

MISQ Archivist

Reconciling the Paradoxical Findings of Choice Overload Through an Analytical Lens

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Abstract

Too much of a good thing can be harmful. Choice overload, a compelling paradox in consumer psychology, exemplifies this notion with the idea that offering more product options could impede rather than improve consumer satisfaction, even when consumers are free to ignore any available option. After attracting intense interests in the past decades from multiple disciplines, research on choice overload produced voluminous yet paradoxical findings that are widely perceived as inconsistent even at the meta-analytic level. This paper launches an interdisciplinary inquiry to resolve the inconsistencies at both conceptual and empirical fronts. Specifically, we identified a surprising yet robust pattern among the existing empirical evidence for the choice-overload effect, and demonstrated through mathematical analysis and extensive simulation studies that the pattern would only likely emerge from one specific type of latent mechanism underlying the moderated choice-overload effect. The paper discusses the research and practical implications of our findings, the broad promise of *analytical meta-analysis*, an emerging area for using data analytics and machine learning to address the widely recognized inconsistencies in social and behavioral sciences, and the unique yet salient role of the Information Systems community in developing this new era of meta-analysis.

Keywords: Analytical meta-analysis, inverted-U relationship, curvilinear model, moderation analysis, choice overload