An Exploratory Study of Genders, Choice Overload, Perception of Variety and Decision Satisfaction.

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the perspectives of gender about choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction. More precisely, the primary goals are to investigate how the genders perceive the number of options on an online store, how they understand variety and how satisfied they are with the decision made. The research accomplished these goals utilising an inductive approach with exploratory focus was developed using a mono-method qualitative design. Semi structured interviews were carried out with eight participants, four men and for women, who purchased online an apparel item recently. The data were analysed utilising a thematic coding approach.

The main findings were that genders have similar opinion about the number of options in a choice set and use strategies to cope with it such as price, social media and brands, not scrutinised in literature yet. Females seemed to enjoy extensive variety and number of options and presented a shopaholic tendency when faced with many options. For males, when there is too much variety, the options are considered too similar and does not impact on their selection process. However, variety is seen to be essential for a reliable and competitive website. Besides, males seem to establish a previous idea of what they want to purchase and tend to ignore remaining options. Furthermore, for both genders, decision satisfaction is associated with price, time taken to search for the product and accuracy of visual and written information about the product. Concerning online stores, this study found that it requires a well-planned user interface to avoid detrimental effects of overload.

This study adds to the body of literature due to the unique research method and design, as the major part of past studies were conducted with experiments. The diversification of methodologies applied to overload studies is needed owed to the discrepancies found in the area, which has been presenting contradictory conclusions about the positive and negative impact on consumers' feelings and behaviour.

Keywords – exploratory study, genders, choice overload, perception of variety, decision satisfaction.

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I submitted for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Science in Management, entitled "An Exploratory Study of Genders, Choice Overload, Perception of Variety and Decision Satisfaction" is entirely my work and has not been taken from the work of others.

Signed: ....

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Introduction

Online shopping, though rooted in the same notion of traditional commerce where goods and services are exchanged for capital, requires different practices and approaches when compared with brick-and-mortar stores due to the unique characteristics of the shopping environment, available information, time and distance (Küster and Vila, 2011). E-tails offer consumers alluring benefits of great convenience, greater product choice and a large amount of product information (Zha, Li and Yan, 2013, p. 873). Surprisingly, it is precisely these advantages that lead to its greatest problem.

The quantity and variety of options are acknowledged among scholars to exert influence on the decision-making process, satisfaction and consumer feelings. When the individual experiences too many options, the so-called choice overload happens, which is when the limited human cognitive capacity is proved (Simon, 1955). Nonetheless, whether it affects positively or negatively the consumer is still a source of discussion and disagreement due to the contradicting literature findings. On the one hand, studies indicate that choice overload has a detrimental effect on the consumer satisfaction and selection process (e.g. Aljukhadar, Senecal and Daoust, 2013; Fasolo, McClelland and Todd, 2007; Iyengar and Lepper, 2000). On the other hand, research suggests that the same issue has a beneficial effect on consumer satisfaction and decision process (e.g. Huff and Johnson, 2014; Acosta, Castillo, Nicolas and Palacios, 2014).

Several reasons explain the difference among results in studies conducted on choice overload. A plausible motive is the consideration of different moderators to account for the relationship between choice or information overload and the expected outcome of consumer behaviour and feeling, which can be either an internal or external factor.

Internal factors that have been studied past literature are personality traits (Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyubomirsky, White, and Lehman, 2002); computer anxiety (Nagar and Gandotra, 2016); variety seeking customer (Nagar and Gandotra, 2016); decision strategy (e.g. Scheibehenne, Greifeneder and Todd, 2009); confidence

(Stanton and Paolo, 2012); information literacy (Shang, Chen and Chen, 2013) and unconscious thought, which is opposed to conscious thought and can lead consumers to process large quantity of information while "distracted to other irrelevant tasks" (Gao, Zhang, Wang and Ba, 2012, p. 772).

Among the external factors, examples are situational involvement with the purchase (Turri, 2011); perceived choice options, consideration set or choice set size (Hadar and Sood, 2014; Turri 2011; Oulasvirta, Hukkinen and Schwartz, 2009); time pressure (Haynes, 2009); gender (Ji, Ha and Sypher, 2014; Williamson and Eaker, 2012) and age (Benselin and Ragsdell, 2015).

Another reason for the contradiction might be the homogeneity of research methods applied to overload studies. Eppler and Mengis (2004) called for more studies with different approaches, as the majority of them carried out quantitative experiments. This study aims to reduce the gap and bring insights to literature by conducting an exploratory study. It is intended to explore the perspective genders have about choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction. Semi structured interviews were orchestrated, generating data analysed with a thematic coding approach.

The starting point of the research question was gender, owed to the different roles they play in society and the social construct in which it was created. Furthermore, demographic classifications had not been extensively scrutinised and also present contradicting results in the previous literature. Williamson and Eaker (2012) and Ji et al. (2014) found that women are more likely to be impacted by over choice than men. Conversely, Allen and Griffeth (1997) found the opposite.

Also, a recent line of thinking defends that is not the number of options that affect the consumer and may cause choice overload. Rather, is the variety in the choice set that might confuse (Szrek, 2017). Due to this reason, this study has taken into consideration the perception of variety, instead of the real variety in the choice set, as one of the subjects to be explored.

This paper consists firstly in the discussion of literature review, presenting the background which outlines this research. Secondly, research question and methodology is detailed further, with an in-depth description of data collection and analysis. Lastly, the conclusion and contributions are unravelled.

Chapter I • Literature Review

This chapter aims to examine and critically assess the relevant literature underpinning this study, which lies at the juncture of marketing and psychology. The literature review commences with an introduction to choice overload, examining the contradictions of this field presenting both sides of the debate. The discussion will follow with a focus on the variety of options in the choice set, which some scholars believe to be the most relevant mediator of the effect of choice overload. The subsequent sections will review the consumer satisfaction literature and the reasons why this study believes gender could be a source of divergent opinions and behaviours while shopping online.

1. Choice overload: predecessors and controversy

The root of choice overload erupts from a line of thinking opposed to the classical idea that humans are rational. For neoclassical theorists, the higher the number of options, the higher the consumer welfare because it increases the likelihood of finding the perfect match (Elbel, 2007). Conversely, behavioural economics theorists propose that humans have bounded rationality and to make decisions, count on first, a limited cognitive capacity to process all the necessary information and second, environmental constraints imposed to the decision maker, i.e. the number of alternatives, the payoffs and the preference among the payoffs (Simon, 1955).

