3.4.3 Store Evaluation

Customer Satisfaction

To measure the treatments on customer evaluation towards the store, measures of satisfaction were included in the study. Three satisfaction questions (Fornell, 1992) were averaged to form an index with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,884. The respondents were asked to answer: "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this store" (1=very dissatisfied, 10= very satisfied), "To what extent does this store meet your expectations?" (1=not at all, 10= totally), and "Imagine a sunglass store

that is perfect in every respect. How near or far from this ideal do you find this store?” (1=very far from, 10=cannot get any closer).

Perceived Quality

To measure how respondent's perceived quality as a result of the experiment treatment, measurements of the perceived quality of the products was taken from research by (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991), with the statement “The sunglasses that the store sells is of high quality”, measured on a 10-point scale (1= does not correspond, 10= corresponds completely)

Confidence in quality

In addition to the customer's perceived quality measures were added to investigate how the respondent felt about the stores confidence of selling high quality products. The questions “Does the store seem confident in the quality of its sunglasses” was added with that intention and it was measured on a 10-point scale (1= not at all convinced, 10=fully convinced).

3.4.4 Manipulation Checks

Because of the relatively long stimuli text, it was important to include manipulation checks in the questionnaire to make sure respondents apprehended the treatment. Since placing manipulation checks in the beginning of a questionnaire, prior to other questions, can potentially affects the following responses (Söderlund, 2010) the manipulation checks were placed at the end of the questionnaire.

A so called filler item (Söderlund, 2010) with the intention to confuse the respondent about the purpose of the study was added in the middle of the questionnaire. The question was: “Did the salesperson try to sell a pair of sunglasses to you for your own private use” and the respondents could reply either “yes” or “no”. Another such question was “What color was the shirt of the salesperson”, this question was placed at the end of the questionnaire and also had the purpose of ensuring the respondent had read the entire stimuli text. The respondents were given four alternative colors to choose from. A third question asked respondents “How much did the glasses cost?”, where respondents typed in the cost in SEK. The fourth manipulation check was a yes/no-question, “Is the store part of a chain of similar stores”, and the fifth manipulation check was: “I was asked to recommend the store”, measured on a 10-point scale (1=do not agree at all, 10= completely agree).

3.5 Statistical analysis

The analysis was conducted using IBM Analytics software SPSS (version 23). Since our hypothesis concerned more than two groups and was split into two factors, a two-way ANOVA test was used to run the analyses, however independent t-tests were conducted to zoom in on results where no post-hoc test was possible. This was only done to tests with a maximum of two groups. To test for additional findings and conduct manipulation controls independent t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used. Throughout all tests, the significance level was strictly kept at 5 percent.

3.6 Data Quality

In order to ensure that the findings of the study are accurate, the reliability and validity of the study was evaluated (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The former measures the consistency of a measure and its potential to produce similar results, in the same conditions over time. Validity on the other hand, measures how well founded the findings and really measure what they intend to. (Söderlund, 2010) A discussion of the reliability and validity will be held in the following section.

3.6.1 Reliability

Reliability is a concept that measures whether an experiment can give consistent results if performed on several different occasions. It is measured in terms of *stability over time* and *internal reliability* (Bryman & Bell, 2015)

To ensure stability over time, several measures were taken. First, pre-study 4 used identical stimuli as the main study in order to test the scenario realism. Second, before conducting Study 1 the questionnaire was pre-tested on six students to confirm that respondents would understand the questions and interpret them as intended. Third, since the only reliable way to ensure stability in the measurements is to conduct a re-test (Malhotra, 2008), two separate studies were conducted.

Internal reliability was also considered in the studies, which measures the correlations of different items on the same test (Söderlund, 2010). Therefore, multi-item scales were used for the same construct to the largest possible extent. The use of secondary research for theory and scale selection has mostly been from well-cited books and journal articles, to further ensure high reliability. Furthermore, some of the multiple-item scales for the independent variables were adjusted in order to be more suitable for the study (Söderlund 2005), both in terms of size and

applicability. The multiple-item scales were tested through a calculation of Cronbach's alpha in order to ensure that they capture the underlying construct and correlate positively (Söderlund, 2010). Items were indexed only if the Cronbach's alpha was higher than the minimum level of 0.7 because then they are considered to be of high internal consistency (Söderlund, 2010). By undertaking these measures to ensure reliability, the overall reliability of the study is considered to be high.

3.6.2 Validity

Validity in a study refers to its accuracy in measuring what it was intended to measure and to what extent the measure is free from random and systematic measurement errors (Söderlund, 2010). Internal validity is a term that describes the extent to which one can indicate that there exists a causal relationship between the independent and the dependent variable (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). When the concept is applied to this study, it refers to which extent the WOM-intention is influenced by the type of request and salesperson effort, and not by external factors. To ensure this, several manipulation controls were applied and the choice of brand and store in the stimuli text was fictional. The reason for the latter choice was to exclude the potential impact of pre-existing attitudes to an existing brand. Eliminating data from respondents who had failed to provide correct answers to the manipulation checks further strengthened the validity of the survey. Based on the above, the internal validity of the study is deemed to be high.

External validity concerns the concerns the cause-and-effect relationship in the experiment and if it can be generalized beyond the specific research context (Malhotra, 2008). Considering that the experiment was conducted through a survey, this may cause the results to be less generalizable compared to if it had been conducted in real life.

Moreover, the samples of respondents for both main studies are considered relatively heterogeneous and widely distributed in terms of age and gender. The respondents in Study 1 were approached at the Stockholm Central Station, the main travel hub in Stockholm where respondents come from different places of origin, were considered to represent the general Swedish population. For Study 2, panelists of the research company Nepa was used, a sample which is widely distributed in terms of age, gender, regional origin and occupation. Overall, the external validity as of how generalizable the results are was considered high.

Finally, since all respondents were approached in Sweden with the precondition of the ability to take the survey in Swedish, the results cannot be generalized to other geographical markets. Since the notion of politeness might be perceived different in other languages than Swedish due to nuances in languages the findings of the study will be specific to the Swedish market. The notion of ecological validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015), which concerns whether the findings can be applied to people's everyday, natural, social settings, was ensured of through a carefully designed stimuli text. Pre-testing the stimuli text and ensuring that the scenario was perceived as realistic strengthens the ecological validity of the survey.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The following chapter presents the results of the empirical analysis. First manipulation controls will be tested, after which the study will focus on the hypotheses. We first conduct tests with a two-way analysis of variances, followed by independent t-test where post-hoc tests could not be conducted. The chapter concludes with additional findings and a summary of the results.

4.1 Manipulation Controls

Before investigating the results of the hypotheses, manipulation controls were conducted to assess the internal validity and ensure that the observed effects were a result of the research stimulus. First, we ensured that the text was typical of a service encounter by asking the respondents about the realism of the stimuli text. All scenarios received scores well above the middle of the ten-point scale ($M=6,83$, $SD=2,290$), enabling us to conclude that all scenarios were perceived to be realistic.

