

# The Impact of Variety on Consumer Happiness: Marketing and the Tyranny of Freedom

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework for the study of the impacts of marketing strategies on general happiness. The goal is to provide a road map to establish a link between constructs of consumer behavior and happiness. We will propose the intervention of a new construct that we will name "consumer happiness". The first application of the theoretical framework will be a look at high-variety strategies in marketing. We will try to identify areas for further empirical research that will complement extant efforts in the area.

A researcher interested in the impact of variety (or freedom of choice) on the general well being of individuals would find a series of articles with startling findings. Indeed, it has been suggested that freedom of choice can be experienced as a form of tyranny (Schwartz 2000). Also, there has been empirical evidence that choice can be demotivating (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). A group of researchers also claims that happiness is a matter of choice (Schwartz et al. 2002). This latter example postulates that certain people (called "maximizers") are worse off with more choice. Lehmann (1998) suggests that when variety is concerned, there can possibly be too much of a good thing.

The need for the development of a theoretical framework stems from a desire to study the impact of marketing strategies on happiness AND incorporate the different findings we just mentioned. The constructs we are trying to link marketing with are subjective in nature. Existing macromarketing frameworks for the study of the impacts of marketing strategies on life satisfaction are somehow too narrow to incorporate some of the findings. We present a theoretical framework (Figure 1) for the study of the relationship between marketing strategies and happiness and suggest the mediation of a proposed consumer happiness measure.

We postulate that marketing strategies (marketing-mix strategies, high-variety strategies, mass customization or experience-shopping, etc.) influence (main effect) how people feel about their consumption possibilities and experiences (consumer happiness). For instance, distribution strategies influence the availability of goods directly and the creation of new channels such as online retailing improves the ease, availability and experience of shopping. We also presume that consumer happiness may or may not influence (as a main effect) either the affective (affect) or cognitive (life satisfaction) aspects of happiness. Consumer happiness is needed for the creation of an interactive effect between marketing strategies and happiness measures. We believe that consumer happiness should be measured via general questions so that respondents evaluate their satisfaction with consumption by doing their own "weighted average" of the experiences for which they attach significance.

We present a graphical representation (inverted-"U" shaped) of the relationship between variety and the positiveness of a consumption experience when the evaluative task is performed by cognition (Figure 2). There are three sections to the curve on the graph: an upward sloping portion, a relatively flat plateau and a downward sloping portion. Two lines separate the three sections: satisfaction and regret identify their positions on the x-axis. This indicates that (full) satisfaction is obtained after some number of options. Adding an option adds to the positiveness of the experience since it allows a good chance of finding what one is looking for, and there is an open door for variety-seeking behavior (change). The "point of satisfaction" could be attained with one option alone, providing it fulfills the needs of the consumer. As satisfaction is reached, we enter a plateau section where options can be considered (or ignored) without much affecting the

positiveness of the experience. At the end of the plateau, we find the "point of regret" where the curve starts to dive. We propose that there exist a point in the amount of variety where variety alone brings about doubt and regret avoidance mechanisms. After the point of regret, the positiveness of consumption experiences goes down because of stress, frustration, disengagement from the process, or anticipated/experienced regret caused by heightened expectations and/or an inability to conduct all the evaluations and calculations (mathematical or otherwise) necessary to arrive at a choice. Thus, even though we are past the point of satisfaction, the consumer perceived enough variety for its expectations to be heightened. Instead of simply ignoring other options, as suggested by rational choice theory, the consumer is "infected" by feelings of doubt, and the consumer experiences stress, frustration, regret, or opts for a disengagement from the process in front of anticipated regret.

We conclude that marketing does seem to create some instances of unpleasant choices and unhappiness with decisions. However, several moderating factors can influence the undesirable effects. Thus, a positive role for marketing is to make sure that strategies do not lead to undesirable effects that can engender negative experiences. Marketing strategies (especially high-variety strategies) should be especially concerned with the effects on consumers' expectations. As we have discussed earlier, maximization tendencies are related to very negative consequences. Advertisers should be concerned that their message does not lead the consumer to hold unreasonable expectations about the advertised product. In addition, marketers should continue to offer information for consumers so that they can gain some expertise with the category. It is marketing's role, we believe, to educate consumers and provide the necessary information for people to make appropriate choices within a category.

## **The Impact of Variety on Consumer Happiness: Marketing and the Tyranny of Freedom**

The link between the provision of choice and motivation is by no means unclear. Many researchers in psychology have proven time and again that choice does improve intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, among many other things. In these studies, the reader may want to note, the conditions are often "with choice" or "without choice", where the provision of choice is limited to a few options. Likewise, economics theory assumes that an increase in variety will be accompanied by an increase in the likelihood that consumers find exactly what they are looking for and thus increased variety results in more utility. Two of the assumptions in this model of rational choice are that consumers can evaluate options and determine their preference AND will aim to maximize their utility by choosing what is best for them. That is, people know how good the options presented to them are and they will pick out the best one, the one that maximizes their utility.

Most research efforts do not try to identify the behavior of the variety-satisfaction relationship when variety is large. If anything, an observer would assemble views from psychology and economics literature and assume that variety drives satisfaction (or utility) up all the way to the maximization of the potential utility that could have been derived from the purchase or experience. That is, the curve stops at the maximum utility and other alternatives can be ignored. This relationship and understanding of the impacts of choice seems to be held by most. Indeed, more choice is the way progress is leading us. Selection and assortments are very potent marketing value propositions, and consumers are surely attracted by the promises such retailers can make. Again, if anything the relationship is logical and uses common sense. But still, do we really need 500 TV channels and hundreds of different ice cream flavors? It is conceivable that many of us would be tempted to say "no". It will be our goal to provide probable explanations for the phenomenon and further propose the consequences and negative impacts of overwhelming choice.

The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework for the study of the impacts of marketing strategies on general happiness. The goal is to provide a road map to establish a link between constructs of consumer behavior and happiness. We will propose the intervention of a new construct that we will name "consumer happiness". The first application of the theoretical framework will be a look at high-variety strategies in marketing. We will try to identify areas for further empirical research that will complement extant efforts in the area.

### **Articulation of the Paper**

In Section 1 of the paper we will look at elements in the literature that somehow question the value of choice. In Section 2 we will present a theoretical framework that offers links between marketing strategies, consumer behavior constructs and happiness. In Section 3 we will propose and explain a relationship between variety and the positiveness of consumption experiences where we will discuss the factors necessary for consumption experiences to have a negative impact on the happiness of consumers. In Section 4 we will present conclusions and areas for further research and empirical testing.

## **SECTION 1: QUESTIONING THE VALUE OF CHOICE**

### **Tyranny of Freedom**

The basis for questioning the value of choice in our first reviewed piece of research is the observation of a growing trend in the number of cases of clinical depression. Schwartz (2000) argues that freedom, autonomy and self-determination can become excessive and be experienced as a kind of tyranny. The main idea is that an aspiration to self-determination can be problematic and lead not to freedom of choice but tyranny of choice. The author condemns the American society's focus on an all-encompassing freedom. The *tyranny of freedom* is concerned with whether or not it is beneficial to have countless options as opposed to a more restricted, easier to evaluate set of options. Basically, the author suggests that people faced with the decision of how to allocate their time or money are confronted with an overwhelming array of possibilities, and the ensuing choice process and post-choice evaluation can have detrimental effects.

To make his argument, Schwartz undergoes a thorough examination of rational choice theory. In turn, he questions the validity of the assumptions of well-ordered preferences, complete information, and attribute evaluation and categorization.

He argues that rational choice theory is on the one hand too rich, because it gives people credit for more calculation and flexibility than they possess, and too impoverished since it fails to appreciate a range of influences on decision making that are not themselves amenable to rational calculation. He warrants that choices people make can leave them with the intimidating feeling that they could have done better. The author's thesis is articulated around the recognition that modern American society and culture have evolved into one that features an excessive focus on freedom.