Relatedly to the neoclassical and behavioural economics theorists, contemporary scholars have been divided in the opinion of whether the vast number of options brings positive or negative implications for the customers. The discussion is even more important for practitioners, who become confused in which strategy to follow: increase inventories (thereby costs) and take the risk of overwhelm customers or drop stocks, costs and jeopardise the purchase conversion owed to the limited variety? (Turri, 2011).

Scholars vehemently defend that a large number of options decreases motivation and satisfaction with the chosen option (e.g. Nagar and Gandotra, 2016;

Alvarez**,** Rey and Sanchis, 2014; Stanton and Paolo, 2012). Conversely, papers have also shown the increase of motivation and satisfaction among customers (e.g. Huff and Johnson, 2014; Acosta et al., 2014, Hadar and Sood, 2014).

The controversy is such that to prove it, Scheibehenne, Greifeneder and Todd (2010) carried out a meta-analysis with the most relevant choice overload studies conducted from 2000 to 2009. The result was the overall effect size nearly zero, which means that despite the significant number of research, the phenomenon still cannot be generalised. Chernev, Böckenholt, and Goodman (2010) responded affirming that meta-analysis is not an adequate methodology to measure this nature of phenomena that contains a high and varied number of variables (or moderators). Instead, a "theoretically-based meta-analysis needs to be performed" (Turri, 2011, p.16).

Either way that is precisely the gap in the existent literature which this study aims to reduce. An exploratory study can help bring a different understanding of the phenomenon, which could be used as a base for future experiments. The next sections discuss thoroughly choice overload as an advantage and disadvantage. Likewise, the variables found to mediate the effect.

1.2 Choice overload as a disadvantage

Iyengar and Lepper (2000) are the pioneers of choice overload experiments and are most famous for the jam study. The authors measured to what extent consumers exposed to a booth with few and large assortment of jams felt motivated to buy afterwards. The findings suggested that although initially, large varieties were more appealing to consumers, encouraging them to approach the booth, it diminishes the subsequent purchase motivation. This study was replicated by Scheibehenne et al. (2009) nine years later, and the results were the opposite, apart from one experiment in which consumers had to justify their choice.

Alvarez et al. (2014) research the topic through the lens of personality traits. Past literature has already stated that consumers can be either maximisers or satisficers (Schwartz et al., 2002). The former relates to people who seek the best possible option and the latter who are happy with an option that is good enough. Maximisers showed to be more likely to regret the choice made and are less satisfied than the other side of

the continuum (satisficers). Alvarez et al. (2014) confirm those results, showing that maximisers tend to suffer from choice overload whereas satisficers are generally more satisfied and are not impacted by choice overload. Thus, according to these authors, the adverse effect of this phenomenon depends on the personality, rather than being generalised to everyone.

Hadar and Sood (2014) also use the psychological science to explain the effects of choice overload. The moderator applied in the research is the subjective knowledge. The detrimental effect of choice overload does not impact an individual who possesses a little degree of knowledge in a particular area. In this case, the more options, the better. For a highly knowledgeable person is the opposite, and the person feels less motivated and satisfied with the choice process.

Following this line of thinking, Nagar and Gandotra (2016) focus on choice overload associated with variety-seeking behaviour, which means people who enjoy trying different products and brands even if the product attributes are similar, only to feel the pleasure of change (Van Trijp, Hoyer and Inman, 1996). The findings suggest that even this type of consumer experience the detrimental effects of too much choice and are likely to regret the decision made, a result that is confirmed by previous researchers (e.g. Shang et al., 2013).

1.3 Choice overload as an advantage

The other side of the spectrum shed light on choice overload as a motivational and advantageous aspect of online retail settings over brick-and-mortar stores. Katz and Assor (2007) take into account the self-determination theory and state that choice is motivating when meets with the person's interests and goals, are complex in a stimulating way provoking a sense of competence and are congruent with one's values and culture. Although it was developed in a teaching context, the interpretation can be brought to a retail context due to its psychological side.

Anderson (2003) pointed out that large assortments contribute to satisfying the consumer needs for diversity and promotes pluralism. Nagar and Gandotra (2016) also endorsed this idea and shows the increase in decision quality of variety-seek consumers in too-much-choice contexts. In line with this idea, Ma (2016) indicates

that customers spend more money in an online store due to the larger assortment, when comparing a retailer's offline and online sales channel. "The effect is particularly pronounced for niche products, for which the spending of the online shoppers is more than double that of the control group" (Ma, 2016, p. 381). Additionally, the literature suggests that more choice is associated with competitive advantage for a company over those who offer less choice (Bown, Read and Summers, 2003).

Huff and Johnson (2014) disclose that information and choice overload might be beneficial in certain situations because consumers see it as a source of richer information before the decision-making process. Similarly, Boyd and Bahn (2009, p. 294) supports that "consumers' attraction to a large assortment is positively influenced by the information-processing opportunities that large assortments afford". According to this line of argument, consumers feel more confident with large choice sets than with small ones, an idea that is contradicted by some authors (Lee and Lee, 2004; Iyengar and Lepper 2000).

1.4 Moderators of choice overload

It seems to be impossible to follow the discussion about the overload without presenting the studied variables that mediate the effect. Those mediators can be external or internal to the individual, which is why the body of literature is laid in the intersection of psychology and marketing areas. In other words, people's conscious and unconscious behaviour and thought can impact one's experience and perception of overload. At the same time, external cues such as price, visual merchandising, advertising, mix of products and variety, and so on were also found to influence on it.

Among the internal factors, Schwartz et al. (2002) demonstrated that personality traits might moderate the effect of too many options, depending on the maximising or satisficing behaviour of an individual. The former stands for a person that looks for the best alternative possible, and the latter is related to people for whom a good range of products is enough. Another characteristic, very similar to the Schwartz et al. (2002) theory, discussed in the literature is the degree in which a person seeks variety (Nagar and Gandotra, 2016; Kahn and Wansink, 2004). Van Trijp et al. (1996) defines a variety-seeker consumer as the one who enjoys trying new brands or

products for the sake of change, not because of different attributes or quality. Recent literature has gone further in the variety subject and states the difference of actual and perceived variety, and how it might be the cause of choice overload (Szrek, 2017; Lenton and Francesconi, 2011; Kahn and Wansink, 2004;).

