



## An Empirical Analysis of Purchase of Nail Enamels In India: A Case for More Choice

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### ABSTRACT

Abundance of choice has been associated with freedom and thereby more welfare for a person. Schwartz challenged the existing notion by giving the concept of 'Paradox of Choice'. He suggested that more choice may result in fatigue and stress, thereby affecting the psychological and emotional well-being of a person. He suggested that marketers may rather benefit more by offering less. The current research specifically tried to capture the purchase behavior of females for a female specific product, namely 'nail-enamel'. In a controlled experiment 50 female respondents were exposed to different batches of choices to choose from. The results suggested that more choice involved more time but was largely not related with any displeasure or a negative emotion. It was rather associated with higher levels of satisfaction and positive emotions like pleasure and enhancement of self-esteem. Scope of further research is suggested.

### KEYWORDS

Paradox of Choice, India, females, nail enamels, empirical analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Barry Schwartz (2005) an American Psychologists coined a term 'Paradox of Choice'. The paradox of choice argues that too much choice is bad, causing decision paralysis and unhappiness thereby also sometimes resulting in low sales. The release of Schwartz's phenomenally successful book 'Paradox of Choice: Why more is less', spurred a plethora of experiments by various researchers. Some of these results substantiated the paradox as cited by Schwartz (2014) while some others produced different results as observed by Scheibehenne (<http://scheibehenne.com/>) respectively.

Marketers are tempted to offer more variety to the customers to choose from. They expect that the customer is more likely to buy more if they are given more choices. Intuitively women enjoy shopping. They enjoy spending time in buying things for themselves and the households. Researchers have observed major differences in the buying behavior of women and men. They find that even on a time-bound schedule women love shopping (Knowledge @ Wharton, 2007). Thus the curiosity regarding the reaction of females towards the availability of more choice for a female specific commodity prompted this research.

The objective of this research paper is to specifically inquire and focus on the satisfaction of women, for a women-specific product 'nail-enamel' when they are offered batches having different number of choices to choose from.

### METHODOLOGY

The experiment was conducted in Gandhidham city, in Kachchh district of Gujarat, India and the period of research was October 2014 to January 2015. The research process started with the identification of such a product that generally involved women in the purchase to analyze the buying behavior of women and their reaction towards the availability of more choice. Hence, preliminary survey was undertaken for three specific products - utensils, cosmetics and saris (traditional Indian attire). In the preliminary survey it was observed that women insisted the shopkeepers to show as many varieties of the commodity that was intended to purchase, as were available in the shop. At times they were inclined to see related commodities that were different either by brands, features or prices. When the shopkeeper would suggest that he had shown all available varieties women still prompted them to explore if more varieties were available in the shop. Sometimes even after exploring a lot of variety they would move to the other shop with a hope to get more variety. Women chose to shop from those shops that offered more variety. But

the shopkeepers did not allow undertaking the experiment to understand the reaction of women towards getting more choices in their shops for two reasons. One, they feared that they might lose customers while offering fewer choices as an option even for a limited time. Two, they did not agree upon allowing to offer discounts for the experiment period or quantity, as was the requirement of the designed experiment. They feared the repercussions on the demand when after the experiment; they would not offer the discount. While most of these shops operated in unorganized sector the malls had confining company policies that did not allow the experiment. Moreover, seeking the perception of the respondents towards the abundance of choice offered during the purchase process was not considered as advisable as to involve the respondents in actual purchase to capture their behavior towards the choices offered. Due to logistics issues and financial constraints the product finalized was nail-enamels. They were easy to procure promptly and at a short notice to smoothly undertake the experiment. It was observed during the preliminary survey in a cosmetic shop that most of the young girls chose to buy the inexpensive trendy nail enamels while most of the middle aged women tend to purchase the branded expensive sober colored enamels. So the enamels chosen for the experiment were those sold at Rs. 10 in the shops and the respondents were offered a discount of Rs. 5 to participate in the experiment. 50 respondents belonging to the age group of 18 to 23 volunteered to participate in the experiment. The choice of the respondents was based on convenient sampling. The enamels were displayed on a table in three batches. In the first batch 5 enamels were offered with options of very different colors. In the second batch 15 enamels with more shades of the previous batch (3 shades of each of the five colors of the first batch like for red colored nail enamel in first batch a lighter and a darker shade of red) were offered and in the third batch further 30 different shades (6 shades of each of the five colors of the first batch) were offered. Every respondent was exposed to three batches sequentially from first batch with 5 enamels to the third batch with 30 enamels. Each of them paid an amount of Rs 15 before the experiment. Then she was allowed to choose one from each batch (i.e first a nail enamel from 5, then from 15 and then from 30 choices). Thus *ceteris paribus* every respondent explored and chose from a band-width of low choice to high choice options. The research involved a controlled social experiment. Time taken by the respondents to choose from each batch was noted. Having chosen three enamels the respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction as 'least satisfied', 'neutral' and 'most satisfied' for each batch of enamels. They were also asked an open ended question to describe their experience during dif-

ferent stages of the experiment elaborately.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