The result of the American society's focus on freedom is an increase in control and *expectations*. People, Schwartz argues, may have grown to expect the best from all areas in their lives. Excessive freedom is experienced as a form of *tyranny* when people realize that some of their choices were not perfect. People expect perfection from themselves and when it inevitably occurs that they fail, the American culture of individualism biases them toward making causal attributions that focus on internal rather than external causal factors (Schwartz 2000). The *tyranny of freedom* exerts pressure on people when they are faced with difficult choices, and also haunts them after the decision has been made. It occurs if people have high expectations and take it upon themselves to make a perfect decision.

### **Choice, Regret and Motivation**

Results from a series of studies (Iyengar and Lepper 2000) indicate that participants were more likely to purchase exotic jams or gourmet chocolates when they had 6 options presented to them as opposed to 30. Additionally, those confronted with fewer options expressed greater satisfaction with the choices they actually made. Similar results were obtained in the case of college students facing the possibility of writing an extra-credit essay. When given 6 topics to choose from, students were more likely to write the essay (motivated), and wrote better essays than when faced with 30 options. In a laboratory setting, participants were found to enjoy assessing their preference more when faced with 30 varieties of chocolates than when faced with 6. However, participants found that the choice was more difficult to make.

Although we find the results of the experience to be particularly interesting and striking, we are less impressed with the authors' explanations of the phenomena. Iyengar and Lepper do little theorizing to provide explanations for the findings. Further, the consideration sets were "forced" onto participants, who had to assess their preference from what experimenters put in front of them. A pre-decided consideration set does not fit within the description of satisficing strategies (more on satisficing later). In terms of theorizing, we suggest that participants may have enjoyed assessing their preference for chocolates because of anticipation and imagination. That is, people may imagine how succulent each and every one of the options may have tasted. In making the choice, we suggest that participants found it difficult because of regret, a potent force in human decision making. As the number of options grows, the likelihood of one making a nonoptimal choice also increases, and that prospect undermines whatever pleasure individuals may get from their actual choice. In consumption situations, it often pushes people to delay their decisions, or else to use simple heuristics or arbitrary rules to settle their choice. Consumers have been shown to be more promotion-sensitive in front of large assortments (Bawa, Landwehr and Krishna 1989).

Gilovich and Medvec (1995) study the temporal pattern of regret and suggest causes. Their efforts focus on the intensity of regret for actions, or commissions, versus inactions, or omissions. Errors of omissions (inactions) seem to loom larger in the long term, and have more powerful consequences. Regrettable inactions tend to be amplified whereas the pain of regrettable actions tends to be reduced with the passage of time. Thus, regret theory suggests that negative consequences would follow from a person turning away from a consumption experience (e.g. due to overwhelming variety).

Tsiros and Mittal (2000) studied the antecedents and consequences of regret in consumer decision making. They shed some light on the importance of several factors influencing regret and distinguish the construct from satisfaction, by showing that the two have different antecedents, moderators and consequences. The moderating roles of certain factors are as follows. First, it was shown that regret could be experienced even in the absence of *information* on a forgone outcome. Then, it was shown that the *valence* of the outcome (positive or negative), the preservation of the *status quo* (retain status quo or change), and the *reversibility* of decisions all influenced the intensity of the experienced regret. Results showed that when no information on the forgone outcome was available, regret was more likely to be experienced when the chosen outcome was negative, irreversible, or was a departure from the status quo.

### **Maximizing vs. Satisficing**

Maximizing and satisficing seem like an interesting area to study along with questioning the value of choice. Iyengar and Lepper make reference to the concepts and attempt to find relationships with their conditions of limited vs. extensive choice. However, we hinted to our disappointment with the way the constructs were measured. A very recent series of study by a team of 6 researchers (Schwartz et al. 2002) approached the idea of maximizing vs. satisficing and came up with a quite fantastic suggestion: happiness is a matter of choice! Their findings indicate that a group they call "maximizers" are less happy than those they refer to as "satisficers". Those who score high on their multi-item maximization measure (maximizers) scored lower (negative correlations were found) on happiness, self-esteem, optimism and life satisfaction. Moreover, their score correlated positively with depression, perfectionism and regret.

Looking at the items for the measurement of maximization, which in this case would be a general tendency, we find that they relate to maximizing more than to satisficing. In Wiczorkowska and Burnstein (1999), we find the original definition of "satisficing" from Simon (1976): "In decision-making, people limit consideration to a subset of options they deem good enough given the situation and their resources." From the definition, we see that the intuitive "good enough" component applies to the consideration set, not necessarily to the chosen alternative. Indeed, satisficing is a screening strategy that could satisfy a goal similar to that of a maximizer. Therefore, we find that the scale used by Schwartz and colleagues does not, for instance, measure satisficing tendencies with reverse scores. Furthermore, the 13-item scale includes dubious items such as "No matter what I do, I have the highest standards for myself" and "I never settle for second best". These particular items have very low correlations with the maximization scale, but would likely correlate highly with perfectionism. Most items in the maximization scale would hint to high expectations but the above-mentioned items relate to high standards. Another item relates to (perhaps) the experience of frustration ("I find it difficult to shop for a gift for a friend") and another to fantasy ("I often fantasize about living in ways that are quite different from my actual life").

The relevance of the maximization scale for the study of the impact of high-variety strategies on consumer behavior lies in the fact that some people limit their consideration set because of situation demands or limited resources. To a certain extent, it may be more interesting for researchers in marketing to study "satisficers" than "maximizers". Indeed, those people would potentially follow rational choice more closely, in that in front of a choice A-B-C, they could choose to ignore "C". However, these may be the less satisfied consumers. They may not find the option that is exactly what they were looking for because it was outside their consideration set. Although less satisfied, the satisficers may be more happy because their expectations were lower and the attribution of blame may not be too important, and perhaps may even not fall on internal factors but external, situational factors. We suggest that satisficers may just "get over it", while maximizers are expected to ruminate over their negative experience.

## **SECTION 2: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF MARKETING AND HAPPINESS**

A researcher interested in the impact of variety (or freedom of choice) on the general well being of individuals would find a series of articles with startling findings. Indeed, it has been suggested that freedom of choice can be experienced as a form of tyranny (Schwartz 2000). Also, there has been empirical evidence that choice can be demotivating (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). A group of researchers also claims that happiness is a matter of choice (Schwartz et al. 2002). This latter example postulates that certain people (called "maximizers") are worse off with more choice. Lehmann (1998) suggests that when variety is concerned, there can possibly be too much of a good thing.

The need for the development of a theoretical framework stems from a desire to study the impact of marketing strategies on happiness AND incorporate the different findings we just mentioned. The constructs we are trying to link marketing with are subjective in nature. Existing macromarketing frameworks for the study of the impacts of marketing strategies on life satisfaction are somehow too narrow to incorporate some of the findings.

### **Frameworks for the Study of Marketing and Happiness**

Typically, marketing impacts on some happiness-related concept have been covered by economics-based approaches. That is, marketing was studied for its relationships with "quality of life", most often via measurable economic indicators

(see Reynolds and Barksdale 1978; Samli 1987). In the case of choice, the analysis would be that high-variety strategies increase the selection of goods available for consumers, which measured as an economic indicator is assumed to be a good thing. That is, people get a better chance to satisfy their needs when more choice is present. The problem with such a framework is evident: it does not account for the subjectivity of individuals and the importance of various factors in their assessment of their well being.