To ensure that the manipulation of effort had worked, an independent samples t-test tested whether high effort scenarios were perceived to be more effortful than the low effort scenarios. There was a significant difference in means between the low effort scenarios ($M=7,68$, $SD=3,29$) and the high effort scenarios ($M=8,86$, $SD=3,40$, $t(421)=-3,635$, $p=0,00$), proving that the manipulation of effort successful.

A mean comparison test was carried out for the control question validating that the groups that were exposed to a scenario with a WOM-request had comprehended the manipulation. The data revealed that in all low effort cases respondents grasped whether they were exposed to a recommendation request or not (no request: $M=2,65$, neutral request: $M=6,89$, polite request: $M=7,85$). However, the request seems to have gone unnoticed in the high effort scenarios (no request: $M=7,82$, neutral request: $M=6,34$, polite request: $M=3,56$). Additionally, a one-way ANOVA found no significant mean differences in how polite the salesperson appeared between the types of requests (no request: $M=7,40$, neutral request: $M=7,58$, polite request: $M=7,58$, $p=0,568$). However, the means do indicate that any request was perceived as more polite than no request

In order to further validate our results and make sure that the respondents had comprehended the stimuli, the responses were only included in the analysis if they had correctly answered the control questions. Out of which two were multiple choice with only one correct alternative. The third control question was open ended and asked for the price of the sunglasses. For this question, all responses within a 50 SEK standard deviation were kept. Altogether, this screening led to a total number of rejected responses of 129.

4.2 Results

Both Study 1 and Study 2 were conducted to examine the effects of different types of effort on customer evaluations. Since the surveys were identically designed, the same tests were run on both data sets. To assess the hypotheses, a two-way between-groups analysis of variance was used.

4.2.1 Study 1

To test the hypotheses, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of salesperson effort and different requests for WOM on customer satisfaction, the attitude towards the salesperson and the intention to engage in WOM.

Satisfaction

As for customer satisfaction, there was no significant interaction effect, ($F(2, 229) = 0,398, p = 0,859$). Neither was the main effect for effort significant ($F(2, 229) = 8,773, p = 0,069$), nor was the main effect for the type of request ($F(2, 229) = 0,706, p = 0,765$). Therefore, a post-hoc test was not conducted, concluding that neither a request, the type of request nor effort has a statistically confirmed impact on the customer satisfaction.

Salesperson Attitude

Running the two-way ANOVA on the variable measuring the customer's attitude towards the salesperson, no interaction effects were found to be significant ($F(2, 229) = 5,320, p = 0,232$). The main effect for the type of request was not statistically significant ($F(2, 229) = 0,328, p = 0,721$). However, the main effect for effort was found to be statistically significant ($F(2, 229) = 11,793, p = 0,001$). Since there are only two levels in the variable for effort, no post-hoc tests could be conducted. When running an independent samples t-test, the test revealed that there were significant differences on the attitude towards the salesperson between low effort ($M = 6,74$,

SD=1,79) and high effort (M=7,62, SD=1,99); ($t(233) = -3,52, p = 0,001$). Suggesting that more effort exerted does have a positive effect on the customer's evaluation of the salesperson.

WOM-Intention

In assessing hypothesis H1c, the two-way ANOVA revealed that for the WOM-intention, there was no statistically significant interaction effect ($F(2, 229) = 0,700, p = 0,498$). The main effect for the type of request was not found to be significant for the intention to engage in WOM either, ($F(2, 229) = 0,352, p = 0,704$). However, the main effect for effort was found to be significant for this variable, ($F(2, 229) = 4,481, p = 0,035$). Similarly to the previously tested variable, an independent samples t-test revealed that the significance was in favor of the hypothesis, that the intention to engage in WOM between low effort (M=6,31, SD=2,07) and high effort (M=6,87, SD=2,03); ($t(233) = -2,1, p = 0,038$) was significant. Thus, more effort does have a positive effect on the customer's intention to engage in WOM-activities.

TABLE 5
HYPOTHESES H1a, H1b & H1c

Hypothesis	Study 1
H1a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction than with low effort</i>	Rejected
H1b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson than with low effort</i>	Failed to be rejected
H1c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention than with low effort</i>	Failed to be rejected

Since none of the interaction effects were significant, hypotheses H2a-c and H3a-c would be rejected. Still, the means will be presented below. When the effort of the salesperson is high, there was no significant difference in means for the customer satisfaction between a scenario without any request (M=6,86, SD=1,69) and one with either a neutral request (M=6,84, SD=1,60) or a polite request (M=6,95, SD=1, 72). The lack of significance would also be apparent for the attitude towards the salesperson (no request: M=6,33, SD=2,00, a neutral request: M=6,33, SD=1,96, a polite request: M=7,05, SD= 1,97) as well as for the WOM-intention (no request: M=6,08, SD=1,99, a neutral request: M=6,63, SD=2,13, a polite request: M=6,23, SD= 2,43).

TABLE 6
HYPOTHESES H2a-c & H3a-c

Hypothesis	Study 1
H2a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer satisfaction with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H2b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer attitude towards the salesperson with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H2c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer WOM intention with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H3a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H3b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H3c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected

4.2.2 Study 2

Once again in Study 2, to test hypotheses H1a-c, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of different requests and effort on customer satisfaction, the attitude towards the salesperson and the WOM-intention.

Customer satisfaction

For customer satisfaction, no significant interaction effect between the type of request and the degree of salesperson effort was found, ($F(2, 182) = 0,694, p = 0,501$). Neither was the main effect for effort significant ($F(1, 182) = 0,032, p = 0,857$) or the main effect for the type of request ($F(2, 182) = 0,888, p = 0,413$). No post-hoc tests were conducted on the variable, concluding that effort does not have a statistically confirmed impact on the customer satisfaction in Study 2.

Salesperson Attitude

No significant results were found for the variable measuring the attitude towards the salesperson. Neither the interaction effect, ($F(2, 182) = 1,279, p = 0,281$), the main effect for effort ($F(2, 182) = 0,003, p = 0,956$), nor the main effect for the type of request ($F(2, 182) = 0,574, p = 0,564$) was found to be significant.

WOM-intention

For the intention to engage in WOM-activities, neither the interaction effect ($F(2, 182) = 1,059, p = 0,349$), the main effect for effort ($F(1, 182) = 0,335, p = 0,563$) nor the main effect for the type of request ($F(2, 182) = 0,820, p = 0,442$) was found to be significant.

No post-hoc tests were conducted for any of the variables since no significant results were attained. The results from Study 2 suggest that neither effort nor the type of request has any significant impact on customer satisfaction, the attitude towards the salesperson or the willingness to engage in WOM.