It was observed that the females made a choice within 5 to 20 seconds of being exposed to the first batch of 5 nail enamels. Number being less and drastically different from each other the choice was promptly exercised. For the second batch of 15 enamels the respondents took about 15 to 50 seconds. Finally for the batch 3 respondents took about 1 minute to 5 minutes time to choose nail enamel out of a choice of about 30 enamels. Since the time involved in the purchase generally competes with the other demands on time for female, this observation was crucial. Exploring more choice involved higher time consumption.

Respondents sought pleasure in involving more time while choosing from the batch having more options. They enjoyed visualizing the enhanced beauty after applying the nail paint and its suitability with particular attire. So it was not associated with any negative emotion like fatigue, stress or irritation. The remembered utility and anecdotal evidence gave the respondents more confidence in context of the purchase goal with regards to the color choice of the enamel.

Moreover, the respondents belonged to an age group where they were comparatively less occupied in context of demand on their time as compared to elder females. Elder females tend to be more occupied with household chores and professional work.

The results for satisfaction showed that barring 4 respondents all the respondents were 'least satisfied' with the 1<sup>st</sup> batch of choices with only 5 enamels and were 'most satisfied' with the 3<sup>rd</sup> batch of choices with 30 enamels.

This result differs from the result of an experiment carried out by Iyengar and Leeper (2000) in which they found that people were more likely to purchase jam and chocolates when offered a limited choice (6) instead of more choice (24). Besides the differences in the methodology implemented in the jam-chocolate experiment and the current nail-enamel experiment, there is a big difference between the tasting of chocolates and trying nail-enamels. The tasting of jams and chocolates was more likely to be quickly affected by the law of diminishing marginal utility since for tasting various chocolates the same tongue and the taste buds were repeatedly used by a respondent. Whereas the nail enamels could be experimented with ten different shades on 10 different fingers. Choosing nail enamels from a variety of options thus might not result in diminishing marginal utility.

Further, since this experiment involved a purchase of a product that formed a very small part of disposable income and the goal was predetermined the *hypothetical tradeoff* was less likely to occur.

## LIMITATIONS

Being a controlled social experiment various limitations are

engulfed in the process and respondents may react differently when exposed to real market conditions. The selection of the product and respondents was restricted to a limited number due to time and resources constraint. The experiment could only be performed on one inexpensive female-specific-product. Results may differ if the age group consisted of elder females, with more disposable income or for more expensive purchases like durable commodities. This research simply attempted to trace certain behavioral patterns amongst females involved during the process of purchase of a commodity. These results can certainly not be generalized for all females across various demographic indicators like location, age-group, income levels and commodities among others.

## SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

More research on the purchase behavior of the females involved in the purchases of expensive and durable commodities can be undertaken. Females of different age groups may behave differently during the purchase of different commodities. Research based on observation method may shed more light on the actual buying behavior of the females. A research based on a survey through the administered questionnaire can also be used to capture the reactions of female respondents post purchase. Understanding the reasons for choosing a particular shop for various products on the basis of available choices there may help the marketers to decide better whether more choices would result in more purchases. But the success of such a survey would depend on the ability of the respondents to recall.

## CONCLUSION

The experiment results showed that the females involved in the purchase of an inexpensive female product like nail enamel enjoyed having more choices than less. The process did not involve negative emotions even though the time involved and the efforts put were more while choosing from a wider choice. Rather it was associated with positive emotions like pleasure, self-esteem and positive self-image.

However the conclusions may drastically differ and the paradox of choice may hold true during the purchases of expensive commodities with elder females who have more demanding time constraints amongst other circumstances. Hence studies specifically analyzing the reactions of females towards availing abundance of choice in the process of purchase can enhance the understanding of a marketer. It can assist in designing an appropriate marketing strategy for the decision making processes of the females when they are offered more or less choices to choose from.

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