

# The Effects of Too Many Choices

## <Section 1>

Throughout our daily lives, we humans must make choices. These range from the simple- what clothes to wear, what TV programs to watch – to the life-altering – which university to attend, whom to marry, where to buy a house. After we make our choices, we sometimes feel a sense of satisfaction with our decisions. At other times, we regret our decisions, thinking we would have been happier had we taken a different route.

## <Section2>

It is often assumed that the more choices we have, the better off we are. Having more choices is often assumed to mean having more freedom. Having the “right to choose” is considered positive, while having “no choice” is negative. If each additional choice we have leads to more freedom, then surely an infinite number of choices would leave nothing to be desired.

However, we must also consider the adverse effects of a massive number of choices. People tend to be overwhelmed when they are faced with too many options. As the work of various psychologists and other researchers has proved, having a large number of choices does not necessarily have a positive effect on people.

## <Section 3>

Sheena Iyengar, a professor of management at Columbia University Business School, studied choice when she was a graduate student. She sought to prove that an abundance of choice had a positive influence on children. In her study, she presented groups of three-year-old children with a variety of toys – Legos, crayons, jigsaw puzzles, and so on. In one group, she allowed the children to play with whatever toys they liked. In the other group, she gave the children one toy to play with and told them to refrain from playing with the other toys. Then she allowed each group to play.

One could assume, as did Ms. Iyengar, that the group with freedom of choice would have more fun. However, the group for which Ms. Iyengar had specified toys had so much fun playing that they did not want to stop when the experiment was finished. On the other hand, the “free choice” group, surrounded by all kinds of toys, seemed to show less enthusiasm for play.

## <Section 4>

Given that these results were contrary to her expectations, Ms. Iyengar decided to explore the subject even further. She tried an experiment that was later called the “jam study.” In her test, she set up two jam sampling booths near the entrance to a California supermarket. At certain times, the booths offered 24 varieties of jam from the same company for sampling. At other times, they offered six varieties of jam. Then the researchers looked at the percentage of customers who sampled the jams at each booth, as well as the percentage of customers who actually purchased the jams.

The researchers found that people showed more interest in the jams when they were offered more choices. About 60% of customers sampled the jams during the times when 24 varieties were available, as opposed to 40% during the times when only the smaller number of varieties was available.

The researchers got a big surprise, however, when they looked at how many people actually bought the jams. Of the customers who were offered 24 kinds of jam to sample, only 3% bought some, despite the greater selection. But 30% of the customers who were offered six kinds of jam bought some. Customers asked to choose from 24 flavors seemed to be overwhelmed by the volume of choices they were offered, while those who were offered six varieties of jam had an easier time choosing the flavor they liked. The results of the experiment suggest that when given too many choices, customers’ desire to purchase the products actually decreases. On the other hand, certain limitations seem to enhance the desire to purchase.

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