Some authors found that consumers can feel overwhelmed and present a little confidence in making a good decision from large assortments (Chernev, 2003; Stanton and Paolo, 2012). High levels of anxiety while purchasing or using a computer has also moderated the choice overload effect (Nagar and Gandotra, 2016). Finally, the extent to which a consumer is knowledgeable about the product being sold can also mediate the too much choice effect (Shang et al., 2013).

Turri (2011) found that if the consumer present a certain level of emotional involvement with the purchase, e.g. buying a gift for someone, which she called situational involvement, influences the customer's decision-making process in huge assortment sizes.

The perception of individuals related to the size of the choice set is another factor mentioned by many scholars (Hadar and Sood, 2014; Turri 2011; Oulasvirta et al., 2009), which is similar to the idea of perceived variety previously mentioned. A consumer's vision of the number of options in a choice set can be different from the physical assortment per se. This variation between real and perceived can occur due to visual cues and the mix of products such as assortment structure, which is the organisation and disorganisation of goods, similarity between options and number of attributes (Scheibehenne et al., 2009).

Consumers are more likely to be affected by abundant possibilities to choose from if they time bounded (Haynes, 2009) or according to demographic variables such as gender (Ji et al., 2014; Williamson and Eaker, 2012) and age (Benselin and Ragsdell, 2016).

Online environments offer unique alternatives to cope with choice overload, for example, the online store layout might also play a major role to organise the information on the page (Acosta et al., 2014) as well as the use of a filtering tool (Turri, 2011). The crowd can also help the decision-making process by writing recommendations (Turri, 2011; Aljukhadar et al., 2013), online reviews as well as rating the stores and products preferred (Zhang, Wu and Matilla, 2014).

To sum up, there are many variables found to mediate the overload effect. This study intends to give a step back and analyse what the customer perception about overload, variety and satisfaction is. The exploratory character of this study can aid future quantitative studies to establish different variables for their experiments or even eliminate a few to seek generalisation. The next sections will emphasise and justify the areas in which this study seeks exploration: variety, satisfaction and gender.

2. Variety

Apart from the number of options, this study will enquire individuals about how they perceive as the variety on the online store. The justification for this is that a more recent line of thinking put into question if is only the size of the assortment that causes choice overload. Szrek (2017) believes that the variety in the choice set is the real factor that might lead to confusion and poor decision-making. She states that is rather simplistic consider the number of options as the only origin of overload and defends that the difference between the options weighs more when analysing the effect of too many options.

Scheibehenne et al. (2010) also share the same opinion, pointing out that the effect of too much choice will only be understood if the moderators used in future studies go beyond the idea of set size and contemplate an ample context such as structure of the assortments, individual's decision-making strategies and so on.

As mentioned before, variety stands for the difference between the options in a choice set. In practice, a store can offer either a wide or narrow product line presenting the same number of options in the set (Szrek, 2017). An example is a Pharmacy, in which the manager must decide whether the facial care section will present 5 or 10 different brands, considering that the total number of products is 100. In this case, the number of options is not the most relevant factor that might influence the customer satisfaction, but the contrast among the options. Focusing on the consumer perspective, the decision to choose 1 product out of 10 different brands might be confusing or pleasant, depending on his/her perception of how extensive is the variety presented. This perception influences the satisfaction directly with the

choice made and it also might be different from the actual variety the choice set presents.

2.1 Actual variety and perceived variety

The challenge that the concept of variety presents is that: it might be the *actual*, the one that is put forward to the consumer and the variety the consumer *perceives*. The discussion in literature is that either of them might be the cause of overload.

Actual variety is defined as "the number of distinct options or the number of conceptually distinct subcategories" (Kahn and Wansink, 2004, p. 520). There are simple and complex assortments, which depends on how different the options are from each other in number of attributes. In a supermarket, choosing conserves is a simple task, as they vary only in the flavour and price. However, choosing trainers at Amazon.com, which offer over 12 attributes to differentiate a product from each other is a complicated task. The same stands for the number of categories, e.g. Amazon.com shows 21 categories with over 200 subcategories and the conserve section of a physical store might present 2 or 3 categories (price, flavour, size).

Perceived variety is the perception of the consumer in relation to the variety of the alternatives offered in a brick-and-mortar or online store. Factors that influence the perception of variety is the organisation of the items and their symmetry, which means frequency that an item is displayed in the choice set (Kahn and Wansink, 2004); information structure (Lurie, 2004); presence of categories (Mogilner, Rudnick and Iyengar, 2008) and visual stimuli, rather than text, to present the variety (Townsend and Kahn, 2014).

Szrek (2017) study this phenomenon in health plans context. She hypothesised that perceived variety influences choice satisfaction more than the number of alternatives, which was supported by the experiment she conducted. It means that in a consumer perspective, more options are desired if he/she perceive it as differentiated options. The second hypothesis is that "perceived variety mediates the relationship between the number of options and choice satisfaction" (Szrek, 2017, p. 42), which was also supported. These findings are in line with Chernev and Hamilton (2009) research, which shows that consumers make a better decision when they are attracted

by the options in the choice set, regardless of the size. Although the two authors use different nomenclature, attractiveness of a choice set and perceived variety have a similar idea, which is related to the customer's opinion about the choices offered. For them, the angle to analyse the choice set size is what the consumer judges as attractive and their perception of variety.

Kahn and Wansink (2004) find the perception of variety can influence directly the consumption quantities. The independent variable in this context was the assortment structure, more specifically the organisation of the options and their symmetry (i.e. distribution of options in a set). The more disorganised the assortment, the less quantity customers consumed in large assortments. Similarly, Mogilner, Rudnick and Iyengar (2008) finds that categorisation of assortments, which can be regarded as a type of organisation, increase customer satisfaction with their choice. The perception of variety increases with the use of categorisation, which leads to increase in self-determination and consequently raise the satisfaction level with the choice made.

Townsend and Kahn (2014) also adds to assortment structure and find evidence to the hypothesis that images influence more the perception of variety than text regardless of the choice set size. A wide variety can also lead to the same detrimental effect of choice paralysis, confusion and poor quality decision as having too many options. Townsend and Kahn (2014) research suggests that high number of options in a choice set led to increased perception of variety, which resulted in high complexity and decreased likelihood to choose. In the context of dating decisions, Lenton and Francesconi (2011) find that the more variety people had to choose from, the less choices they were able to make. The effect was even stronger when great variety was coped with a large number of options.