Studies of the quality-of-life concept typically proceed by identifying domains that have an influence on the overall quality-of-life. Day (1987) synthesizes a number of studies on the quality-of-life and presents thirteen domains that can be, and have been, used to obtain a measure of overall quality-of-life. Of the thirteen domains reported, two are influenced by marketing, namely "Purchase and Consumption of Goods and Services" and "Material Possessions". This framework is translated into satisfaction measures in an attempt to study the relationship between marketing and overall satisfaction with life in a developing country (Leelakulthanit, Day and Walters 1991). Basically, the framework becomes one that lists potential domains affecting life satisfaction and tries to find which ones influence overall satisfaction with life. The authors posit that the (direct) relationship between marketing and life satisfaction can be observed by establishing a link between "satisfaction with material possessions" and "satisfaction with acquisition". The study finds a significant relationship between the former construct and overall life satisfaction (OLS), but fails to relate the latter with OLS. The subdomains of the "acquisition" construct included the following items: (satisfaction with) selection of merchandise in stores, quality of goods, prices charged and attractiveness/ambience of stores. Unfortunately, the item is concerned with the availability of goods and not with the process of acquisition itself. The authors note that "future research might include consumer strategies and tactics in the development of measures of acquisition." (Leelakulthanit, Day and Walters, 1991) We shall use the idea of domains of life satisfaction in our framework.

Aside from the measures of "satisfaction with acquisition", we could use a construct called "consumer satisfaction" (see Giese and Cote 2000). We choose to present Day (1987), who studies consumer satisfaction and its relationship with life satisfaction. The construct of consumer satisfaction defines steps within a purchase experience where expectations are formed, actual performance assessed, expectations are then confirmed or disconfirmed, feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction ensue and some behavioral/nonbehavioral responses follow. Basically, the construct is restricted to experiences where a purchase occurred and omits experiences where there was no purchase, whether or not that was intended (browsing only or process disengagement).

A paper by Ahuvia and Friedman (1998) proposes a composite model to relate wealth to subjective well being (SWB). It reviews and contrasts three perspectives that explain the relationship between material resources and SWB. Their presentation of the concept of happiness is of interest to us since it divides and defines the SWB construct to contain a cognitive part called *life satisfaction* and an affective part (affective experience). That is, *life satisfaction* refers specifically to the cognitive judgments people make about how well they are doing in life and the affective experience is divided into positive affect and lack of negative affect. Thus, experiences of negative affect may contribute negatively to SWB.

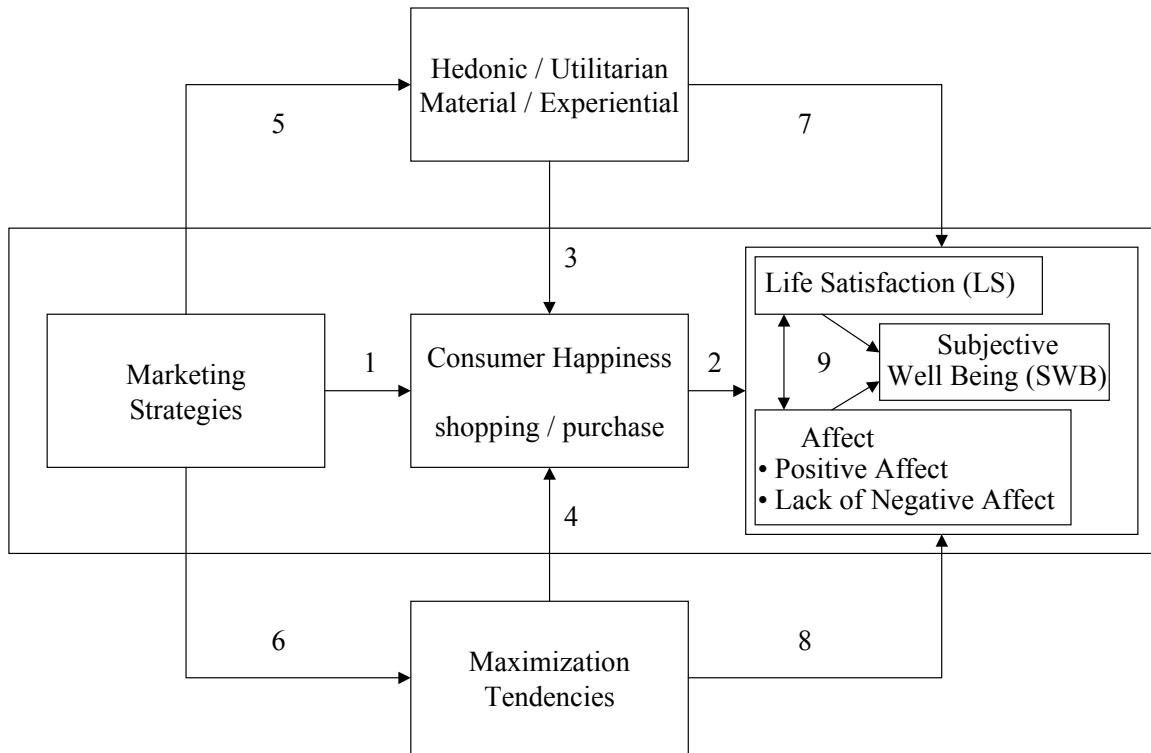
### **Theoretical Framework for the Study of Relationships Between Marketing and SWB**

The provision of choice as a marketing strategy is related to the acquisition process more than to the consumption or enjoyment of the good or service itself. That is, we cannot evaluate the impact of choice directly by using a measure of consumer satisfaction since we do not assume that the experience will result in a purchase. Indeed, in the studies by Iyengar and Lepper (2000), many people approached a booth with an assortment of 24 jams but most did not buy jam. Thus we need a measure of the whole interface of the consumer with marketing efforts. That is, we want to create a measure that allows for the consumer's subjective evaluation of its overall contact with marketing. We will call this measure "consumer happiness" and define it to include all consumption experiences (shopping with no intention to buy, shopping with intention to buy, and purchases). We believe that consumption is an important area in people's lives and is a basic building block in the organization of our society. Basically, we want consumer happiness to represent the pleasure individuals draw from exchanging their money for goods and services. Therefore we stress the importance of the hedonic perspective of consumption by creating the consumer happiness construct.

### Consumer Satisfaction, Regret and Consumer Happiness

Consumer happiness is not consumer satisfaction although the two concepts would seem to be similar. Consumer happiness is meant to mirror general happiness in life, only for the area of consumption. Consumer satisfaction (see Giese and Cote 2000) is an evaluation (comparison) of actual performance versus expectations, generally geared toward a particular part of an experience within some time frame. Regret is also a comparison, but it confronts the chosen option with the foregone options (real or imagined). Consumer happiness is a summary variable of the important experiences in consumption, and thus integrates satisfaction and regret with positive and negative affective experiences.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Theoretical Framework for the Study of Marketing Strategies Links to Happiness**



"Happiness" box at right from Ahuvia and Friedman, 1998

Figure 1 presents the intended conceptualization of the relationship between marketing strategies and happiness. (Numbers along arrows represent the different relationships and will be referred to with square brackets [x]). In the "happiness" box (from Ahuvia and Friedman 1998), we find the three relationships represented by [9]. In their model, Ahuvia and Friedman link up to either affect or life satisfaction, but we choose to point to the entire box (to happiness in general), thereby assuming the proposed relationships exist for the affective and/or cognitive aspects of happiness. Arrows [1] and [2] represent the main relationships that we introduce, along with the concept of consumer happiness. We postulate that marketing strategies (marketing-mix strategies, high-variety strategies, mass customization or experience-shopping, etc.) influence (main effect) how people feel about their consumption possibilities and experiences (consumer happiness) via [1]. For instance, distribution strategies influence the availability of goods directly and the creation of new channels such as online retailing improves the ease, availability and experience of shopping. We also presume that consumer happiness may or may not influence (as a main effect) either the affective (affect) or cognitive (life satisfaction) aspects of happiness, or as it is, [1] and [2] are needed for the creation of an interactive effect between marketing strategies and happiness measures. In short, we believe that marketing strategies will influence the happiness (SWB) of those who see consumption experiences as important features of their lives. On that note, we believe that consumer

happiness should be measured via general questions so that respondents evaluate their satisfaction with consumption by doing their own "weighted average" of the experiences for which they attach significance.

