



# ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

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## **Turning the Page: the Impact of Choice Closure on Satisfaction**

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We examine whether the physical act of closing triggers choice closure, the psychological process of ending a difficult decision and focusing on assessing its consequences. Four studies demonstrate that choice closure inhibits further deliberation over foregone options when choosing from large sets, enhances satisfaction, and moderates the choice overload effect.

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outcome ( $F(2, 213) = 9.1, p < .001$ ). Specifically, participants who were forced to receive \$3.00 were significantly happier ( $M = 4.1$ ) than those who were given a choice ( $M = 3.6; t(143) = 2.3, p = .02$ ) and those who were forced to donate ( $M = 3.6; t(143) = 2.6, p = .009$ ). Analysis on our choice satisfaction measure revealed the same pattern of results (all  $p$ 's  $< .001$ ). Participants in the free choice condition did not significantly differ in happiness ( $t(75) = .41, p = ns$ ) or choice satisfaction ( $t(75) = 0.72, p = ns$ ) from those in the imposed donation condition.

Together these studies demonstrate evidence that imposing a selfish option on an individual can lead to greater positive affect and post outcome satisfaction than letting people choose between a selfish and prosocial option. When a selfish option is imposed, individuals can enjoy the pleasure from that option without feeling intrapersonal conflict. One open question is why imposed prosocial behavior fails to raise happiness, as it likewise reduces the conflict between selfishness and prosocial behavior. It is possible that when forced, individuals do not feel causal and responsible for the good deed and this feeling of ownership of the behavior is what produces happiness. Yet choosing prosocial behavior is no better for happiness because of the inherent conflict of the choice. Future research will seek to resolve these open questions.

### **The Chooser's Curse: The Ability to Choose Increases Satiation**

#### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

There are only four places to have lunch near my office. I am regularly reminded of this painful fact every day around noon when I decide where to eat lunch. Although I pick whichever option sounds the best that day, the problem is that I am quite satiated with all of them. I often wonder if this daily act of deliberating and choosing heightens my satiation. In other words, would I be better off if someone simply told me where to eat lunch each day? Similarly, would I get less bored with my music if I used a shuffle feature rather than selecting each song myself? Generally speaking, do people get more satiated when they choose, or when others choose for them?

Common sense dictates that letting people choose should increase enjoyment. In fact, a core tenet of economics is that consumers maximize utility, and what they prefer can be determined from what they choose (called revealed preference). Therefore, in a repeated consumption setting, people know when their satiation is growing with an item and switch to a more preferred alternative. Only the consumer would be privy to their moment-to-moment preferences; hence, selections from any other source should be more satiating.

The present research posits that repeated choosing instead increases satiation because it makes the repetition more salient. Recent research has identified perceived repetition as an important antecedent of satiation (Redden, 2008). Kahn and Wansink (2004) similarly found that people expected to enjoy M&M candies more (and indeed ate more) when the variety of colors were easier to visually perceive. People also recovered faster from satiation when reminded of the variety of other things they had also recently consumed (Galak, Redden, and Kruger, 2009). These findings all indicate that satiation depends on the extent to which people notice the variety and repetition of what they consume.

This research proposes that choosing affects perceptions of repetition by acting as a recurring reminder that one is repeatedly having more of the same thing. Given the aforementioned work identifying perceptions of repetition as a key driver of satiation, highlighting the fact that an experience is increasingly repetitive will make it subsequently more satiating. Alternatively, if a sequence is not chosen but

instead exogenously determined (e.g., random), the repetitive nature of the consumption would be less salient. This leads to the prediction that an individual will satiate more with a sequence they choose versus a randomly selected sequence. That is, the enjoyment for people allowed to choose will decline faster with repeated consumption, and eventually be less than for those not allowed to choose. Of course, this is not saying that choosing will increase satiation in all cases (e.g., a food allergen or a hated song).

