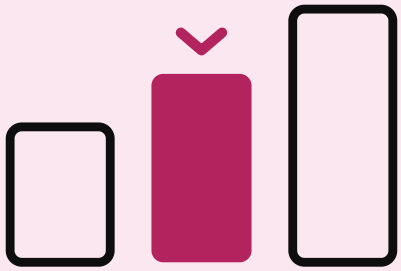
Concept

Compromise effect

When an option sits between two others, one cheaper and one more expensive, we tend to choose it.



In Spanish
Efecto compromiso

Origin
Simonson (1989)

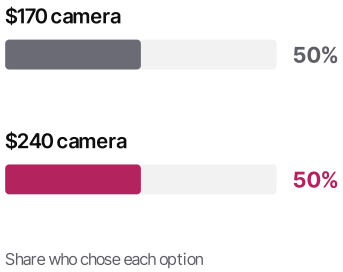
What problem it addresses

It explains why adding a more expensive option can make the middle one sell more.

An example

Cameras were offered to two groups. One got two models; the other, the same two plus a more expensive one.

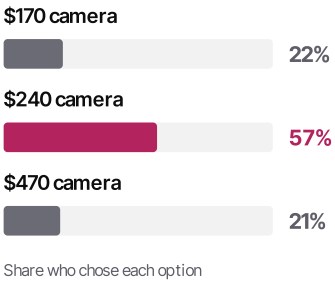
Two cameras



Share who chose each option

The $240 one is chosen by **50%.**

Three cameras



Share who chose each option

With a $470 one added, the $240 one rises **to 57%.**

The $240 camera was the same. Sitting in the middle, it looked like the most sensible choice.

Why it happens

1 

We don't know what each feature is worth, so we compare options with each other.

2 

The extremes seem risky: one falls short and the other costs too much.

3 

The middle option is easy to justify, to ourselves and to others.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Order plans so that the recommended option is the one that truly suits most people.

✗ Avoid

Adding a very expensive option nobody wants just to make the middle one look reasonable.

Don't fall for it

Look at each option on its own: would you choose it if there were no others beside it?

50% → 57%



What the research says

People who chose the middle camera without and with the more expensive option (Simonson and Tversky, 1992).

●●● **Solid evidence.** Simonson (1989) described it alongside the decoy effect: both show that what we choose depends on the other options.

Connections

Used in

- Product design

Related to

- Anchoring
- Decoy effect

Authors and works

1989	**Itamar Simonson**	Showed that we prefer the option that is easiest to justify.
1992	**Itamar Simonson and Amos Tversky**	Measured it with products such as cameras and called it extremeness aversion.

Sources

Original sources

- Simonson, I. (1989). Choice based on reasons: The case of attraction and compromise effects. Journal of Consumer Research, 16(2), 158–174. View source (https://doi.org/10.1086/209205)
- Simonson, I., & Tversky, A. (1992). Choice in context: Tradeoff contrast and extremeness aversion. Journal of Marketing Research, 29(3), 281–295. View source (https://doi.org/10.1177/002224379202900301)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.