We included a box with the title "Hedonic/Utilitarian-Material/Experiential" to represent WHAT people consume. Relationship [3] indicates that the tendency for people to acquire material possessions as opposed to experiential "goods" influences their happiness with consumption. We include [7] to postulate that perhaps some experiential goods (such as travels) may have a main effect on SWB, as they are readily recalled in the evaluation of one's well being. Relationship [7] (and somehow [3]) has been studied by Van Boven (2000) and results seem to indicate that experiential purchases make people happier than material purchases. Relationship [5] indicates that marketing strategies influence consumers' tendency toward material and experiential purchases. For instance, some retailers focus on providing experiences for their customers (experiential marketing strategies presented in Schmitt 1999).

The box titled "maximization tendencies" relates to HOW people approach consumption and relates to their aims. Some people (or most on some occasions) will aim to get the "best" product to satisfy their need (maximize), while others will only aim to "satisfice" (a term suggested by Simon, 1976). Arrow [4] suggests that tendencies to maximize have an impact on consumer happiness. That is, maximizers can be less happy with their purchases [4] and in general [8] (as suggested in Schwartz et al. 2002). An integral part of the question of validity for [4] and [8] is the construal of expectations. Indeed, we shall discuss later on whether or not high expectations are part of maximization strategies or if they influence the choice of a strategy, as suggested by [6]. In other words, something (perhaps marketing strategies for [6] to hold) influences the expectations people have towards their purchase and directs them to a maximization strategy when their expectations are heightened. In reality, [6] may be empirically evidenced by online retailing (lower search costs lead to maximization) or provision of choice (expectation that one will find exactly what he/she is looking for) or by other means that lower search costs or influence expectations. The impact of search costs on acquisition strategy is articulated by Wiczkowska and Burnstein (1999) who further hypothesize that there exists a trade-off between "means" and "ends" that can be under consideration (encoded) because of the limited capacity people possess.

### **More on the Interactive Effect of Marketing Strategies on SWB via Consumer Happiness**

In defining consumer happiness we extended the concept of consumer satisfaction (Day 1987) by including shopping experiences (with or without the intent to buy). The distinction is important since we see in the evidence of Iyengar and Lepper (2000) that people are attracted by large assortments and enjoy asserting their *preferences* within a large assortment, even though they may experience frustration and regret with a *decision*. Therefore, we do not want to assume that people assign more or less weight to the shopping experience as opposed to the consumption experience. Indeed, many people enjoy shopping as a hedonic activity. Shopping offers the pleasure of dreams, imagination and most importantly anticipation. This anticipation is part of the experience of consumption, and is even part of the marketing strategy of some marketers (a bicycle company makes people wait exactly two weeks for the delivery of a customized bicycle, even though the item could be delivered sooner). Whether consumers recall this anticipation and assign weight to it might influence their consumer happiness rating. If one limits or prompts to the evaluation of purchases only, then the mechanisms of adaptation may well have dimmed the quality of the consumption experience (see Kahneman). It is suggested that people will never enjoy a product as much as they anticipated because of the adaptation principle, hence consumers may not feel that their possessions made them as happy as they objectively did, in time.

## **SECTION 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VARIETY AND CONSUMER HAPPINESS**

In their article about measuring the marketing contribution to quality-of-life (QOL), Samli, Sirgy and Meadow (1987) suggest two distinct approaches, either top-down or bottom-up. In the top-down approach a researcher would start with a QOL model, establish its determinants and trace marketing efforts within the QOL goal hierarchy. In the bottom-up approach one looks at a marketing model and attempts to find out the contributions of the model's indicators to global QOL indicators. In a similar fashion, we could adopt two approaches, one "inductive" and the other "deductive". We relate the approach using Schwartz's (2000) article on the Tyranny of Freedom to a deduction. We could follow along the lines of reasoning for the Tyranny of Freedom and make a case against marketing-related choice situations. Or we could try to generalize from specific consumption experiences and obtain a case against high-variety strategies. From the two

cases we can arrive at conclusions that call for different but not unclear prescriptions. Indeed, the tyranny of freedom calls for social change, whereas a study from the marketing side calls for changes in strategy and more support for consumers.

### **Deductions from the Tyranny of Freedom**

To make a case against marketing high-variety strategies using the Tyranny of Freedom, one only needs to point out to the fact that people may not know what to buy and may be unhappy even if satisfied with their purchases. Bypassing consumer happiness, we look at the route identified by relationships [6] and [8] in Figure 1. That is, marketing strategies influence maximization tendencies, which in turn have impacts on happiness. The line of reasoning in the Tyranny of Freedom is that the American culture influences people to expect *perfection*. These expectations of perfection are assumed and need to be tested empirically, but they hold as a working hypothesis. Still and all, there may be a pervasive sentiment among people that they may have done better. This feeling is studied in the follow-up studies by Schwartz et al. (2002) that identify a group of people most likely to experience the feeling, namely the "maximizers". Thus, in front of high-variety strategies, maximizers most likely cannot evaluate all options and are left feeling like they could have done better. The authors believe that the presence of an overwhelming array of options is the key mediating factor to establish the link between maximization and depression (which we take as a sign of unhappiness).

*Assumptions* - The prescriptions from these results remain within the realm of social change, or at least some support for those that could be identified as heading for depression. We are tempted to suggest that many (and perhaps a majority of people) do not expect perfection in everything, or even most things. Thus if we drop the assumption of perfection, our conclusions will suggest a much brighter future for high-variety strategies. Moreover, the kind of attribution that is necessary for people to be (severely) unhappy as a result of facing overwhelming choice is perhaps the weakest point of Schwartz's theory, and what leads us to believe that it impacts a minority of people. We believe that the American culture of individualism, which according to the theory biases people toward making causal attributions that focus on internal rather than external factors, has a lesser impact for consumption activities, for a variety of reasons which we will discuss shortly. For instance, we believe that people will experience much more negatively a bad choice of schooling than a bad choice of jam or breakfast cereal. Thus, by also dropping the attribution assumption, we are left with an analysis of the impacts of high-variety strategies on what we hope is the majority of people. The picture is indeed pretty grim if most of us are headed for depression.

### **High-Variety Strategies and Consumer Happiness (generalization approach)**

We now look at how the high-variety strategies in marketing influence consumer happiness and SWB ([1]-[2]). The difference in the approach is that we look at a specific consumer and his/her consumption experiences, and try to work our way up to happiness. We now assume that people have some idea of what they want to acquire. For instance, a consumer sees a piece of advertisement and develops a liking for the product, which triggers him into some action. The action and reaction the consumer will go through is what we study now.

### **High-Variety Strategies in Marketing**

Barbara Kahn (1998) proposes that high-variety strategies in marketing can increase the competitiveness of firms by better-meeting customers' needs over time. The article presents an excellent overview of marketing strategies and their impacts. The author suggests that when firms adopt high-variety strategies, they fulfill two distinct goals. First, more variety makes it more likely for consumers to find exactly the option they were looking for (customization strategy). Further it allows consumers to enjoy variety over time (variety-seeking strategy). The basis for suggesting high-variety strategies is reasonable: firms need to develop long-term relationships with their customers, and instrumental in achieving that goal is learning customers' preferences and continually meeting their needs over time.

Kahn raises many of the important issues in establishing the role of marketing in the creation of overwhelming choice and unpleasant consumption experiences. She argues that the answer to the question "how much variety to offer" is empirical and is dependent on the nature of the competition and customer values in particular industries. From the firm's point of view, this seems like a satisfactory argument but from the standpoint of consumer happiness, factors seem to influence the level of desired variety. In agreement with previous sections, Kahn recognizes that high-variety can lead to frustration.