3. Satisfaction

Satisfaction is majorly utilised as the dependent variable of past studies. Reutskaja and Hogarth (2009, p. 198) define it as "the difference between the perceived benefits and costs of choice". Scheibehenne et al. (2010) exposed in the meta-analysis that satisfaction has been measured in three different ways: with the choice experience, with the choice made and with the process of choosing. The authors suggest that the researcher specify which type of satisfaction is being gauged to contribute to future generalisations. Thus, this study will focus on satisfaction with the decision made.

Spassova and Isen (2013) examine satisfaction with the option selected in both large and small assortments, considering positive affect as a moderator of this relationship. Positive affect is defined as a pleasant stimulus given to a person that affects cognition (Spassova and Isen, 2013), that could be either a positive word or image. The results were that people with positive affect are more satisfied choosing from large assortments and seek more variety in the choice set than the ones with neutral effect. Diehl and Poynor (2010), however, researching on the same measure of satisfaction, find that individuals may feel overwhelmed and less satisfied with the chosen option due to the overestimated expectations they create that a large assortment would provide the possibility to find the perfect match.

Turri (2011) focus on satisfaction with the process of selecting a product and findings suggest that people felt more satisfied with this process when choosing from large assortments, although reckoned it difficult to choose.

Reutskaja and Hogarth (2009) measure satisfaction with the choice made (or the outcome) and with the process of selecting. They found an inverted U-shaped relationship between the number of alternatives and the perceived costs and benefits of choosing. In other words, as the number of alternatives increases, the cost of deciding among the options grows faster than the advantages of the set size. These findings are in line with many authors (e.g. Szrek, 2017; Shah & Wolford, 2007). The peak of the concave function is the right number of options, which means a moderate number of choices satiates.

The same stands true for perceived variety (Szrek, 2017). She included perceived variety in the function instead of the number of options, and the result was

the same. Individuals are satisfied with a medium level of variety in the choice set, and when this number is surpassed, choice overload effect starts taking place.

As suggested by Scheibehenne et al. (2010), future studies on choice overload should specify which kind of satisfaction gauge is being used to generalise findings. Thus, this study will consider satisfaction as the perception of benefits and costs of choice and will only research on satisfaction with the decision made.

4. Gender

Demographic variables are always present in studies of choice overload (e.g. Townsend and Kahn, 2014; Lenton and Francesconi, 2011), however not as the focus of the analysis. This study emphasises this aspect because it believes that the perceptions of the number of options, variety and the satisfaction with the choice made may vary according to gender. First of all, the difference between genders origin from humans' ancestors, in which men developed skills to improve their hunting abilities and women to improve household activities and family related skills (Tifferet and Herstein, 2012).

In addition to inherited behaviour, societies also shape the way in which people position themselves according to gender. Risman (1998) have noted that gender is a social construct, rather than a consequence of human's biological roots. Having been treated as different structures, men and women play different roles and developed unique behaviours, significance and actuation in companies and society in general (Risman, 2004). Regarding shopping behaviour, researchers have found evidence for the hypothesis that women appreciate shopping more aesthetic goods (clothes) and men prefer buying long-term goods (Rook and Hoch, 1985). Likewise, literature proposes that women tend to make unplanned purchases more than men do (Rook and Hoch, 1985; Tifferet and Herstein, 2012).

The processing of information is also mentioned to be different in men and women. Females are more likely to require full information, are more detail-oriented and discriminating than men while consuming information of advertisements (Kempf, Laczniak and Smith, 2006). Perhaps that is the reason why Ji et al. (2014) found that women experience more information overload than men. Moreover, in O'Donnell and

Johnson (2000) study, females performed better in high complexity task setting than males.

Concerning consumption behaviour, research shows that women are more committed to brands than men (Tifferet and Herstein, 2012) due to their proposed risk averse nature according to Croson and Gneezy (2009). In line with this findings, Ayman and Kaya (2014) research present that females consumed branded fashion apparel due to past experiences with brand and satisfaction with the product. Also, it was found that both genders opted for luxury brands because of status and prestige (Ayman and Kaya, 2014).

Friedmann and Lowengart (2013) hypothesise about how purchase intentions are formed in both males and females. Firstly, both genders make their shopping decisions influenced by the extent to which they consider the product represent themselves. However, males are more utilitarian, i.e. purchase a product they deem useful compared to the price. On the other hand, women are more price-oriented and change their purchase intentions when the expected price is higher than the actual price.

With regards to information overload, Williamson and Eaker (2012) hypothesise the relationship between gender and information overload and find that women are more likely to be impacted by over choice than men. In line with these findings, Ji et al. (2014) detect similar results, affirming that young adults and women are more impacted by information overload. On the other hand, Allen and Griffeth (1997) who researched communication within a company found that females experienced less information overload than males. This study aims to add to this body of knowledge by examining whether gender plays a role in the experience of choice overload.

5. Conclusion

Choice overload scholars aim to generalise its findings and create a consistent theory of whether it is advantageous for retailers to invest in a great variety of products

and its impact on consumers decision-making process. Studies on one side of the spectrum emphasised that choice overload, in fact, occurs when individuals face large choice sets. However, the other side defends that offering a great variety of options might be favourable and can also increase sales because consumers feel that the choice set is complete and they can make the best decision possible.

The literature on choice overload has used a large variety of moderators to attempt to predict when, how and why the phenomenon occurs. Individual's psychological traits and feelings might moderate the effect, as well as external factors such visual and physical cues in the choice set.

Given the contradiction of findings, this study aims to reduce the gap in the literature by diversifying from the predominant methodology applied in most overload studies. An exploratory study will take place to look to the phenomenon from another angle and bring novel for future research.

Chapter II • Research Question and Aims

The previous chapter strived to give a grasp of the previous studies conducted in choice overload. The discussion of the different perspectives and suggestion for future studies on the subject contributed to the formulation of the research question. The aim of this master's thesis is to "explore choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction through the lens of gender".

Thus far, the effect of having too many options was found to be both beneficial and detrimental to the customer, which depends on a variety of factors and moderators. Due to the discrepancy of findings in previous studies, this research identified that a broader view of the phenomenon is necessary to provide insights into future research on choice overload. This study will attempt to do that by applying a different methodology, which is an exploratory approach, detailed in the following sections.