Five empirical studies confirm these predictions. All of the studies have a similar setup: some participants choose their own sequence while others receive a random sequence, and all participants rate their enjoyment at periodic intervals. Study 1 shows that participants who chose which song to hear on each trial satiated faster than those for whom each song was randomly selected. Study 2 establishes the general nature of this effect by extending it to art, and showing that it does not depend on the number of available options, or whether those options vary on each trial. Study 3 provides mediation evidence that choosing triggers thoughts of repetition that subsequently lead to more satiation. Studies 4 and 5 give further support to the proposed process by showing that cuing judgments of repetition makes a random sequence as satiating as a chosen one, and the satiating effect of choosing disappears if all of the choices are made before consumption begins. Overall, the studies provide consistent evidence that letting a person choose their own consumption sequence satiates them faster because it highlights the repetitive nature of the experience.

This research adds a new negative effect to the choice literature, and highlights repeated consumption as an important moderator. This research also deepens our theoretical understanding of the processes underlying satiation. Choosing increases satiation because it encourages thoughts of repetition. This proposed process highlights the critical role of self-reflective thoughts in determining how satiated one feels, and establishes choosing as a novel antecedent. By exploring choosing and satiation, this work joins two literature streams not typically considered together, and demonstrates their interplay. Widespread choice in consumers' everyday lives may help explain the ubiquity of satiation, and repeated choosing may be necessary to see the full effects of choosing on satisfaction.

### **Turning the Page: The Impact of Choice Closure on Satisfaction**

#### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

When moving from a difficult period to another stage of life people sometimes use metaphors such as "turning the page", "closing the door", or "turning the back". These metaphors combine the physical act of closing with the psychological state of ending a challenging time, reflecting people's intent to make a new start. In this paper we suggest that such metaphors can play an important role in the domain of choices. We show that the physical act of closing embodied in these metaphors can psychologically bring a difficult decision process to an end and allow people to focus on their experience with the decision outcome. We refer to this process as *choice closure*.

We investigate a specific case of difficult decisions—choices made from extensive sets (Iyengar and Lepper, 2000). Research has shown that an increase in the number of options to compare during the decision process enhances regret and decreases the attractiveness of the chosen option relative to the forgone options in the post-decisional phase (Brenner, Rottenstreich, and Sood, 1999; Cameron, Wertenbroch, and Zeelenberg, 2003; Hsee and Leclerc, 1998; Inbar, Botti, and Hanko, forthcoming). By metaphorically and thus psychologically ending the decision process, choice closure can inhibit

further comparisons between the chosen and the forgone options and therefore improve satisfaction with the final outcome. This hypothesis was tested in four studies.

Studies 1 and 2 tested the predicted effect of choice closure on satisfaction by comparing choices from larger versus smaller sets. In both studies participants chose a chocolate from an assortment of either 24 (large set) or 6 (small set) chocolates. In study 1 choice closure was manipulated by asking participants to taste the chosen chocolate in front of the original assortment (no-closure) or after turning their backs to it (closure). In study 2 choice closure was manipulated by asking participants to taste the chocolate in front of a tray containing the assortment either before (no-closure) or after covering it with a transparent lid (closure). We predicted that the action of turning one's back to the choice set or covering the tray would facilitate choice closure. As hypothesized, in both studies participants in the closure condition were more satisfied than those in the no-closure condition when choosing from the larger set, but this difference was not significant in the small-set condition. As a result of this increase in satisfaction, choice closure mitigated the choice overload effect. Whereas in the no-closure condition participants choosing from the smaller set were more satisfied than those choosing from the larger set, in the closure condition this difference was not significant.

The next two studies tested the hypothesized process underlying choice closure. In study 3, we experimentally removed the link between the physical act of closing and the psychological process of choice closure by providing an external reason for closing. This study was a 2 (choice closure: closure vs. no-closure) x 2 (reason: reason vs. no reason) between-subjects design. All participants were asked to choose one biscuit to taste from among a large assortment of 24 biscuits described in a menu. Closure was manipulated by having the menu open or closed during the tasting task, whereas reason was manipulated either by providing no reason for keeping the menu open or closed or by providing a reason that was unrelated to the decision task. In the no-reason condition, the menu was kept open (no-closure) or participants were asked to close it (closure condition) after making their choice. In the reason condition participants were told that the menu had to be kept open because the experimenter had to read some information that was written inside it (no-closure) or that they had to close menu because the experimenter had to read some information that was written on its back cover (closure). Results from studies 1 and 2 were replicated in the no-reason condition: participants who physically closed the menu after making their choice indicated greater satisfaction with the selected biscuit than participants who left the menu open. As expected, however, in the reason conditions this difference in satisfaction was not significant. Also consistent with our explanation, participants who closed the menu in the no-reason condition were more satisfied than those who closed the menu in the reason condition, but there was no difference in satisfaction between participants who kept the menu open across the two reason conditions.