She also seems to agree with Schwartz on the point that the amount of variety that can be processed or effectively considered is constrained by an upper bound.

An important factor influencing the role of marketing in creating consumer unhappiness with product proliferation is suggested in Kahn's discussion of perceived versus actual variety. Indeed, consumers recognize the level of variety differently depending on some factors. Kahn and Lehmann (1991) suggest that two elements contribute to perceived variety: the number of acceptable options and the amount of desirable diversity among items. Perceived variety is considered quite low if consumers see little or no differences among items in a product class. It has been proven that the decision-making task becomes arduous when consumers perceive that a line of item contains a lot of redundancy and duplication (Glazer, Kahn and Moore 1991). Kahn also suggests that "high" perceived variety is preferable to "low" when the consumer is "motivated enough". (We understand being "motivated enough" to represent a state when people have dispositional attentional capacity, which may help produce variety-seeking behavior) Ways in which more variety-seeking behavior can be induced are reviewed. For instance, prompting positive mood in study participants increased their variety-seeking behavior by affecting their feelings of openness and flexibility (Kahn and Isen 1993). Further, similar results were obtained when congruent ambient scents were pumped into the consumption environment (Mitchell, Kahn and Knasko 1995).

It appears that the process of learning one's own preference increases customer satisfaction. The evidence is from Huffman and Kahn (1997), who show that the process of having both the marketer and consumer involved in learning about the consumer's preference can lead to higher satisfaction. The authors suggest that customers should be engaged in the process of formulating preferences on each of a product's attributes. That is, customers should first learn about the attributes and then determine their preference. However, they also found an upper bound to the amount of input that can be drawn from a consumer. Asking for too much only served to frustrate consumers who as a result opted to disengage from the whole collaboration process.

Also addressed in Huffman & Kahn (1997) was the study of how information should be presented to consumers. They compared two methods of presentation, either by attribute or by alternative. Presenting options by attribute in a computer-shopping example would involve asking preferences on monitor size, processing speed, amount of memory and so on. Comparatively, presenting options by alternatives would be to present whole packages and trying to derive consumer preference by asking what is liked or disliked in the different alternatives. The authors found that presenting information by attributes for complex products and involved decisions increased customer satisfaction with the process of learning preferences and also enabled the customer to be more ready to make a choice.

Lehmann (1998) provides a follow-up commentary based on the paper by Kahn (1998). He suggests that consumers create variety for themselves, for instance by mixing outfits. Additionally, he provides evidence that customers often don't know what is best for them. Indeed, the author argues that the assumptions that customers can detect small differences, that they have a preferred (ideal) level, and have a fixed preferred level are all inaccurate. Lehmann suggests that more options can lead to worse decisions. That is, in the face of information overload, customers tend to resort to simple decision rules, which are not generally optimal. Also, Lehmann asserts that the belief that a large assortment increases the likelihood of getting a product that perfectly meets one's needs is not supported by game theory. That is, it is not optimal for firms to offer variety in a way that is optimal for consumers. For example, if two products are offered between 0 and 1, consumers might prefer light (.25) and dark gray (.75), while firms would be offering black (0) and white (1).

We add to this exposition the potential benefit of variety on the hedonic value of shopping. Indeed, we believe that large assortments support a pleasant shopping experience, and thus create a stream of positive affect experiences for some. While not everyone enjoys shopping, we believe that variety is contributing to the consumer happiness of those that do. Indeed, we believe that shopping provides the pleasure of anticipation and the possibility for people to imagine owning particular products. However, we also believe that some people will only find shopping to be a frustrating experience if the activity is framed under thinking that all one sees is temptation one cannot have.

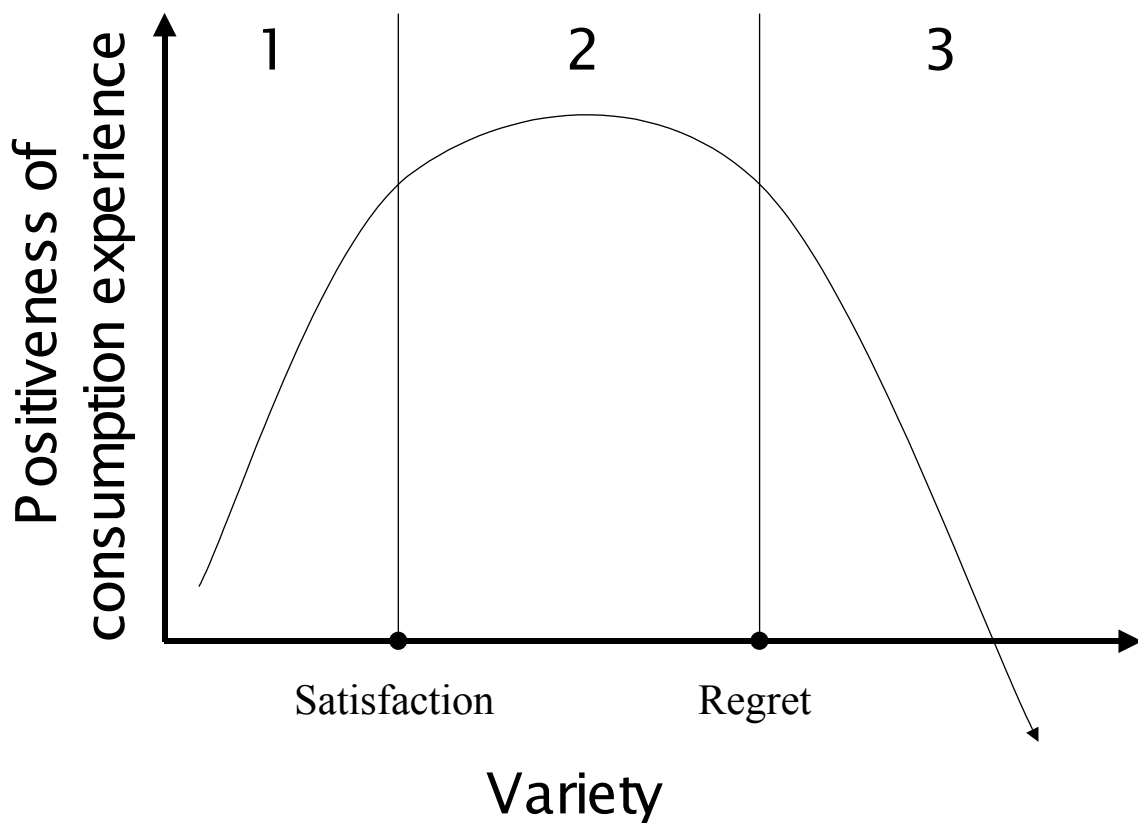
### Relationship Between Variety and Happiness in Consumer Behavior

*Assumptions* - In order for us to define the relationship between high-variety strategies and consumer happiness, we focus on the affective component of consumer happiness. We choose to be advocates of the *affective primacy* (see Zajonc, 1998) and in the theory that people actually enjoy assessing their preferences. This has support in the literature in terms of choice (Iyengar and Lepper, 2000) and shopping behavior. Furthermore, we assume that people can assess their preferences using their affective system without the intervention of cognition. This relates to the suggestion by Zajonc (1980) that "preferences need no inferences". Further, we believe that preferences assessed via the affective system (with feelings and emotions) explain partly the results found by Wilson and colleagues (1993). That is, introspecting about reasons can reduce post-choice satisfaction while focusing on one's feelings (without attempting to explain the reasons for them) does not disrupt people's attitude in the way that analyzing reasons does (See Wilson et al. (1993) for discussion). Our explanation is that preferences come almost automatically from affect but these preferences can be difficult to verbalize so they may find little support from cognition. From our point of view, it happens that consumers like something but don't really know why, they just do. Many people enjoy running and many people enjoy marathons, but most would find it hard to explain why. In fact, the reason for people to choose to run marathons probably falls outside of rationality. For consumer behavior, we note that the importance of the distinction between choices made with cognition (rational) and affect. We assume that people can make choices by focusing on their affective reactions to options, but some factors may influence consumers to use cognition. We will assume that there is a limit to the size of a set evaluated with the cognitive system. Formally, we pose the assumption that large assortments may heighten expectations and trigger people to find reasons for their choice. That is, large assortments may trigger regret avoidance mechanisms and in attempting to reduce regret, consumers try to choose rationally, and evaluate options formally using cognition.