1. Research Question

This study is utilising a unique approach to addressing the research question. Specifically, this study aims to understand *how genders perceive choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction.* This investigation is seeking insights and perspectives of the genders in relation to the high number of options in a choice set, perception of variety and satisfaction with the decision made. The next section specifies the aims and purpose of this study, followed by the methodology with a detailed rationale for the approach, design and strategy adopted.

2. Research aims and purpose of the study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the perspectives of gender in relation to choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction. As discussed in the literature review, authors have found evidence for both sides of the spectrum: in some studies, choice overload is beneficial to the customer and in others is detrimental. Due to this discrepancy, this research is carrying out an exploratory study to gain insights and to add a new angle and interpretation to the choice overload phenomenon. The sub-objectives of this research are the following:

- Investigate how genders perceive the choice overload effect
- Investigate how genders perceive the variety in a choice set
- Investigate how satisfied genders are with the decision made

First of all, gender will be the starting point on trying to explore the subject of choice overload. Due to the different roles genders play in the society and the social construct each gender carries with them, this study expects that the genders would have different opinions about choice overload. The second objective aims to bring ideas about one's perceptions of the several items displayed on an e-tail choice set. The number of options has been extensively investigated. However, it is known that this is not the only factor that influences the choice overload (Szrek, 2017). The similarity among the options also impacts significantly, and this investigation attempts to explore this variable. The third objective intends to understand if the opinions could vary about the satisfaction with the choice made.

The purpose of this study is, firstly, to critically evaluate the choice overload literature and bring insights to the marketing and psychology bodies of knowledge. Secondly, this thesis is motivated to explore the gender perspectives on choice overload, perceived variety and choice satisfaction. Additionally, it intends to diversify the research method commonly used in overload studies, as called by Eppler and Mengis (2004), providing a novel perspective and serving as a source of information for future authors in either quantitative or qualitative study.

The next section discusses the research philosophy, methodology and design of the investigation and also details sample, data collection and analysis.

Chapter III • Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology and research method utilised to answer the research question of this study, following the "research onion" structure conceptualised by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007).
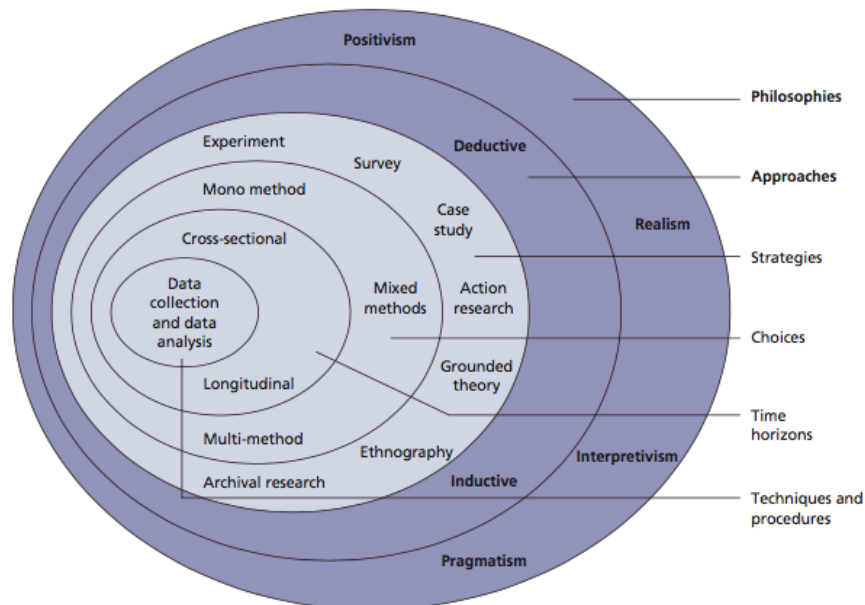
Figure 1: The Research Onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007, p. 139)

First, the research philosophy and approach are discussed, followed by research design, methodological choice, strategies, time horizon and finally techniques and procedures.

1. Research philosophy

The philosophy consists of styles of reasoning that researchers adopt to develop the research (Adams, 2007). This study will embrace **interpretivism**, aiming to understand individuals in their social context, playing their social roles in the society (Saunders et al., 2009). It was idealised in opposition to positivism, which was created to study natural sciences, and requires a "different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order" (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 16). Unlike the positivism, Bryman and Bell (2001) also emphasises that rather than trying to explain the human behaviour, interpretivism focus on understanding the human behaviour. This philosophy fits with the purpose of this study

because it seeks to understand the perspective genders have about a phenomenon that happens both in online and offline settings, rather than try to create a causal relationship between variables which will explain the choice overload effect. The idea is gaining insights, understanding the meaning of the too many options effect for those involved in the social action of shopping online.

This study follows the **inductive approach**, which "operates from the specific to general" (Adams, 2007, p. 29). According to the same author, it means that the researcher observes the world and can draw conclusions to generalise a phenomenon due to the repeated number of events, also named pattern or trend, which leads to the formulation of theories. Unlike most of the studies on choice overload, which followed a deductive approach (e.g. Scheibehenne et al., 2009; Iyengar and Lepper, 2000), this study is going to the opposite direction due to the contradictions found about the overload effects thus far. Eppler and Mengis (2004, p. 341) specifically called for more studies with different approaches, saying that "these inductive methods can then lead to more informed hypotheses and refined experiments" both in choice and information overload literature.

2. Research Design

Research design uncovers the research strategies, choices and time horizon, which are the three inner layers of figure 1. First of all, this research claims to be an **exploratory study**, as the choice overload phenomena can still be considered as "uncharted waters", in which "the most powerful thing to concentrate is on explore" (Robson, 2011, p. 39). Saunders et al. (2009) defend that this type of study seeks an understanding of phenomena using a novel perspective. This point of view is adopted due to the necessity of differentiated research methods to explore the overload phenomenon (Eppler and Mengis, 2004). Most studies in the area (e.g. Turri, 2011; Diehl and Poynor, 2010; Scheibehenne et al., 2009; Iyengar and Lepper, 2000) focus on explanatory, which are studies aiming to understand the relationship between variables (Saunders et al., 2009). This approach enables a "creative starting point for new areas of exploration, facilitating laps to the next levels of discovery" (Graziano and Raulin, 2009, p. 115).