Study 4 directly manipulated the proposed process by varying the focus on the foregone options. This study was a 2 (choice closure: closure vs. no-closure) x 3 (focus: control vs. alternatives-focus vs. outcome-focus) between-subjects design. The procedure in the control condition was similar to the no-reason condition in study 3: participants chose a tea from a 24-tea menu and either left the menu open or closed it before drinking their selected tea. In the alternatives-focus condition, after making a choice, participants took part in a "memory enhancement technique" task that involved recalling information about the chosen and forgone options. In the outcome-focus condition participants performed a "meditation technique" that

involved focusing on a single object — the chosen tea. The results in the control condition replicated our prior studies: participants in the closure condition were more satisfied with the tea selected from a large assortment than those in the no-closure condition. Consistent with our hypothesized process, the memory enhancement technique reduced participants' satisfaction in the closure condition (but had no effect on those in the no-closure condition). In contrast, the meditation technique enhanced the satisfaction of the participants in the no-closure condition (but had no effect on the participants in the closure condition).

To summarize, this paper argues that the physical action of closing triggers the psychological process of choice closure due to which consumers stop comparing the chosen and the forgone options, make peace with their decision, and start focusing on the assessment of the decision outcome. Our studies show that when choices are difficult, choice closure has a positive effect on satisfaction.

### Focus! Creative Success Is Enjoyed Through Restricted Choice

#### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Does increasing choice in the number of creative inputs offered to consumers (e.g., more choice in ingredients for cooking) affect their creativity? We draw on the choice literature (e.g., Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Schwartz, 2004) to provide understanding for the counterintuitive effects we identify. We find that increasing the choice of creative inputs for consumers experienced in a creative task can hurt objective creative outcomes. Consumers that have experience and knowledge in a creative pursuit are shown to be objectively less creative with more input choice, while inexperienced consumers are relatively unaffected by differences in input choice. Based on creativity research (e.g., Henderson, 2004; Russ, 1993), we argue that it is the difficulty experienced consumers have to focus when choosing among extensive creative input options that likely results in reduced task enjoyment, which has negative implications for the consumers' creativity. In contrast, regardless of their experience level, we find that consumers perceive *themselves* as being more creative, the more choice they have. Two studies document these effects.

We first conducted an experiment on knitting, a 2 (Choice: moderate vs. extensive) x 2 (Knitting level: experienced vs. inexperienced) between-subjects design facilitated by a yarn store, where knitters received instructions. 76 knitters (74 women, mean age = 29.82 years) participated in return for a \$20 gift certificate. Based on a pretest, we categorized participants who could (not) knit cables as (in)experienced. Participants were required to knit a scarf for a three-year old girl over a week, and to choose 12 balls of yarn from a display of either a moderate (6) or relatively extensive (12) color selection. Participants were provided with needles, were told to be creative and utilize only the materials provided, however they liked.

A week later, participants returned their scarf, reported how creative they thought their scarf was (1 = not at all/7 = very creative), assessed how pleasant the creative process had been (not at all/very enjoyable, very boring/very much fun). Then, two experts in creative knitting evaluated the creativity of the scarves on a 10-point scale ("not creative at all" (1)/"extremely creative" (10)). Focusing on the latter averaged measure, a 2x2 ANOVA only revealed a main effect of Choice, such that knitters with extensive rather than moderate choice reported that their scarf was *more* creative ( $M_{\text{moderate}} = 4.55$  vs.  $M_{\text{extensive}} = 5.09$ ,  $F(1, 72) = 4.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r^2 = .05$ ). We averaged the knitting experts' creativity ratings ( $r = .66$ ,  $p < .01$ ) to form an objective creativity index. A 2x2 ANOVA showed a significant two-