*Cognitive Evaluation of Options, Construction of Preferences* - We now present a graphical representation of the relationship between variety and the positiveness of a consumption experience when the evaluative task is performed by cognition (Figure 2). The dependent variable (positiveness of experience) could also have been happiness or satisfaction, but as we will see, variety may create occasions where the result is regret, frustration or a disengagement from the choice process which would not be measurable with the expectation-disconfirmation model of satisfaction if no purchase took place. We note that the proposed relationship will help us to expose the impact of different enablers, mediators and moderators on the positiveness of consumption experiences, but it is not intended to be a universal representation of the relationship.

Figure 2 shows the proposed inverted-"U"-shaped relationship between variety and the positiveness of a consumption experience. There are three sections to the curve on the graph: an upward sloping portion (1), a relatively flat plateau (2) and a downward sloping portion (3). Two lines separate the three sections: satisfaction and regret identify their positions on the x-axis. This indicates that (full) satisfaction is obtained after some number of options. Adding an option adds to the positiveness of the experience since it allows a good chance of finding what one is looking for, and there is an open door for variety-seeking behavior (change). The "point of satisfaction" (end of section 1) could be attained with one (1) option alone, providing it fulfills the needs of the consumer. However, it probably is more in most cases. As satisfaction is reached, we enter a plateau section (2) where options can be considered (or ignored) without much affecting the positiveness of the experience. At the end of section (2), we find the "point of regret" where the curve starts to dive. We propose that there exist a point in the amount of variety where variety alone brings about doubt and regret avoidance mechanisms. After the point of regret, the positiveness of consumption experiences goes down because of stress, frustration, disengagement from the process, or anticipated/experienced regret caused by heightened expectations and/or an inability to conduct all the evaluations and calculations (mathematical or otherwise) necessary to arrive at a choice. Thus, even though we are past the point of satisfaction, the consumer perceived enough variety for its expectations to be heightened. Instead of simply ignoring other options, as suggested by rational choice theory, the consumer is "infected" by feelings of doubt, and the consumer experiences stress, frustration, regret, or opts for a disengagement from the process in front of anticipated regret.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Relationship Between (Perceived) Variety and Positiveness of Consumption Experiences**  
**When the Evaluative Task is Performed by Cognition**



### Factors Explaining the Downward Slope

The explanations for the appearance of negativness into the consumption experience in section (3) are related to self-regulation (see Baumeister, Heatherton and Tice 1994). At the point where choice becomes overwhelming, we liken the impacts to those of self-regulation failure. Indeed, the stress, frustration and disengagement are causes and effects of self-regulation failure. High perceived variety confronts consumers with a hard evaluative task that consumes the limited resources people have for self-regulation (Muraven and Baumeister 2000). Keinan (1987) finds that under stress, people may be unable to make themselves compare and contrast many different alternatives, because their attentional capacity is depleted. The result is that people may tend to choose the first viable (good enough) option they find, losing out on the possibility that another option was even better. This resort to a simple heuristic can be considered a disengagement from the process or an experience of lack of control, which according to Schwartz and colleagues (2002) can be considered a part of learned helplessness. Whether or not consumers evaluate this disengagement or lack of control as negatively as we model it remains to be tested empirically, but we assume that compounding these experiences may indeed lead to learned helplessness and the tyranny of freedom (Schwartz 2000).

We also note that as consumers perceive more variety, they may set their expectations, and thus their goals, too high. As another form of self-regulation failure, Baumeister, Heatherton and Tice (1994) discuss the setting of inappropriate goals. They refer to Ward and Eisler (1987) who showed that "Type-A subjects (coronary-prone)" tended to set their goals too high. Because of the lofty goals, the subjects' performance tended to fall short, and so they evaluated themselves badly. These poor self-evaluations then produced emotional distress i.e. they made themselves miserable. This discussion of a self-regulation failure experience bears all the elements of the tyranny of freedom and the discussion of maximizers (Schwartz 2000 and Schwartz et al. 2002).

### Determining the "Point of Regret"

The point where consumers start to experience the negative impacts of overwhelming variety is of particular interest since it answers the question: "How much is too much?" Unfortunately, the answer depends on many factors which we will set out to enumerate. Some factors will, as their value increase, move the "point of regret" to the right and others will make it more likely for consumers to have negative consumption experiences in front of high-variety, and thus move the point of regret to the left.

*Moving the Point of Regret to the Right: Consumer Expertise* - Huffman and Kahn (1997) found that presenting information by attributes for complex products and involved decisions increased customer satisfaction with the process of learning preferences and also enabled the customer to be more ready to make a choice. However, asking for too much information only served to frustrate consumers who as a result opted to disengage from the whole collaboration process. What if a consumer had enough knowledge already and did not need to collaborate with the marketer to assess his preference? In that case, we would label the consumer an "expert". Consumer expertise is concerned with the amount, content and organization of knowledge about domains. An "expert" is one that has enough information arranged in such a way that he/she can find reasons for choice across different usage contexts (see Mitchell and Dacin 1996). In short, an expert would have enough information to evaluate options within a category and be able to find the best options to answer a particular need or goal. This organization of knowledge, to be most efficient, is organized around attributes. In the construction of preference, it is clear that evaluations are more tractable for alignable differences (attributes) than non-alignable differences (see Markman, Zhang and Moreau 2000) for a representation of the construction of preference). Presenting information to customers can increase their satisfaction and have them ready to make a choice and the learning process can be motivating for customers. Indeed, as well as providing bases for alignable differences, the presentation of attributes actually leads consumers to gain expertise, i.e. they become "experts".

Thus, we propose that consumer expertise shifts the "point of regret" to the right because of the experts' ability to reduce the size of their consideration set readily and easily. For instance, we believe that an expert runner will have a highly positive consumption experience even in the presence of very large assortments. Indeed, instead of considering the appearance of all models (up to a hundred), which is what we assume a novice would do, an expert would be able to reduce its consideration set to models designed for "high-mileage neutral runners with high arches and light to medium frame build" (from this author's experience). This definition of a shoe along 4 attributes (mileage, pronation, arch and frame) automatically reduces the consideration set to about 6 options, which we assume is manageable, especially with actual tryout.

*Moving the Point of Regret to the Left: Expectations, Risk and Involvement* - Some factors will make it more likely for consumers to have negative consumption experiences in front of high variety. Those factors are expectations, risk and involvement. Whether the influence on the negativeness of the experience is a main effect ([1] on Figure 1) or an interactive effect by increasing maximization tendencies ([6-4] on Figure 1) remains to be tested. Generally, higher expectations may influence maximization tendencies. High expectations may be the result of variety alone or may have been created by idealized images of advertising (Richins 1991). With higher expectations, there is a lesser chance for the consumer to find exactly what he/she was looking for, and it may be that the expectation is for the proverbial "best". Schwartz and colleagues (2002) argue that it will be impossible to succeed in such a mission. The "point of regret" is attained sooner by maximizers because of anticipated regret and the impossibility for them to evaluate all options.