The strategy of this research **draws upon grounded theory principles**, which is the study of particular actions, interactions and processes in which people are involved (Robson, 2011). Glaser and Strauss (1967) conceptualised this research design, and unlike the current methodologies at the time, it aims to generate theories where no prior theoretical background is available (Robson, 2011). Grounded theory is a systematic approach to research, based on "'constant comparison', in which data are collected and analysed simultaneously, and 'theoretical sampling', in which decisions about which data should be collected next are determined by the theory that is being constructed" (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634). The author also defends that it is appropriate to create knowledge about how people understand the reality. The purpose of this study is indeed, generate insights and even be the ground for theories on choice overload, however, recognises it is unfeasible due to time constraints. Thus, the research does not affirm to be grounded theory per se, yet was influenced by it and utilised semi structured interviews to do so, described in the next section.

This research is following two grounded theory principles outlined by Charmaz (2014). The first one followed was data collection through in-depth interviews, which is one of the multiple techniques used by grounded theorists. Grounded theory researchers focus on rich and thick data collection using numerous methods and aim to build a 360º view of the participants' world. For them, gathering data includes interviewing all individuals involved directly or indirectly in the research puzzle, ethnography studies, document analysis, photography, observations, and so on (Charmaz, 2014).

The second is the coding phase, which was conducted mainly from the data and not from theory. As the author describes, it enables to reach a definition of what the data wants to say, and it also generates the "bones of your analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). The following action is to create categories and subcategories with the existent codes, which were also carried out in this research.

The research choice of this study is **mono method qualitative**. Qualitative inquiry stands for a recognised research method that uses the natural setting where the investigated event happens, are focused on the researcher as the primary instrument, seeks for participants' meanings and attempts to construct a holistic view of the subject studied (Creswell, 2009). The use of qualitative research is appropriate due to the

necessity of exploring a problem or issue and "this exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that can then be measured" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). This approach fits with the purpose of this study, which is to provide insights and new variables for future quantitative research that mediates the overload effect, contributing to the generalisation of the phenomenon.

The qualitative approach also leaves room for a variety of data collection methods, e.g. interviews, observations, documents, that provide a superior understanding of a phenomenon, also known as multi method. As Charmaz (2014, p. 25) reveals, qualitative researchers can "add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles while we gather data, and that can even occur late in the analysis". It is acknowledged that the use of multiple methods to data collection is preferred to increase the reliability of the findings and the possibility to make inferences (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003 cited in Saunders et al. 2009). Nonetheless, this study is limited in time that makes unviable the application of a different methodology and data collection techniques.

The weaknesses often mentioned in literature about the qualitative research is its subjective character, which can be open to interpretation; researcher bias and over reliance on researcher capabilities; poor validation of results; high ethical risks and costs (Stake, 1995). Graziano and Raulin (2009) add that the low representativeness is also an issue, as well as difficulty in the replication of the study. Nevertheless, it is appropriate herein due to the exploratory character of the research question, which is understands people's opinion about the number of options. Silverman (2010, p. 10) defends that a qualitative method should be preferred if "you are concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behaviour" and also study an "interesting phenomena relating to what people actually do in their day-to-day lives".

This research is also attending a call from Eppler and Mengis (2004, p. 341), who defended that "other research methods should be employed […]. Such methods could include [...] all of which capture more of the contextual side of the overload problem than experiments".

The time horizon of this study is cross-sectional, i.e. a research that describes the choice overload event at a particular point in time (Saunders et al. 2009). It was highly desirable to understand the occurrence of choice overload in a longitudinal

study, as called by Eppler and Mengis (2004). But, this study is restricted in time and could not embrace this approach.

3. Techniques and procedures

3.1 Data collection

This research employed **semi structured interviews** conducted in person to collect **primary data** about the influence of gender on the perception of variety, choice overload and decision satisfaction. Interviews have the purpose of seeking for responses and the type used depends on the depth of answers requested (Robson, 2011). According to the same author, semi structured interviews allow flexibility to the interviewee and count on a guide of questions and wordings used. Face-to-face interviews also enable the researcher to notice nonverbal clues, modify the progress of the interview and manoeuvre the course of the conversation to reach the purpose of the inquiry.

Conversely, this instrument requires experience from the interviewer, is time-consuming, is not standardised therefore facing issues with reliability (Robson, 2011). It also might bias the responses due to the researcher presence, depends on people's personality to communicate and perceive the subject in question and also provides filtered information according to the participant perspective (Creswell, 2009).

Despite the disadvantages, this method is the more appropriate because of, first of all, is in line with the research philosophy and design of this investigation. Second of all, because this study seeks a broad understanding of how genders deal with extensive choice sets, how they perceive the number of options and variety on an online store and how they see satisfaction with a chosen option. The generation of insights requires a flexible method where the participant can discuss their opinions freely. Although Saunders, et al. (2009) defends that the use of semi structured interviews is less frequent in exploratory studies, this research utilises this strategy to decrease the over reliance on the researcher's abilities, which in this case is not an experienced practitioner. A guide of questions was used to conduct the interview and

some cases the order and omission occurred due to the flow of the discussion (Saunders, et al. 2009).

At last, the third reason for the choice of semi structured interviews was directly called by Eppler and Mengis (2014, p. 341), who suggested that most of the overload literature utilised experiments to investigate the phenomenon, however other ways to collect data should be put in place "in order to triangulate prior findings".

Secondary data will not be used in this study due to the lack of time, although it is acknowledged that would be beneficial to triangulate the results (Yin, 2014; Saunders, et al. 2009).

3.2 Research sample

The sample of this research is collected through **non-probabilistic sampling**, utilising the **convenience** approach. There are many "samplable units" such as people, documents, images, films, and so on, according to Mason (1996, p. 86). The author says that the selection of the relevant sample depends on the research question. This study selected people to understand their meanings and perceptions. A convenience sample is the one who the researcher has easy access (BPP Learning Media, 2013). Further, as this study has the purpose of understanding gender perspectives on choice overload, the same number of males and females are interviewed to create a balanced view of the different genders.

Low-constraint research methods, i.e. qualitative research, often counts with an unrepresentative sample. Representativeness in a research stands for "how closely a sample resembles the population under study" (Graziano and Raulin, 2009, p. 122). The authors defend that this type of research normally does not have control under the sample of the study, therefore the results cannot be generalised. It is advisable to conduct a high-constraint or quantitative research afterwards to seek the generalisability (Graziano and Raulin, 2009). The lack in the application of a quantitative study is recognised as a limitation as this study was developed in a short time.