TABLE 7
HYPOTHESES H1a, H1b & H1c

Hypothesis	Study 2
H1a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction than with low effort</i>	Rejected
H1b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson than with low effort</i>	Rejected
H1c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention than with low effort</i>	Rejected

As with Study 1, the mean values will be presented below to zoom into the results for assessing hypotheses H2a-c and H3a-c, which results from the two-way ANOVA suggest would be rejected. Neither for customer satisfaction (neutral request: $M=7,17$, $SD=1,72$, polite request: $M=6,58$, $SD=1,88$), the attitude towards the salesperson (neutral request: $M=7,42$, $SD=2,39$, polite request: $M=6,80$, $SD=1,97$) nor the WOM-intention (neutral request: $M=7,07$, $SD=2,03$, polite request: $M=6,01$, $SD=2,51$). Although no significance were found, the results were interesting in the sense that the levels of the means for the neutral request cases were consistently higher than the means for the polite request cases. Still, we could reject hypotheses H2a-c and H3a-c since the results from Study 2 did not provide support for a WOM-request as having an impact on the tested variables when the salesperson exerts effort.

TABLE 8
HYPOTHESES H2a-c & H3a-c

Hypothesis	Study 2
H2a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer satisfaction with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H2b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer attitude towards the salesperson with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H2c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer WOM intention with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H3a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H3b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected
H3c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected

4.3 Additional Findings

Besides our main dependent variables, we studied the impact of the stimuli using a two-way ANOVA on other variables. The aim was to see whether any significant main or interaction effects were to be found between the degree of effort and the type of request on these variables. The findings from the two studies will be presented below, as well as findings from a test comparing the two data sets.

4.3.1 Study 1

The results revealed that there was a significant difference in means for the variable measuring reciprocity between low effort ($M=3,13$, $SD=1,91$) and high effort ($M=4,21$, $SD= 2,69$) $F(1, 233)=12,727$, $p=0,000$). Indicating that when a salesperson exerts effort it positively affects the customer's urge to reciprocate.

There was also a significant difference in means for the perceived quality of the products when effort was exerted (low effort: $M=7,02$, $SD=2,08$, high effort: $M=7,59$, $SD= 1,84$) $F(1, 233)=18,804$, $p=0,029$). These results suggest that salesperson effort positively affect the perceived quality of the products sold.

The test was also run on the stores perceived confidence in the quality of its products, where no significant interaction effect was found between the degree of effort and the type of request ($F(2, 229)=3,948$, $p=0,971$). There was no significant main effect for the type of request either ($F(2, 229)=4,108$, $p=1,010$). However, there was a significant main effect for effort ($F(2, 229)=4, 451$,

$p = 0,036$). An independent t-test proved that the significant difference in means was in the predicted direction, that if the salesperson exerts low effort, the customer perceives the store to have lower confidence in the quality of its products ($M=7,55$, $SD= 2,12$) than high effort ($M=8,11$, $SD=1,89$, $t(233)= -2,113$, $p = 0,036$.)

Moreover, running a two-way ANOVA on the WOM-tonality variable, a significant main effect was found for effort ($F(2, 229)= 6,687$, $p = 0,010$). However, no significant interaction effect was found ($F(2, 229)=0,330$, $p = 0,720$), nor was the main effect for the type of request significant ($F(2, 229)=0, 043$, $p = 0,958$). An independent t-test on the effort-variable revealed that the means for the WOM-tonality was significantly higher for the high effort-manipulations ($M=2,42$, $SD=0,641$) than the low effort-manipulations ($M=2,18$, $SD=0,734$, $t(233)= -2,589$, $p = 0,010$). Indicating that salesperson effort positively affects the tonality of WOM.

4.3.2 Study 2

The two-way ANOVA on reciprocity revealed that there was a significant interaction effect, ($F(2, 182)= 3,368$, $p = 0,037$). The main effects were not significant for neither effort ($F(1, 182)= 2,221$, $p = 0,138$), nor the main effect for the type of request ($F(2, 182)= 1,631$, $p = 0,199$). Running an independent t-test on the effort-variable, after splitting the file between the type of request, revealed that there was a significant difference in means between effort for the level of reciprocity when the request is polite (low effort: $M=2,87$, $SD=1,71$, high effort: $M=5,65$, $SD=3,46$, $t(65)= -3,123$, $p = 0,003$). Suggesting that when the salesperson exerts effort, a polite request positively affects how eager the customer is to reciprocate.

4.3.3 Comparison of Studies

To examine if the two data sets differed significantly from one another independent samples t-tests were run. Testing the variable for reciprocity revealed that there was a significant difference in means for reciprocity between the manually collected data from Study 1 ($M=3,64$, $SD=2,37$) and the panel data from Study 2 ($M=4,32$, $SD=3,84$, $t(421)=2,228$, $p = 0,026$). Respondents from the Study 1 did not feel as much of an urge to reciprocate for the salesperson's behavior, as did those from Study 2. This also proved true for the perceived effort exerted by the salesperson, where there was a significant difference between the manually collected data ($M=7,54$, $SD=2,37$) and the panel data ($M=9,16$, $SD=4,49$, $t(421)=4,977$, $p = 0,000$). Indicating that respondents from the manually collected data perceived the salesperson as exerting less effort than those from the panel data.

All scenarios displayed high mean scores for the ulterior motives of the salesperson ($M= 6,7$, $SD= 3,75$). Indicating that the salience of ulterior motives was relatively high in the scenarios. Running an independent samples t-test revealed that there was a significant difference in means between the manually collected data ($M=5,97$, $SD=2,56$) and the panel data ($M=7,61$, $SD=4,69$, $t(421)=4,579$, $p = 0,000$). Showing that respondents in Study 1 did not perceive that the salesperson acted out of ulterior motives as much as did those from Study 2.

Further, all scenarios received relatively low means in how intrusive the salesperson was perceived to be ($M= 5,29$, $SD=3,63$). An independent samples t-test revealed that the manually collected data received significantly lower means ($M=4,55$, $SD=2,25$) than the panel data ($M=6,21$, $SD=4,67$, $t(421)=4,802$, $p = 0,000$). Thus, the respondents from the manually collected data perceived the salesperson as being less intrusive than those from the panel data.

4.4 Summary of Results

The results of the two studies are conclusive. In Study 1, we find that salesperson effort positively affects the customer's attitude towards the salesperson as well as the intention to engage in WOM. Study 2 does not replicate the results.

