

Flexibility moderates choice overload: Consumer satisfaction and purchase rate increase when choice from large assortments is “flexible” as opposed to “constrained”

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Abstract

Previous research has documented that choosing from a large number of alternatives leads to negative consequences in the form of reduced satisfaction, increased difficulty, and lower motivation to buy (“overchoice effect”). Our research identifies a novel boundary condition of the overchoice effect: whether customers have the flexibility to choose as many options as wished, or are constrained in the number of options to buy to a single alternative. Four studies (including two field studies) show that having the flexibility to choose as much as wished reduces difficulty and leads to greater satisfaction and motivation to buy from large sets compared to having the goal of choosing a constrained quantity of products (i.e., single option only). We replicate this finding in field and laboratory settings and across various choices (when choosing cookies after a meal in a restaurant, possible dating partners on a simulated dating website, energy bars, and soaps for personal use).

Keywords: *choice; assortment size; consumer satisfaction*

Track: Consumer Behaviour