Samples on qualitative studies do not necessarily need to be small, however, as Mason (1996) states, it normally is due to time and money limitations. This study

interviewed eight people, four men and four women, invited for the interview with the condition of answering yes to the question "did you shop apparel online last month". This enquiry yielded a similar context to assure that the respondents would bear in mind the same fashion retail environment when answering the questions. The researcher recorded all eight interviews and conducted three by phone and five in person. Table 1 contains a profile of the participants, whose real names were anonymised and pseudonyms were given to carry out the analysis narrative.

Name	Age	Occupation	Income (approx.)	Frequency of internet shopping*
Maria	25	Student	€15k/year	High
Anna	20	Sales Assistant	€20k/year	High
Cristina	27	Account Manager	€30k/year	High
Claire	30	Child Minder	€20k/year	Medium
Daniel	43	Company owner	€120k/year	Low
Henry	23	Administrative Assistant	€20k/year	Medium
Michael	33	Sales Assistant	€20k/year	Medium
Tom	24	Systems Analyst	€30k/year	High
* Frequency of internet shopping legend: High: twice a month or more | Medium: once a month | Low: once every two months				

Table 1 – Profile of participants

Robson (2011) defends that one of the ways to overcome the drawback of a convenience sample is developing a pilot study to avoid bias. Thus, a pilot study was conducted to correct possible mistakes with the instrument such as the number of questions; language and terms used; misinterpretation and also check the existence of multiple issues in one question (Adams, 2007). The pilot research herein was conducted with a non-participant to test whether the questions would answer the research question and also improve the confidence of the interviewer. Likewise, the pilot interview was recorded to provide an understanding of the length of time taken. The first questionnaire was composed of 26 questions, and the interview took 19 minutes. The researcher removed three unclear questions, leaving the new guide with 23 questions.

4. Development of the interview schedule

The interviews were arranged in person with five respondents and by phone with three respondents, and took around fifteen to nineteen minutes each. The questionnaire was developed to answer the research question, covering three topics: choice overload, perceived variety and decision satisfaction. To state the context, the first part of the interview enquired if the person purchased a product online last month, which product and website was.

According to Quinlan (2011), an interview must an information sheet that states details of the interviewer, college, degree, objective of the research, guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality and the voluntary character of the participation. The interview guide followed these guidelines as presented in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 shows a sample of the interview.

5. Data analysis

The data of this study were analysed using a **thematic coding analysis**. Thematic coding is a "method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The authors highlight that the main advantage of this type of analysis is the flexibility, serving as a useful tool for the diverse style of theories and methodologies. This investigation selected this data analysis technique due to, first of all, easiness to learn, use, summarise and communicate findings (Robson, 2011). Additionally, it is appropriate to an inductive study, which aims to understand people's perspectives and experiences, as exemplified by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Bryman and Bell (2011) comments that thematic analysis is widely used, yet lack precise definition when it comes to techniques and how it is conducted, which is its major drawback. A remedy for this issue is describing the procedure adopted thoroughly. This study will do so by using the guidelines stated by Robson (2011, p. 476):

1. Familiarising yourself with the data
2. Generating initial codes

3. Identifying themes
4. Constructing thematic networks or maps
5. Integration and interpretation

The first step is transcribing the interview to paper and reading it meticulously. This step is relevant to reach the second stage with a grasp of the content and some ideas about the possible codes. Robson (2011) and Yin (2014) suggest that coding can have as starting point the literature, the data or both. Braun and Clarke (2006) comments that there is no correct way of coding the data, however, highlight that using predetermined themes can narrow the researcher's perspective and lead to failing to notice possible insights in the analysis. On the other hand, Tuckett (2005) cited in Braun and Clarke (2006) defends that engage with literature previous to the analysis improve the researcher's judgement by emphasising subtle features present on the data.

The third step is the identification of themes or categories, which must be executed when the second is ready. The following step is where themes are grouped to form the networks, which are constituted of many sub-themes. Attride-Stirling (2001) cited in Robson (2011) says that these sub-themes should not be over fifteen and not less than four. Lastly, the interpretation stands for try to seek for meaning within and across networks.

The purpose of this research is exploring new perspectives and understandings of the choice overload phenomenon and provide a relevant contribution to the existent body of knowledge. Many studies using numerous variables were and have been conducted, however contradictory findings still emerge. Due to this reason, the coding step of this thesis was mainly data-driven, which means that no structure or framework was used to scrutinise the data. As already mentioned in this section, it enables more freedom and possibility of rich and novel insights. Previous theories were used to create a few codes. Appendix 3 contains the codes that became themes, described in the next section. The networks originated from this research are presented in each section of the analysis.

6. Validity and reliability

Creswell (2009) emphasises the importance of the credibility of a qualitative research. Mason (1996) defines **reliability** as a way of convincing others that the study used methods of data collection (tools) that are replicable. In other words, "if you measure the same phenomenon more than once with the same instrument, then you should get the same measurement" (Mason, 1996, p.145). Unlike quantitative methods, which uses standardised scales and measurements easily replicable, qualitative studies require a different approach to prove its accuracy and reliability. The first advice to tackle this issue is presenting the steps taken to reach a conclusion stated in the study and an explanation of how and why the claims are accurate and reliable (Creswell, 2009; Mason, 1996). Moreover, transcriptions, codes and memos should be double checked to correct glaring mistakes to avoid possible deviation in the meaning (Gibbs, 2007 cited in Robson, 2011).

Saunders et al. (2009) define **validity** as a concerning of "whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about". For example, this research claims to focus on the different perspectives people have about choice overload. Thus, the researcher must be able to demonstrate that the findings will be in fact related to choice overload rather than perhaps information overload.

Robson (2011) also says that to avoid validity issues, the data collected should be described and documented with audio or video taping; the framework utilised to analyse the data should be demonstrated to evidence how the researcher reached the interpretation and theory that agrees and disagrees with the findings should be presented. Mason (1996, p.150) adds that the study must be able to "trace the route" by which the interpretation was reached.

This study was carefully carried out following the standards presented in the textbooks to accomplish the reliability and validity criteria imposed. It is acknowledged that triangulation should be conducted to increase the reliability of the findings, nonetheless due to time constraints this study did not apply different methods or data collection techniques.