TABLE 9
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Hypothesis	Study 1	Study 2
H1a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction than with low effort</i>	Rejected	Rejected
H1b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson than with low effort</i>	Failed to be rejected	Rejected
H1c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention than with low effort</i>	Failed to be rejected	Rejected
H2a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer satisfaction with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected	Rejected
H2b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield lower customer attitude towards the salesperson with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected	Rejected
H2c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer WOM intention with a WOM-request than with no WOM-request</i>	Rejected	Rejected
H3a <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer satisfaction with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected	Rejected
H3b <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher customer attitude towards the salesperson with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected	Rejected
H3c <i>A customer encounter where the salesperson exerts high effort will yield higher WOM-intention with a polite WOM-request than a neutral WOM-request</i>	Rejected	Rejected

5. DISCUSSION

The final chapter will entertain a discussion on the results of the studies. The main purpose of the thesis will be revisited and a conclusion regarding the findings will be drawn. This will be followed by a general discussion.

The chapter will conclude with limitations, managerial and theoretical implications, and suggestions of further research.

5.1 Conclusion

The introductory chapter of the thesis presented the purpose of the study. The objective was to shed new light on WOM literature and merge it with theories of salesperson effort and request strategies. To do so, we examined actionable steps a salesperson can take in order to increase the likelihood of WOM-activity. This section will provide a conclusion regarding the main purpose, broken down into the three research questions.

RQ1. Does salesperson effort increase WOM-intention and customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store?

Previous research on salesperson effort indicates that it positively impacts customer evaluations. Still, none had made the connection between salesperson effort and its impact on a customer's intention to engage in WOM-activity. The empirical findings of Study 1 support that salesperson effort increase a customer's WOM-intention. However, the results were not replicated in Study 2. Study 1 also found, without the support of Study 2, that salesperson effort positively impacts the customer's attitude towards the salesperson. Finally, customer store satisfaction was examined but neither study produced significant results that salesperson effort positively impacts satisfaction.

RQ2. Does a WOM-request increase WOM-intention and negatively affect customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store?

Recent studies have shown that merely asking a customer to make a recommendation increases the likelihood of the customer doing so. However, a request can be seen as an imposition and could therefore cause the person who is being imposed upon to negatively react. Imposing actions in general, and requests in particular, could have dire consequences on the evaluation variables of the person being imposed upon. Thus, the study was designed to empirically examine if a WOM-request increases the likelihood of WOM-activity and what effect it has on customer evaluations. Both Study 1 and Study 2 failed in producing significant results supporting that WOM-intention

and customer evaluations of salesperson and the store were affected when a WOM-request was added to the stimuli text. It seems no exceptional harm is caused when a salesperson asks for a WOM-request. More surprisingly, no significant empirical support was found that a WOM-request increased the customer's WOM-intention. The results from this study thus challenge previous studies suggesting that this would be the case.

RQ3. Does a polite WOM request yield higher WOM intention and customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store than a neutral request does?

Building on psychological studies suggesting that imposing actions may cause the person that is being imposed upon to react, other theories have been developed in order to mitigate the risk of reactance. One of these is the politeness theory that is commonly used to explain how to neutralise an imposing threat. Thus, the study set out to empirically study what effects the politeness theory has when applied to a WOM-request and how it affects a customer's WOM-intention and evaluations. No significant results were found to support that a polite request would yield better results to the store than a neutral one in neither of the studies.

5.2 General Discussion

The knowledge contribution section specified that the study intended to expand the theoretical field of WOM by merging said theory with those of salesperson effort and request strategies. Therefore, the study sheds light on new ways to apply theories of effort and the politeness theory. To achieve as generalizable results as possible, the first study was replicated with a second group of respondents, keeping everything else identical. Thus, one can with confidence argue that the empirical findings lays base for a solid discussion.

Along the lines of previous effort literature, Study 1 indicated that salesperson effort has a positive impact on customer attitude towards the salesperson and the intention to engage in WOM-activity. Store satisfaction did not yield significant results. Further, the results did not confirm that a request strategy would have an impact on a customer's WOM-intention or evaluations of the salesperson or the store. The findings are of interest in practice and academically. A store manager can apply the knowledge as it shapes strategies for its sales personnel. Academically, the merge of WOM, request strategies, and effort should spark interest for researchers to dig deeper into the subject. Considering that the study challenges previous theory (Söderlund & Mattson, 2015; Söderlund & Mattson, 2015) it should be especially interesting to understand why there is a discrepancy between those results and the ones found in

this study. In addition, the results are curious as theories from psychology, such as reactance theory, strongly indicated that adding a request strategy, which by nature is imposing, should affect customer evaluations. Still, no such findings were identified. As an extension to the theory of reactance, politeness theory was applied to shape request strategies that would be beneficial in a WOM request scenario. No significant results were produced from that attempt even though theory strongly indicated that so should be the case. A discussion on the findings will be held below.

5.2.1 Impact of Salesperson Effort

In contrast to what previous studies have indicated, neither Study 1 nor Study 2 supported that salesperson effort has a positive impact on customer satisfaction towards the store. Study 1 provided empirical support for how salesperson effort does have an impact on the customer's attitude towards the salesperson and the WOM-intention.

The thesis supports that salesperson effort positively affects the customer's willingness to reciprocate the effort. This is in accordance with reasoning by Mohr and Bitner (Mohr & Bitner, 1995b), reckoning that the customer's will to reward the salesperson's effort could result in positive word-of mouth. It strengthens their findings that salesperson effort is beneficial in a service scenario, and suggest that research on how expressed effort in advertisements gives rise to positive evaluations (Kirmani & Wright, 1989) would apply in a store setting as well.

The study stresses the importance of a salesperson expressing effort in a customer encounter. This is in line with research showing that people prefer websites with longer waiting times if the website can show that it exerts effort (Buell & Norton, 2011). Translated to a service encounter, effort becomes a factor a store manager should keep in mind as it shapes a sales strategy. The study provides further empirical support for findings reckoning that the effects from putting effort into advertising can be transferred into the sales encounter, when the effort exerted becomes a cue to quality (Kirmani & Wright, 1989).

Although results from Study 1 indicated that salesperson effort stimulated WOM-activity and positive salesperson attitude, we were surprised that the findings did not stretch to customer satisfaction towards the store in neither study. This might be in line with research on advertising expenses, showing that excessive expenditure could be perceived as desperate and used as a cue for low confidence in the products (Kirmani & Wright, 1989). Still, Study 1 did not provide

empirical support for this theory, since the high effort scenarios yielded significantly higher customer perceptions of the store's perceived confidence in its products than the low effort scenarios. One reason for this might be that the positive customer evaluations stemming from the salesperson's exerted effort have become limited to the salesperson itself (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). This poses a high risk to the company since it becomes highly dependent on its sales personnel. In the situation of the stimuli text it seems that this scenario has occurred.

Although Study 1 failed to produce significant results for customer satisfaction towards the store, they do suggest that the increased WOM-intention positively correlates with positive customer evaluations towards the salesperson. This incline is strengthened by Study 2 where neither positive salesperson nor store evaluations were found and consequently no increase in WOM-intention was revealed. Thus, it seems salesperson effort must yield a positive customer attitude in order to stimulate WOM behavior. This subject will be further discussed in section 5.5 Suggestion for Further Research.

