

## Does the modern world offer us too many choices?

*\*\*Note: This essay is reproduced from the original script written under exam conditions. Errors and awkward phrasing have been retained for authenticity.*

*Intro*

“Anyone can have any color Model T he wants as long as it is black”. Henry Ford once said this of his automobile. Such a phrase conjures up images of the past when choice was limited. Now in the present, of the list of things that make modern life better, choice is more often than not at the apex. However, to say that it has improved life radically is myopic as the influx of too many choices nowadays has in fact made our lives worse through decreased satisfaction and analysis paralysis. Hence it can be said that the modern world does offer us too many choices.

*Para 1*

Due to the advancement in technology and the onset of globalization, people are now able to enjoy a wide range of goods and services from all over the world. People are even able to traverse the globe to universities and workplaces of their choice and the basic fact that we are able to select between Nike, Adidas and Reebok already shows the extent of how much choice the modern world gives us. This can be seen as a good thing if people are able to make wise decisions and not let such a wide range of choice overwhelm us. The modern world can then be said to not offer us too many choices as the amount offered to us is still within our capacity. However this is not the case in many instances as often, people are unable to make up their minds because of the influx of choices. The modern world therefore, offers us too many choices many a time.

*Para 2*

As mentioned above, it can be seen that the modern world offers us too many choices because people are unable to come up with a decision when faced with a plethora of choices. Such a behavior or, analysis paralysis, surfaces be it when consumers are shopping for even simple quotidian



items such as groceries where we are faced with many different brands or when we are at the doctor's and we have to make a decision between different treatments with different side effects. It was observed in the US for example, for every 10 retirement funds offered to employees in a particular firm, participation rate went down by 2% and this resulted in almost \$5000 in cash being passed up simply because the employees just could not choose between the different funds. Therefore in this respect, we can be said to be facing too many choices from the modern world and this can be seen from how we face difficulty in making a choice very often.

*Para 3*

The modern world can also be said to be giving people too many choices when it leads to decreased satisfaction. Dr. Johnson, an 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher once said that the overall sum of human happiness would increase if marriages were arranged. This is because couples would see their dissatisfaction in their partner as fate and not due to a poor choice of their own. Hence this illustrates that when people make a wrong choice, they tend to become even unhappier as they would then put the blame on themselves. Barry Schwartz, the author of "The paradox of choice", wrote in his book that he once went to buy a pair of jeans and ended up asking the shopkeeper for the "kind that used to be the only kind" as there were simply too many choices. When he did manage to choose a pair, he wrote that although the pair was a good pair, he was still unhappy because somehow in the myriad of jeans, his expectations for the "perfect pair" increased. Hence when he did not obtain the perfect pair, he became discontented. Schwartz called this the "dilemma of opportunity cost" since opportunity cost increases as the number of alternatives increases, thus leading to an overall decrease in satisfaction. Thus, the modern world can be said to be offering us too many choices when although it increases people's material standard of living, it decreases our non-material standard of living through decreased satisfaction.

*Para 4*

The modern world also offers us too many choices when we start receiving options that we do not really need. In other words, we are given choices that we can do without and which resources that were used to make them would have been better off used elsewhere. In the business world for example, brand proliferation is very common whereby large firms spam the markets with goods that are only slightly dissimilar so as to fill up store shelves with their products. As the differences of these products are more often than not only imaginary, society can be said to not need this increase in choice. Moreover from an economist's point of view, such brand proliferation indicates a waste of resources and such resources could have been used to improve our present choices, for example. Therefore in the business world, the modern world does offer us too many choices when firms spam markets, with very similar products just to maximize their profits. From society's perspective, consumers would be better off without these additional choices and thus we are given too many choices in this aspect.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, society is indeed faced with many more choices owing mostly to modern technology and the fact that the world is becoming a smaller place. Whether or not it offers us too many choices would depend on whether we can handle so much choice because if we face difficulties in making decisions and become unhappier and feel worse off than before, we are most probably being exposed to too many choices.

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**School Examiner Comments:** Good discussion on “too many choices”. Lacking balance though. Gently raised in first paragraph. For depth of evaluation and scope of argument, consider concepts of wisdom, of shutting off options. Just because life offers too many choices doesn’t mean we have to accept them.