In high-risk situations, when there is a lot to gain or lose psychologically and/or financially, consumers have been shown to adopt larger consideration sets (Markman, Zhang and Moreau 2000). In low-risk situation, consumers adopt smaller consideration sets and generally affix little meaning to their choice, and so are less likely to experience regret. In high-involvement situations, the consumer is more active in the decision process and more interactions are necessary. High-involvement situations will contribute to the consumers' feeling of control over the process. Stressful, difficult and frustrating choices will be experienced more negatively because of the higher probability of the experience being felt as lack of control and the higher probability of self-blame. High-involvement situations are critical since they set up the possibility for the consumer to cast the blame for a faulty decision upon him/herself.

For example, we suppose someone is looking to buy a handheld computer for a businessperson. The variety would be impressive and it would be very hard to evaluate for novices. Since the category is quite new, there is no "norm" established for reference (Kahneman and Miller 1986). If the buyer has high expectations, i.e. wants the gift to be just right, then the buyer would likely get very involved and there would be some risk to the purchase. Research suggests that consumers may become more promotion sensitive in front of large assortments (Bawa, Landwehr and Krishna 1989). That is, the buyer might choose a popular option on sale instead of trying to understand the attributes in the category and predict the goals of the person receiving the gift. Then the attribution style assumed for self-blame is perhaps quite likely.

*Note on the Impact of Reversibility* - Tsiros and Mittal (2000) found that the reversibility had a somewhat positive effect on the amount of regret that a person would experience as a result of a choice task. It seems reasonable to include reversibility (money-back guarantee) as a moderating factor influenced by marketing. Intuitively, a reversible decision would make it less likely for a person to experience negative consequences in consumption. Thus, reversibility seems to be a tool that marketers can use to safeguard against unpleasant consumption experiences for their customers. However, some regret may still be experienced even when decisions are reversible. On the other hand, Gilbert and Ebert (2002) found that participants who had a decision-reversal option were actually less satisfied with the outcomes of their decisions than those whose decisions were irreversible. Their argument is that various psychological processes get recruited when a decision is irreversible, suggesting dissonance reduction and rationalization. When a decision is final, people subjectively improve the chosen alternative and denigrate the rejected one.

### **Limitations**

We could have assumed that there are two distinct cases of acquisition processes, one that is driven by an "affective baseline" and another case where there is little or no "affective baseline" or preconceived idea. We define the affective baseline as the preferred brand or an option that brings about strong positive feelings. An example of this case is when a consumer wants to get a particular brand of beer (e.g. Guinness or Budweiser) that he may or may not have already experienced. Similarly, a consumer may have a somehow "precise" idea of what he/she wants, e.g. an Irish stout. In the acquisition process, the consumer shops with a small consideration set (the brand or the beer type). In the case where there is no affective baseline, consumers must relate either to a norm (Kahneman and Miller 1986) or their own logic. Thus, with no affective baseline there is increased reliance on cognitive evaluations. For example, there is no affective baseline for gifts for friends. If one decides on a type of product, then the purchase will need to be for the option that has more merit according to the cognitive evaluation of the consumer, which returns us to Figure 2.

*Affective Baseline - Preconceived Idea* - Sometimes, even in the presence of high variety, large assortments or extensive freedom, consumers may come with a distinct preference that may or may not be the best choice for them. This preference may be the result of habit or any personal factor. Many salespeople will have stories of people set on a decision that beats all logic. Many will say that they were appalled by the decision of the consumer, but most probably ended up granting the consumer's wishes. This constitute an extreme case of affective baseline, but the idea is that most consumers have a preconceived idea of what they want and their shopping behavior will reflect a tendency to search for a product that meets or exceeds the attributes of the preconceived idea. There is a need to distinguish between a preconceived idea and the result of thorough research. We identify the preconceived idea as the result of feelings and emotions about something, while research could include affective and cognitive evaluations, and represent a thoughtful decision. We posit that when consumers have a clear affective picture of what they want and they find it, there is very little introspection, rumination or general thinking about the alternatives foregone. However, if the consumer does not find an option satisfying the preconceived idea, then existing alternatives have to be evaluated. Furthermore, there may exist a relationship between high-perceived variety and the tendency to evaluate other options, or to use cognition in the evaluation of options. Table 1 summarizes the proposed relationships.

### **The Impact of High-Variety Strategies on Consumer Happiness**

We evaluated the link between marketing and consumer happiness with a generalization of negative or lack-of-control experiences resulting from overwhelming choice. First, we had to show that choice situations could be problematic and unpleasant. Then, it was our task to show that marketing contributes to the creation of overwhelming choice. We discussed how some marketers use high-variety strategies and have caused some people to think that some instances of variety can mean "too much of a good thing" (Lehmann 1998). In Figure 1 we propose relationship [1], which is that the

accumulation of instances of difficult and imperfect choice results in people's increasing unhappiness with their consumption activities. We defined consumer happiness generally to include the affective evaluation of consumers of their actual and potential consumption activities.

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of Cases When Consumers Have Preconceived Ideas**

Preconceived idea	→	Satisfactory option present	→	Low perceived variety	→	Purchase
			→	High perceived variety	→	Possible regret + Cognitive evaluation
Preconceived idea	→	Satisfactory option not found	→	Low perceived variety	→	Affective or cognitive evaluation
			→	High perceived variety	→	New cognitive evaluation

Although consumer happiness and consumer satisfaction may appear to be similar (see Giese and Cote 2000) in that they are relying on affective evaluations, the concept of consumer satisfaction is still directed at a particular point in the consumption experience, while consumer happiness is intended to mirror happiness in life. People choose to consider whatever they feel contributes to their happiness, as well they should be free to consider any aspect as important for their happiness with consumption. For instance, some people choose to focus on the behavior of big corporations and are unhappy with their points of contact with them while others may simply enjoy the low prices. Others may feel that shopping makes them happy even if they do not have a lot of financial resources.

The link between high-variety strategies and consumer unhappiness will depend on the frequency and importance of consumption experiences that end up being experienced negatively. We chose to evaluate the impact of high-variety strategies on consumer happiness by looking at the probability that such strategies will be evaluated negatively by consumers. Our model of the relationship between variety and the positiveness of consumption experiences (Figure 2) suggested that the positiveness increased with variety up to a point of full satisfaction which remained as variety increased up to a "point of regret" where it decreased.

#### **SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH AND EMPIRICAL TESTING**

##### **Conclusions: the Role of Marketing**

Marketing does seem to create some instances of unpleasant choices and unhappiness with decisions. However, several moderating factors can influence the undesirable effects. Thus, a positive role for marketing is to make sure that strategies do not lead to undesirable effects that can engender negative experiences. Marketing strategies (especially high-variety strategies) should be especially concerned with the effects on consumers' expectations. As we have discussed earlier, maximization tendencies are related to very negative consequences. Advertisers should be concerned that their message does not lead the consumer to hold unreasonable expectations about the advertised product. In addition, marketers should continue to offer information for consumers so that they can gain some expertise with the category. It is marketing's role, we believe, to educate consumers and provide the necessary information for people to make appropriate choices within a category.

Further research may be necessary in order to develop tools on how to divide products into a reasonable number of attributes that can be presented effectively. Where service is offered, sales personnel should be trained to bring customers into a learning process that will make the choice task easier and more enjoyable. Where no sales personnel is likely to be present, perhaps some information should be posted on the products themselves, such as information on attributes and what to look for, or else information about the type of customer for which the product was designed. One such example is found on skiing equipment, where descriptions of the type of skier and broad potential uses are posted on the products.

Also, grocery stores may help consumers make decisions more efficiently and easily by providing detailed pricing information. For instance, some retailers indicate the price per lbs., ounces or units for the different sizes of product category. Mathematical calculations tend to be demanding under stressful conditions. Otherwise, information can be posted on the Internet when it is expected that it will help consumers do their own research.