5.2.2 Impact of a WOM Request

The findings in this part of the study challenge those by Söderlund and Mattson (2015). Hypotheses H2a-c were rejected in both studies, therefore not supporting that a simple WOM request increases the WOM-intention. Further, making an imposition in the form of a request does not seem to affect the customer's feelings towards the salesperson nor the store, which is along the lines of previous studies (Söderlund & Mattson, 2015).

However, manipulation checks revealed that the manipulations in the experiment did not fully work. All respondents that provided incorrect answers to the control questions were cleared for, in order to make sure that only those respondents being attentive when conducting the survey were included. The results revealed that for all high effort cases, the request went unnoticed. This provides an indication that the manipulation of effort seems to have become predominant over the manipulation of different requests. The polite request in the high-effort scenario received particularly low mean values. The reason why it received such results might be explained by it being indirect, asking the customer to "talk about the store" rather than "recommend", and therefore passing unnoticed.

Further, this study finds that a WOM request per se does not increase a customer's intention to engage in WOM activity. This challenges the Question-Behavior theory that states that asking a

person to do something would increase the likelihood of it doing so. Had that been the case, the results should have been duplicated in this study. Therefore, one must assume there is another underlying mechanism to explain the phenomenon. One such mechanism stems from attribution theory (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), that reckons that if salience of ulterior motives is high, strong sales tactics would be attributed to selfish intentions of the salesperson. If one would argue that requesting WOM-activities is strong sales tactics, it would thus be more appropriate if the salience of ulterior motives was low. However, results indicated that respondents perceived the ulterior motives of the salesperson to be rather salient, providing an argument as to why the request might not have given rise to desired effects on WOM-intention.

One must also take into account how the WOM-request might not even have been considered a sales tactic, but rather as being in line with what is expected of a salesperson. This may have to do with the perceived faces (Mills, 2003) of the salesperson and the customer in the encounter. Potentially, the faces are congruent with a WOM request. Since the role of a salesperson is clearly to sell, the customer might not be surprised or suspicious about its attempts to increase WOM activity. Thus, the customer would not attribute the behavior to a hidden agenda and it may thus not have negative impact on the customer's evaluations. The fact that customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store were not negatively affected indicates that this would be the case.

Furthermore, Study 1 offered the insight that salesperson effort does not only increase the intention to engage in WOM-activities, but that the WOM becomes more positive. Since results for Study 1 revealed that effort had a positive impact on salesperson attitude, these results supports existing research arguing that satisfaction has a big impact on the likelihood of positive WOM activity (Anderson, 1998; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). This is an important finding as companies struggle not only to spark WOM, but also to make sure the conversations are positively charged.

5.2.3 Impact of a Polite vs. Neutral WOM Request

In an attempt to understand if a specific type of request strategy would yield a higher WOM-intention with customers, politeness theory was applied. To our surprise, a polite request did not yield significantly higher customer evaluations or WOM intention than a neutral request, which would indicate that applying politeness to the WOM-request does not have an impact. A plausible explanation for this could be that mitigating a face threat is situational and depends on the context

and appropriateness of the threat and that it cannot be mitigated with static solutions of politeness (Sperber et al., 1986). Thus, it might have been more effective to test strategies that focus on the social roles of the people in an encounter and how expectations play a role in causing a person to comply with a request.

By nature, a request is seen as an imposition on an individual's freedom. Therefore, triggering psychological reactance is a motivational state, which drives the individual to act, or not to act. By applying politeness to a request, the aim was to mitigate this mechanism. However, results revealed that the perceived intrusiveness of the salesperson was rather low, indicating that the request was not perceived to be much of an imposition on the individual's freedom. This is along the line with findings that suggest that predictions on the amount of reactance one can expect from an addressee when making a request are difficult to make (Brehm, 1966). In this case it meant that the polite request, intended to mitigate reactance, did not serve its purpose.

None of the studies provided findings that a polite request would yield a higher WOM-intention or customer evaluations in a high effort scenario. Still, Study 2 provided results indicating that when the salesperson exerts effort, a polite request does affect how eager the customer is to reciprocate the effort. However, even though the reciprocal mechanism could result in rewards such as customer satisfaction, repeat purchases and positive WOM (Mohr & Bitner, 1995b) the results from this study indicate that there could be more ways in which reciprocity takes form. More importantly, it indicates that there might exist a threshold for when the willingness to reciprocate turns into actual opinions and actions, which in this particular case was not above this threshold.

5.2.4 Manually Collected Data VS. Research Company Panel Data

Although it was not intended to be examined empirically, there seemed to be a discrepancy between the data collected manually and that collected through the research company NEPA. Some patterns became obvious in the way the data behaved. Firstly, the number of excluded responses was markedly higher for the panel data than the manually collected data, indicating that panelists were less careful in reading the text and answering the questions. This is explained by how the respondent burden is higher in panel surveys than for normal surveys (Lohse et al., 2000). Further, panelists voluntarily respond to surveys and receive payment for doing so, providing incentives for responding to as many surveys as quickly as possible for an increased salary. This could once again lead to insufficient effort when responding to a survey.

Tests revealed that on several variables, the results from Study 2 were significantly different from those in Study 1. For the variables where there was a significant difference between the studies, the manually collected data consistently displayed lower mean scores than did the panel data. These variables were reciprocity, perceived salesperson effort, salesperson intrusiveness, and salesperson ulterior motives. One plausible explanation for this finding is that panelists, in the role of professional respondents, have become used to these types of experiments and might have grown an increased skepticism towards stimuli texts (Lynch, 1999). This could result in these respondents finding the salesperson more intrusive and acting out of stronger ulterior motives, than amateur respondents. Further, being more used to reflecting over stimuli texts might have made the panelist skilled in picking up on treatments they could have better comprehended the effort exerted by the salesperson which might be the reason for their higher will to reciprocate. Moreover, panelists might exaggerate their responses due to insufficient effort when conducting the survey (Huang et al., 2012). Interestingly, the variables that received a higher mean value from the panel data, also had a higher standard deviation. Once again indicating that panelists, with a high opportunity cost of time (Lynch, 1999), would respond to questions in an inattentive manner, leading to more dispersed results. This would then pertain to what researchers refer to as panel selection bias, the risk that panelists differ largely from the rest of the population (Lohse et al., 2000). The notion of insufficient effort would also explain why the results from Study 1 were not replicated in Study 2 as well as strengthen arguments that panel data might be unreliable for academic purposes (Telser, 1962).

