When More Is Merrier Indeed: the Impact of Product Involvement on Choice

Maria Aladjem, VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Ulf Böckenholt, McGill University, Canada and Northwestern University, USA

Product involvement is shown to moderate the More-is-Less effect. High-involved participants like options more from larger than smaller assortments. This More-is-Merrier effect is affect-based and mediated by choice-option exploration. Default options increase choice satisfaction for low-involved consumers, whereas delayed consumption of the chosen option reduces choice satisfaction for high-involved consumers.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/16187/volumes/v38/NA-38

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
score on the other hand. High consistency between the attitudinal base and the overall attitude is indicated by small numbers on these discrepancy scores.

A 2 (attitude- affect discrepancy vs. attitude-cognition discrepancy) x 2 (affective attitude formation condition vs. cognitive attitude formation condition) mixed-design ANOVA indicated that we were successful in creating affectively or cognitively based attitudes, since the predicted crossover interaction between type of discrepancy score and attitude formation condition was obtained, $F(1,118)=9.134, p<.01$. In the affective formation condition the affective discrepancy scores ($M=.53$) were significantly smaller than the cognitive discrepancy scores ($M=.76$), $t(59)=3.605, p=.01$; whereas in the cognitive formation condition a nonsignificant tendency for cognitive discrepancy scores ($M=.41$) to be smaller than affective discrepancy scores ($M=.51$) was obtained, $t(59), p=.374$.

To assess the difference between affective and cognitive attitudes concerning attitude certainty and subjective knowledge, an Independent Samples T-test was conducted with attitude basis as the independent variable. Both for certainty, $t(109)=-2.599, p<.05$, and subjective knowledge, $t(109)=-3.845, p<.001$, a significant effect of attitude basis was found. Cognitive attitudes were both held with greater certainty ($M=5.13$) as well as associated with greater subjective knowledge ($M=2.95$) than affective attitudes (respectively $M=4.57$ and $M=2.00$), thus supporting our hypothesis.

Based on these results we can conclude that, contrary to previous research where affectively based attitudes seemingly are stronger than cognitively based attitudes when accessibility was used as a strength measure, cognitively based attitudes appear to be stronger than affectively based ones in terms of certainty and knowledge. These results provide useful insights in light of future studies. Possible research entails to explore which type of persuasive appeal, cognitive or affective, is most suitable to create strong attitudes.

**Selected References**


---

**When More is Merrier Indeed: The Impact of Product Involvement on Choice**

Maria Aladjem, VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Ulf Böckenholt, McGill University, Canada and Northwestern University, USA

**Extended Abstract**

Although generally extensive assortments are believed to benefit consumers, more recent research has highlighted the negative consequences of large assortments. Notably, research on the “More-is-Less” effect (Iyengar and Lepper 2000, Chernev 2003) established that extensive assortments can hinder choice and lower choice satisfaction. These adverse consequences are often explained with the decision difficulty consumers experience when choosing from extensive (as opposed to limited) choice sets. However, a recent meta-analysis (Scheibehenne, Greifeneder and Todd, forthcoming) invites a discussion on the generality of the “More-is-Less” effect since multiple studies failed to replicate the adverse effects of large assortments on choice satisfaction (Scheibehenne, Greifeneder and Todd 2009). Clearly, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the possible effects of extensive assortments on consumer choice and a thorough investigation of possible moderator variables and boundary conditions of the More-is-Less effect.

This work argues that choice from extensive assortments can trigger multiple sources of experiential information that affect choice satisfaction. Thus, going beyond experienced difficulty, we show that intrinsic pleasure from exploring the choice options can increase...
choice satisfaction and lead participants to be more satisfied when choosing from a larger assortment size. We refer to this finding as the “More-is-Merrier” effect. The involvement level of a consumer is an important moderator variable for this effect: Larger assortments can lead to greater choice-process difficulty and thus reduce the choice satisfaction of consumers with low levels of product involvement. In contrast, consumers with high levels of involvement experience choosing from the same large assortments as more enjoyable and report greater choice satisfaction. Perhaps similar to baseball fans enjoying recalling arcane statistics or splitting hairs over particular teams, high-involved consumers enjoy exploring and comparing options and are—if at all to a much smaller degree affected by the difficulty of a choice task than low-involved consumers.

Experiment 1 examined whether choice-set size would differentially affect the choice satisfaction of consumers with different levels of product involvement. Based on a large-scale online pretest, we selected participants with high and low levels of involvement with night clubs based on the Personal Involvement Inventory (Zaichkowsky 1994). Several weeks later, the same participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions with either a limited (6) or an extensive (16) choice set of night clubs and were instructed to choose a night club for a company party paid for by the firm. Care was taken to ensure that not the composition of the choice sets, but their size would be the underlying reason for the ease or the difficulty of the choice task. As predicted, we found that high-involved consumers liked better their choice after choosing from the extensive choice set and that this effect was mediated by involvement-induced task enjoyment measured by a three-item scale. Conversely, low-involved consumers liked better their choice when choosing from the limited choice set and this effect was mediated by experienced difficulty, in agreement with previous findings on the More-is-Less effect (Iyengar and Lepper 2000, Chernev 2003). Importantly, perceived variety in the choice sets and experienced difficulty were both found to increase significantly with choice set size and not to vary across involvement conditions.

The objectives of Experiment 2 were two-fold: First, the experiment was designed to test the sensitivity of high- and low-involved consumers to choice task difficulty in their judgment of choice satisfaction. For this purpose, we introduced a default option in the choice task that was expected to lower choice task difficulty and hence to increase the choice satisfaction of low-involved consumers. For high-involved consumers we expected no effect of the default option on choice satisfaction. Second, we selected a customization task to demonstrate that choice-option exploration can trigger task difficulty for low-involved consumers and enjoyment for high-involved consumers.

Participants were asked to customize a weekend trip, consisting of multiple choices among hotels, restaurants and activities. For each choice, we provided a default option in the low-difficulty condition. As in Study 1, we conducted a large-scale pretest to identify respondents’ involvement levels with planning and going on trips. Several weeks later, high- and low-involvement participants were invited to the lab and asked to customize a hypothetical complementary weekend escape for two in a popular winter resort. As predicted, we found that although the presence of a default option in a self-customization task reduced significantly the perceived difficulty of the task, it increased satisfaction with the customized offer only among respondents with low levels of involvement. Further, the exploration of the choice option mediated the effect of task enjoyment on choice satisfaction for high-involved respondents.

Study 3 considered temporal distance as a moderator variable of task-induced enjoyment. High-involvement participants were asked to plan their weekend trip—as in Study 2—but with the additional instruction that the trip would take place a year later. We predicted and found that this temporal distance manipulation both reduced significantly the exploration of choice alternatives and lowered experienced enjoyment: Compared to participants of Study 2 who did not have to wait for the trip to take place, participants of Study 3 reported significantly lower choice satisfaction with their customized weekend trip.

In sum, the contributions of this research are three-fold. First, the findings point to the importance of affective consequences of involvement, in addition to the motivational and cognitive ones considered in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty et al. 2005, Petty and Cacioppo 1990). Critically, it demonstrates that unlike task-unrelated affect (Bless et al. 1990), task-related affect increases the depth with which people explore and compare choice options. Experienced difficulty has no adverse affects on choice satisfaction. Second, this work adds to the literature on the More-is-Less effect by showing that involvement is an important moderator of this effect. Finally, this work is also of clear importance to practitioners since it demonstrates the need for differentiation of marketing strategies for consumers with high and low levels of involvement with a product category.

References