Under certain conditions, it may be preferable to restrain the variety offered where mostly novices will be found. Consumers looking for more variety could be directed to other retail outlets or to the Internet, for instance. Research in this area could examine whether consumers effectively take advantage of the variety offered at some retailers. That is, since it has been demonstrated that consumers become promotion sensitive in front of too much variety (Bawa, Landwehr, & Krishna 1989), does it make any sense for firms to offer a wide variety of products? On this note, further research will probably help define what kind of changes and variety consumers actually desire. A closer look at the sales effectiveness literature may provide a better understanding of variety by incorporating the distinction between variety and adaptive offerings (see the works of Weitz). It has been suggested that changes consistent with customer needs are effective while changes by themselves are not. This suggests that tailored offerings may be very helpful and positive for consumers.

On the topic of tailored offerings, further research could take a look at different marketing strategies and assess their effects on consumer happiness and satisfaction. Those that result in happiness could be identified and contrasted with other means of providing variety that lead to undesirable effects. For instance, the many types of mass customization should be scrutinized (Pine 1993; Kahn 1998) and compared to strategies that profit from commonality to provide "overengineered" products (a product line based on providing the best options -standard- to everyone). Some automobile manufacturers offer larger engines as a standard option on its models, thus reducing the number of options by assuming that a "better" option will be preferred by most.

### **Empirical Testing**

A researcher interested in testing some of the hypotheses found here will find plenty of opportunities. For instance, all the numbered relationships in Figure 1 could benefit from further empirical evidence. Figure 2 and Table 1 also present opportunities. As guidelines for empirical testing, we now present 7 different suggestions for empirical research and discuss the expected results and critical issues and factors to control. As a general note, we strongly suggest that the testing on the impact of large assortments on consumers be conducted as much as possible in "real" consumption environments as opposed to laboratory settings. This distinction is important since decisions on the size of the consideration set belong to the consumer.

*Consumer Happiness: Important Aspects of Consumption for Happiness* - Pilot studies are needed to establish a measurement (scale development) for consumer happiness. Alternative measures should be developed e.g. single vs. multi-item measurements. We somehow assume that consumer happiness should be related to a weighted average measure. Thus, consumers should be queried on the importance they assign to the different aspects of possessions and consumption. A listing of some subdomains of consumption can be found in Exhibit 15.3 of Day (1987) next to the heading "purchase and consumption of goods and services". Those subdomains should be evaluated on the satisfaction and importance assigned by consumer and appraised for their contribution to the happiness of consumers.

*Importance of Material and Experiential Purchases for Consumer Happiness* - Van Boven (2000) found that experiential purchases make people happier than material purchases. It would be interesting and worthwhile to study what factors influence the proportion of experiential to material purchases people make. Further, it would be interesting to see which kinds of purchases make consumers happy with how they spend their money. Perhaps some personal factors influence people to choose experiential over material purchases, and as an interactive effect consumer happiness mediates happiness. For instance, risk-averse consumers may favor material purchases over experiential purchases, in which case they are happy with their consumption and happy in general. Conversely, those risk-averse may not be happy with consumption of experiential purchases and thus not profit from the happiness generally brought by experiential purchases. In short, some consumers may be uneasy about spending their money on experiences since they are somehow more risky and have little or no tangible results.

*Ice Cream Study 1* - This study would as a goal try to provide evidence that variety alone creates expectations, frustration and regret. The idea is to send participants in the study to get "vanilla" ice cream cones at two different outlets, one with low variety and the other one with high variety. For instance, one store may have 6 to 8 options of ice cream, while the other store provides an assortment of 80-100 varieties. We expect participants to have higher expectations (thus lower satisfaction), to be more frustrated and to experience more regret in the store with more variety. The positiveness of the experience will be interesting to measure in this case since the product is based on flavors (which drive affective reactions). Even with more frustration and regret, consumers may evaluate their experience more positively in the store with more variety if the experience of imagining the taste of all the different flavors is more important than the other consequences.

*Ice Cream Study 2* - This study would be designed to provide more support to the fact that the evaluation of options is frustrating and difficult but enjoyable if based on affect (for ice cream). Participants would be invited to find the "best" option in two different conditions: an ice cream store with a very large assortment or a store with a large assortment of maybe "pens". The idea is to find a product where preference is assessed with affect and another where the evaluation will have to be made with cognition. We assume that pens will be evaluated on attributes such as grip, flow of ink, size and such. A post-choice questionnaire should find many and more articulate reasons for the choice of the "best" pen. Further, two more conditions could be assigned: one where participants choose for themselves and another where they choose for someone else. We suspect that it will be more enjoyable and less difficult to choose ice cream than pens for oneself, but it may be more difficult to choose ice cream than pens for someone else. In any event, results from such a study will provide a better understanding of consumer choice from high variety.

*Consumer Expertise: Online Search Projects, Strategies, Satisfaction and Regret* - We suggest an online retailing study for the impact of consumer expertise on expectations, maximizing-satisficing tendencies, satisfaction and regret. Participants would be asked to shop online for some kind of product (with many attributes) that is widely available online: laptop and desktop computers or electronic equipment. By setting the experience properly, the experimenter will be able to see all the steps taken by participants in order to arrive at a decision. It will be interesting to evaluate differences in strategies according to previous consumer expertise with the searched product and Internet shopping. Also, a measurement of learning tendencies will certainly provide interesting insights. For instance, how will participants use search engines to find information on the product and stores? The study will provide findings on the maximizing-satisficing tendencies of experts. Experts will be able to evaluate options along attributes, but will they use a satisficing strategy and only consider what they consider to be the best online retailers? Or will experts use their knowledge to maximize and try to evaluate all possible options. Will incentives change this behavior e.g. if they are promised more money for finding the best deal on the Internet?

*Diary Studies: Positiveness of Experience vs Considered Variety* - Participants could be asked to maintain a diary of their consumption experiences. From many experiences, researchers will likely be able to assess the impact of the presence of preconceived ideas, maximizing-satisficing strategies and considered variety on the positiveness of consumption experiences. For all consumption experiences, participants would be asked to fill out a questionnaire pertaining to the type of product, affective baseline, strategy used (variety considered), expertise on product, frustration, regret, satisfaction, positiveness of experience, etc. By asking participants for their subjective global evaluation of the positiveness of experiences found in the diary, researchers may find evidence of what types of consumption experiences are weigh more heavily for the global evaluation. Empirical evidence may find negative experiences to be discounted or assigned more weight.

*Type of Regret: Features, Options, Brands, Departure from Preconceived Idea* - Some study could be designed to assess what the main forms of regret experienced or anticipated in front of high variety are. Perhaps there is a difference in the predominance and potency of regret whether it is based on features, options, brand or a departure from the preconceived idea. Indeed, from recollections of regret, a researcher may find that consumers feel regret more strongly and negatively when they had an idea for a product and were convinced by a salesperson (or any other reason) to opt for another option. Perhaps consumers have more regret about certain features of products than particular options or brands.

## CONCLUSION

This article addressed the potential for high-variety strategies in marketing to create a state of overwhelming choice, showing that a focus on high-variety strategies could lead to instances of difficult and unpleasant decisions and result in consumer unhappiness. We wanted to warrant that high-variety strategies might result in negative consequences for consumers, and wanted to provide a preliminary assessment of the moderating factors that affect the role of marketing in creating problematic choice situations. Our approach was to use a measure of happiness as opposed to satisfaction. This may have made the undertaking much more audacious, but it may prove of interest to those interested in taking a departure from the point of view of satisfaction and considering happiness as an important measure for the impacts of marketing strategies. We do not claim to have provided all answers and expect some readers to find some propositions to be incorrect, incomplete or even naïve at this point. We hope that the most will find the hypotheses found in this paper to be intriguing and that we will have stimulated thinking from some marketing researchers interested in issues of happiness and choice.

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