5.3 Limitations

Conducting between-subjects experiments can offer some challenges, as there are many factors to consider in order making the groups comparable. Although, a lot of effort was put into designing the experiments, it was still subject to certain limitations. First, limitations were connected with the survey design and manipulation checks revealed that the manipulations did not fully work. Since the stimuli text was long, it could have caused respondents to not carefully read the text. Even though pre-tests were conducted to make sure that no details in the text would cause respondents to answer differently than desired, this might still be the case. Moreover, in the scenarios where high effort was simulated, the respondents did not seem to have registered that a request for WOM appeared. However, for the cases with low effort, the manipulations seem to have worked. Indicating that the manipulation of effort seems to have become predominant in the text of high effort.

A further limitation to the study pertains to the pre-testing procedure. Pre-tests were conducted on homogenous convenience samples of small sizes. The conclusions drawn from the pre-tests were therefore only indications of how a larger, heterogeneous sample would react, which could explain why the desired results were not attained although pre-tests provided indications for it. It could also be that a WOM-request is not as much of an imposition as assumed, making the mitigating measure of using a polite request strategy excessive. More thorough pre-testing could have revealed when, and if, a request becomes intrusive enough to make politeness a necessity in order not to cause reactance.

There were also limitations pertaining to the sample size and the survey procedure. Since the number of excluded responses was high after being cleared for control questions, one cannot conclude that the remaining responses was of adequate quality. Further, if the experiment would have been conducted in a real life scenario, this problem would not exist and results might have been attained. Even though the sample size was large enough to assume that the sample approximates a normal distribution, the sample size might have been too small to yield significant results. Moreover, no established measures were found regarding how polite a salesperson's request appears to be. Instead, a single-measure question was added to capture how polite the salesperson appeared to be. This measure might not fully have captured what it was intended to. So even though the manipulation checks revealed that there was no statistically confirmed difference in means between perceived salesperson politeness, even though the polite request preferably should have had a significant effect. A better measurement could potentially have attained significance. A further shortcoming connected to the survey procedure is the risk for misinterpretations of the scale items. The items that were taken and adapted from existing research were translated from the original language English to Swedish. This offers a risk that some of the measurements lose power to capture the what they intended to.

5.3.1 Limitations of Study 1

First, the sample selection is not completely unproblematic. The data for Study 1 was collected using physical surveys at the Central Station. The travel hub was deemed to most likely provide respondents of varying age, gender, and place of origin. However, one cannot conclude that the population residing at the Central Station on a Friday afternoon might differ from the general Swedish population, which could skew the results. It could also be that the assumedly dispersed

population in terms of place of origin was more homogenous than we thought, which was not accounted for in the survey.

Surveys were collected by approaching respondents sitting and waiting on a bench. However, the surroundings were stressful and could thus impact the respondents' mood. Furthermore, the bench in question where respondents were sitting as they were approached seemed to be one with low traffic, thus a place to sit when the waiting time was around ten minutes or more. This was plenty of time to complete our survey that only required about five minutes. However, even though many respondents were not undertaking any other activity while sitting on the bench, others were busy reading or listening to music. Therefore, there might have been a discrepancy in mood and attentiveness between these two groups of people. Furthermore, some respondents were stressed and about to leave shortly when approached, where their effort in responding might have been impacted.

5.3.2 Limitations of Study 2

As previously discussed there are limitations to the data collected from the survey panel of the professional market research firm NEPA. This data differs from the self-collected in a couple of ways. First, respondents of the panel have signed up to answer survey themselves, as opposed to the responses for Study 1. Since panelists are professionals and respond to many surveys, it indicates that the risk of survey fatigue is higher than for other respondents. Further, it could also be that there is a fundamental difference in the characteristics of the people signing up to take surveys as opposed to the ones that do not. If, for instance the purpose of signing up for a panel is for the monetary reimbursement, it could be an indication that their preferences regarding consumption would differ significantly from the rest of the population, thus leading to skew results.

Moreover, since the NEPA-responses were collected during a longer period of time than the data for Study 1, one cannot conclude that external factors may have skewed the results. Also, panelists conducted the survey online and therefore the context in which they took the survey could not be controlled. It could also be that there is a general difference in conducting the survey online as opposed to on a physical paper.

5.4 Implications

The study investigated a actionable steps a salesperson can take in order to increase the likelihood of its customers engaging in WOM activity, by exerting effort and making use of request strategies. The findings provided indications in ways a salesperson can be fruitful in spurring WOM and contributed theoretically as well as offered guidance for company managers.

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

Many studies have focused on intangible antecedents of WOM, including satisfaction and perceived quality. However, little emphasis has been placed on controllable WOM tools that are actionable and measurable. This thesis has focused on expanding the theoretical field of concrete measures that are easily replicated in order to drive WOM.

This study contributes to existing theory within the field of WOM antecedents by focusing on the salesperson. Previous studies on the subject of salesperson effort indicate that it positively impacts customer evaluations; still none had made the connection between salesperson effort and a customer's WOM-intention. This study proves that employee effort is an efficient tool to intentionally stimulate a positive attitude towards the salesperson and increase WOM intention amongst customers. Where results indicate that salesperson effort does leave a positive impression with the customer, it may be more strongly associated with the salesperson than the store.

Recent studies have shown that simply asking a customer to make a recommendation increases the likelihood it doing so. The study was designed to replicate these results and empirically examine if a WOM request does increase WOM likelihood and what effect it has on customer evaluations. It seems that no exceptional harm is caused when a salesperson asks for a WOM request in general. More surprisingly no significant empirical support was found that a WOM request increased the customer's intention to engage in WOM activity. Thus, this study challenges findings from previous studies suggesting that merely asking the customer for WOM would increase the likelihood of them doing so.

This study takes the first step in merging theories regarding WOM f with theories on request strategies. Building on the psychological studies, suggesting that imposing actions may cause the person that is being imposed upon to react, other theories have been developed in order to

mitigate the risk of reactance. One of these is the politeness theory that is commonly used to explain how to neutralise an imposing threat, which also seems to naturally occur in everyday life. Thus, the study sets out to empirically examine what effects the politeness theory has when applied to a WOM request. It further zooms in on how it affects a customer's WOM intention and evaluations of the salesperson and the store. No significant results were found to support that a polite request would yield more beneficial results to the store than a neutral one. However, neither seemed to stimulate negative emotions with the customer.

Lastly, the study sheds light on how there might be differences in the characteristics pertaining to panel data and manually collected data. Although researchers have previously acknowledged the usefulness of such data for academic purposes, as well as warned that it might be inappropriate in the context, little research has been conducted on the topic. Since the results between the two data sets in this study differed, it challenges the current understanding of panel data collection.

5.4.2 Managerial Implications

Managers of companies with B&M channels can gain insight in how to give directives to their sales personnel in order to achieve a WOM-behavior based on the findings of this study. First, the study sheds light on the importance of salesperson effort in a service encounter not only to yield a positive salesperson attitude and satisfaction, but also WOM activity. By maximizing the perceived effort, the sales personnel can be more efficiently used. Thus, by instructing them to behave in a way that stimulates WOM-behavior, not only are the costs of human resources utilized more efficiently but marketing will yield a higher ROI. Managers should instruct its sales personnel to perform as much of the work as possible in front of the customers. Since the study did not find indications that effortful behavior would have negative impact on customer evaluations, this could be done without risk. In maximizing the perceived effort, measures could also include restructuring the store, to make the exerted effort visible to the customer. Examples of this would include placing stockpile visibly, allowing the customer to see how the salesperson must work to fetch the products. Another measure would be to have this stockpile being placed inconveniently, making the effort even greater. However, it is important to make sure that these measures are balanced with the desire for speedy and convenient service. Moreover, as society is becoming increasingly digitalized and e-commerce grows steadily it is important that B&M channels understand how they can strengthen their competitive advantage in the market place. One way is to make sure the customer has a pleasurable experience when shopping in a store, which may drive them and others to come back and not give up "real life" shopping for a virtual

experience. Since this study proved that salesperson effort did indeed increase the customer's salesperson attitude it may be key to customer retention.

Furthermore, even though the study was not able to replicate earlier findings that merely asking for WOM increases the likelihood of the customer doing so, no negative effects seemed to stem from it either. Indicating that it might be worth making a WOM-request, since the potential benefits may exceed the potential risks. Moreover, since theory strongly supports that politeness is beneficial, even though this study did not find any indications that that is the case, it is still advised to apply politeness to the request.

5.5 Future Research

WOM is a highly sought after marketing tool. As society becomes more filled with commercial messages, breaking through the clutter becomes increasingly important for companies in order to reach their target customer. Moreover, traditional advertising is no longer the most obvious way to market products, as customers are putting more value on recommendation from people they know. Adding these trends together suggests that WOM marketing is here to stay and will continue to be a sought after marketing tool. Hence more research is needed on how to stimulate WOM, and further how to make sure that it is positively charged.

This study indicated that salesperson effort proved to have an impact on WOM intention, therefore future research should look into understanding what level of effort a salesperson should exert in order to maximize customer evaluations. It is also important to understand how to ensure that the positive attitude towards the salesperson is transferred to the company. Future research should focus on how to create synergies between positive customer evaluations of the salesperson and the store by the use of salesperson effort. Moreover, it could also be the case that a higher level of perceived effort could aid in transferring the positive customer evaluation into company satisfaction. However, qualitative pre-tests revealed that when an individual experienced a request as taking too much time, it felt uncomfortable. Thus, understanding how much effort is too much will be critical in order for managers to avoid crossing the invisible line which may cause more harm than good. Therefore, future studies should also focus on the potential downsides of salesperson effort.

Regarding request strategies, the conclusion was that the Politeness Theory did not have a significant impact with a WOM-request. However, request strategies have proven their

usefulness in several previous studies and theory strongly indicated they should do so in a WOM scenario as well. More thorough research is thus needed on when a request in a sales encounter becomes so intrusive that reactance is spurred and thus negatively affects customer evaluations. Future researchers should continue the merge between psychological theories on request strategies and WOM within marketing to get a deeper understanding of the synergies that exists and the potential pitfalls to avoid. This may include continued focus on politeness theory but also putting more emphasis on the context and the individual roles and expectations of each other. Another take might be to go back to focusing on stimuli-behavior studies and investigate their impact and how they drive WOM activity.

Another aspect of the study was the product category it involved, sunglasses. One cannot conclude that other product categories may yield differing results, nor if one would conduct research on services instead. Thus, future studies should replicate the experiment in this study to include other product categories and services in order to better understand how WOM can be stimulated in individual cases. A distinction between hedonistic and utilitarian products may be an interesting approach, as well as high vs. low involvement products.

Lastly, the data in this study was divided between two data sets, one collected manually and the other collected through the research company Nepa. Results revealed that the data sets behaved differently. Where the panel data yielded significantly higher mean scores for some variables and led to a markedly higher amount of exclusions. For this reason, future research should focus on the differences between data collected manually and through research companies.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1:

Summary of the requests in pre-study 1

Positive Politeness	...just one more thing! You are a valuable part of Qasa's community, help us spread the word
Negative Politeness	...just one more thing! If it is not too much to ask, would you mind spreading the word about Qasa
Off-Record Politeness	...just one more thing! It is always appreciated when our members help spread the word about Qasa!
Explanation Win-Win	...just one more thing! As the Qasa community grows, the number of apartments available for rent and tenants interested increases; a win-win for all. Spread the word about Qasa,
Explanation Effort	...just one more thing! We work hard everyday to improve Qasa because we want it to be the optimal service to our users, both landlords and tenants. Spread the word about Qasa

7.2 Appendix 2:

Summary of the requests in pre-study 2

Positive Politeness	1	You are a valuable customer, feel free to recommend us to other
	2	We would like to have more customers like you, feel free to talk to your friends about us
Negative Politeness	1	If it is not too much to ask, could you recommend us to your friends?
	2	I understand it is a hassle, but would you mind talking to your friends about us?
Off-Record Politeness	1	We always appreciate when our customers talk about us with others
	2	It always makes us happy when our customers talk to others about us
Bald-On Politeness	1	Recommend us to your friends
	2	Talk about us with your friends
Effort Explanation	1	We work hard every day to improve and offer our customers the best. <i>Insert Request</i>
	2	Every day we work our hardest to use our resources in the most efficient way in order to continuously improve our offer and keep prices steady. Our ambition is to grow with our customers and beat the competition. We try our best to be able to offer what our customers want.

7.3 Appendix 3: Main Study Stimuli Text

7.3.1 Low effort & no WOM-request

Föreställ dig följande scenario:

Det är lördag och du är på väg ner mot stan för att köpa en present. Någon du känner har nyss fyllt år och imorgon ska du dit på födelsedagsfika. Du vet att personen önskar sig ett par solglasögon. Men inte vilka som helst, utan ett par av modellen Tibet från märket Sonokai. Så det är dem du ska hitta för att köpa som present. På vägen upptäcker du en solglasögonbutik du inte har sett förut. Du beslutar dig för att se om de har solglasögonen du är ute efter.

Du kommer in i butiken och ser dig omkring i rummet. Det finns solglasögon i montrar och längs med väggarna. Ett butiksbiträde kommer fram till dig och frågar om du behöver hjälp. Butiksbiträdet har på sig en svart tröja. Du svarar att du är på jakt efter ett par solglasögon som du ska ge bort i present. "Är det några speciella du har i åtanke?", frågar butiksbiträdet. Du svarar att du vill ha ett par Tibet av märket Sonokai och frågar om de säljs i den här butiken.

"Ja, sådana kan man köpa hos oss", svarar butiksbiträdet och tar med dig till solglasögonen. "Sonokai har ett funktionellt glas som inte släpper igenom skadligt ljus. Man kan dessutom välja mellan olika färger på glaset beroende på i vilket sammanhang man vill använda dem. Ju starkare ljus, desto mörkare glas ska man ha." Du svarar att det ska vara det mörkaste glaset på dem. "Vilken färg hade du tänkt dig på bågarna?" Du pekar på de brunspräckliga som kostar 850 kr och säger att det är dem du vill köpa. "Sonokai erbjuder också 1 års garanti på alla solglasögon och de kommer i ett stötdämpande fodral".

Sedan uppmanar biträdet dig att pröva solglasögonen. "Det behövs inte, jag ska ju inte ha dem själv" svarar du. "Jag vet, men du vill inte prova dem i alla fall?" frågar biträdet. Du provar solglasögonen. De passar bra. Biträdet betraktar dig och är tyst ett tag. Sedan säger biträdet "Vet du vad, de passar dig jättebra. Du borde överväga att köpa ett par själv". Du funderar på detta ett ögonblick, sedan tackar du nej.

"Är det någonting mer jag kan hjälpa till med idag?" frågar butiksbiträdet. Du svarar att Sonokai-glasögonen var allt du behövde denna gången. "Då ska jag plocka fram ett par nya sådana solglasögon till dig", säger butiksbiträdet och sätter tillbaka visningsexemplaret.

Ni går till kassan och butiksbiträdet tar fram dina solglasögon. Du säger att du aldrig har sett den här butiken förut och undrar om den finns på andra ställen också. "Nej, det här är den enda butiken", svarar butiksbiträdet och du tar fram ditt kort för att betala. Du slår in din pinkod och köpet godkänns. Butiksbiträdet lägger ner solglasögonen med kvitto i en påse och tackar för ditt besök. Du tar emot påsen och lämnar butiken med ditt ärende uträttat.

7.3.2 Low effort & neutral WOM-request

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"Ja, sådana kan man köpa hos oss", svarar butiksbiträdet och tar med dig till solglasögonen. "Sonokai har ett funktionellt glas som inte släpper igenom skadligt ljus. Man kan dessutom välja mellan olika färger på glaset beroende på i vilket sammanhang man vill använda dem. Ju starkare ljus, desto mörkare glas ska man ha." Du svarar att det ska vara det mörkaste glaset på dem. "Vilken färg hade du tänkt dig på bågarna?" Du pekar på de brunspräckliga som kostar 850 kr och säger att det är dem du vill köpa. "Det är den klassiska färgen, den blir aldrig omodern" lägger biträdet till. "Sonokai erbjuder också 1 års garanti på alla solglasögon och de kommer i ett stötdämpande fodral".

Sedan uppmanar biträdet dig att prova solglasögonen. "Det behövs inte, jag ska ju inte ha dem själv" svarar du. "Jag vet, men du vill inte prova dem i alla fall" frågar biträdet. Du provar solglasögonen. De passar bra. Biträdet betraktar dig och är tyst ett tag. Sedan säger biträdet "Vet du vad, de passar dig jättebra. Du borde överväga att köpa ett par själv". Du funderar på detta ett ögonblick, sedan tackar du nej.

"Är det någonting mer jag kan hjälpa till med idag?" frågar butiksbiträdet. Du svarar att Sonokai-glasögonen var allt du behövde denna gången. "Då ska jag plocka fram ett par nya sådana solglasögon till dig. De ligger högst upp på hyllan, en sekund bara". Biträdet hämtar en stor stege och får jobba för att få den på plats, den verkar tung. Biträdet tar sig upp för stegen men det är svårt att nå solglasögonen som ligger högst upp på den översta hyllan. Till slut går det i alla fall och biträdet tar varsamt ner lådan. "Pust! Vissa saker är värda att jobba för!" säger biträdet och räcker dig solglasögonen.

Du säger att du aldrig har sett den här butiken förut och frågar om den finns på andra ställen också. "Nej, det här är den enda butiken", svarar butiksbiträdet och du tar fram ditt kort för att betala. "Vi är precis nystartade och jobbar hårt för att erbjuda våra kunder ett brett sortiment av märken och modeller, så om du är nöjd med besöket får du jättegärna berätta för dina vänner om oss." Du slår in din pinkod och köpet godkänns. Butiksbiträdet lägger ner solglasögonen med kvitto i en påse och tackar för ditt besök. Du tar emot påsen och lämnar butiken med ditt ärende uträttat.

7.4 Appendix 4: Main Study Questionnaire

Hur troligt är det att du skulle prata om butiken med någon du känner?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Inte alls troligt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Mycket troligt

Hur troligt är det att du skulle rekommendera butiken till någon du känner?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Inte alls troligt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Mycket troligt

Vad är ditt intryck av butiksbiträdet?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Dåligt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Bra
Ogillar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Gillar
Osympatisk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sympatisk
Oartig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Artig

I vilken utsträckning instämmer du med följande påståenden:

	1: Instämmer inte alls					10: Instämmer helt och hållet				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Biträdet lade ner mycket tid på bemötandet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biträdet lade ner mycket energi på bemötandet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biträdet ansträngde sig mycket i bemötandet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biträdet har en dold agenda	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biträdets kommentarer är suspekta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biträdet försökte påverka mitt beteende	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I vilken utsträckning instämmer du med följande påståenden:

	1: Instämmer inte alls					10: Instämmer helt och hållet				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Jag kände att jag ville göra något mer för biträdet än att bara köpa solglasögon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag upplevde att jag blev skyldig biträdet någon form av gentjänst	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag kände att jag ville återgälda biträdet på något vis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I vilken utsträckning instämmer du om att butiksbiträdets bemötande var...

	1: Instämmer inte alls					10: Instämmer helt och hållet				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Besvärande	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tillgjort	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inkräktande	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Påfluet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Nedan följer frågor om ditt generella intryck av butiken efter ditt besök

Hur nöjd eller missnöjd är du med butiken?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Väldigt missnöjd | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Väldigt nöjd

I vilken utsträckning upplever du att butiken uppfyller dina förväntningar?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Helt och hållet

Föreställ dig en glasögonbutik som är perfekt på alla sätt. Hur nära det idealet upplever du att den här butiken är?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Väldigt långt ifrån | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Väldigt nära

Solglasögonen som butiken säljer är av hög kvalitet

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Instämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Instämmer helt

Verkar butiken vara övertygad om att den säljer solglasögon av hög kvalitet?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Inte alls övertygade | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Helt och hållet övertygade

Vilken färg hade butiksbiträdet på solglasögonen?

Röd Svart Blå Grön
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Butiken ingår i en kedja med flera likadana butiker

Ja Nej
☐ ☐

Vad kostade solglasögonen? _____ kr

Butiksbiträdet bad mig att rekommendera butiken

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Instämmer inte alls | ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ | Instämmer helt

Om du berättar för andra om det här butiksbesöket, vad skulle du säga till dem?

Kön

Kvinna Man Annat
☐ ☐ ☐

Ålder: _____