Chapter IV • Analysis and Findings

According to the methodology section discussed previously, the empirical data was collected and the analysis will take place in this section. The subsections of this chapter are the description of coding, themes and networks used for the analysis along with the data set containing the main information extracted from the interviews. The data set is presented in table format divided by genders, according to the themes and sub-themes. Next, the empirical findings are analysed utilising a thematic coding approach, divided into five themes: choice overload, variety, decision satisfaction, online store, gender and personality traits. Robson (2011) and Braun and Clarke (2006)

guidelines were used for the thematic coding approach of this study. The software MAXQDA 12 (2017) was used to code and organise the themes present in the data.

1. Approach to analyse empirical data

1.1 Coding

As mentioned in the previous section, the starting point for coding was the data. Gibbs (2007) cited and adapted in Robson (2011) provides instructions of what the researcher can code, that is highly dependent on what the research question aims to respond. Bearing in mind that this study seeks new insights and understandings of the choice overload effect according to gender, the following concepts were selected when creating the codes (Robson, 2011, p. 480):

1. Specific acts of behaviours: "what people say or do"
2. Events: "these are usually brief, one-off events or things someone has done"
3. Strategies, practices or tactics: "activities aimed towards some goal"
4. States: "general conditions experienced by people"
5. Meanings: "what concepts do participants use to understand their world? [...] what are their feelings? [...] what symbols do people use to understand their situation?"
6. Participation: "people's involvement or adaptation to a setting"
7. Conditions or constraints: "the precursor to or cause of events or actions, things that restrict behaviour or actions"
8. Consequences: "what happens if…"
9. Settings: "then entire context of the events under study"

The codes are listed on Appendix 3.

1.2 Themes

The construction of themes is the second step of the data analysis, and consists of grouping the codes that have similar idea and form a collection, which has many sub-themes (Robson, 2011, p. 482). According to the author, some techniques might be used to identify themes, such as:

- "Repetitions" of words, subjects, concepts in the data;
- "Indigenous categories", meaning the participants' use of expressions, with their own language and jargons;
- "Metaphors and analogies", that represent their ideas and manners;
- "Transitions", such as changing the subject might indicate cues for possible themes;
- "Similarities and differences" of statements in the data, in which comparison of chunks of data might generate a theme or subtheme;
- "Linguistic connectors" that explains causal or conditional relationships, explanations, temporal statements;
- "Missing data", however, must be used with careful to prevent researcher bias;
- "Theory-related material", in which prior studies could suggest possible themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest the draw of a map with the codes all together, which helps in the identification of themes, search of meaning and logic. Using the software MAXQDA 12 (2017), this exercise was done using the 'creative coding' tool, where it is possible to easily drag and drop all the codes and create the visual map proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In addition, Robson's (2011) recommendation was put in place using similarities and differences, linguistic connections, repetitions and previous literature information to accomplish the task. Five themes emerged, as depicted in the table below.

Codes	Themes
C	Choices
V	Variety
DS	Decision satisfaction

G	Gender
PT	Personality traits

Table 2 - Themes

1.3 Networks or maps

Networks or maps are the visual representation of the themes and sub themes, organised according to "a sense of the significance of individual themes" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 90). For Robson (2011), networks represent the themes aligned according to concepts or theoretical similarities. When the themes and sub themes are related to each other, it is important to review it to solve issues such as repetitions or lack of evidence to support it (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, five maps were created based on the interviews analysis, which are presented according to the themes under discussion in the next section. It is expected that it helps the reader to illustrate what is covered in each part of the analysis.

1.4 Data set

The data set is a document created in the table format (Appendix 4), exported from the MAXQDA 12 (2017) software. It summarises the empirical findings by presenting the opinion of female and male participants in form of citation, classified according to the sub themes / codes created. This document was used as a guide for the data analysis, developed in the following section. Below is an example of how this document is structured.

		C - Choices	
Code	**Description**	**Females**	**Males**
C-NOP	Number of options	• "There's everything on that website" (Anna) • "Well, it was endless. Because there were like really up to 20 pages and I couldn't really see that" (Cristina) • "I don't have too many options in general in many websites. It's not just this one" (Claire)	• "A huge number of options. There were too many in fairness, quite a lot of them… different colours, different brands" (Daniel) • "I think I had a lot of options" (Henry) • "Well it has plenty of options" (Michael)

Table 3 - Example of the data set structure

2. Analysis of empirical data

The analysis was organised bearing in mind the five themes presented previously and the research question, which is to "explore the perspectives of gender in relation to choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction". The data set, created with the MAXQDA 12 (2017), was used as a guide because it sums up the major information of the data.

2.1 Choice overload

The network shown below was created based on the data collected in this study, and was used to structure this section. Choices are the central theme because it came up several times in the interviews. Around this theme are the sub themes, shown in the rectangle shape, which are choice overload, strategies to deal with the number of choices, positive and negative feelings and positive and negative effects. Each of them is described in detail as follows.
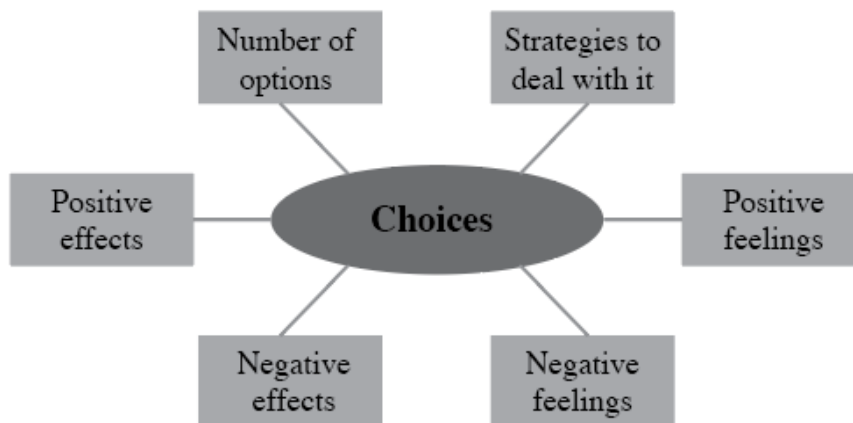

Figure 2: Network created for the Choices Analysis

According to the interviews, the websites on which they shopped online last time had plenty of options to choose from. Daniel, who is a business owner and shops online once every two months said: "a huge number of options. There were too many

in fairness, quite a lot of them… different colours, different brands...". Cristina also shared the same opinion "Well, it was endless". Claire, who shops online regularly (at least once a month), stated that she did not have too many options in a clearance sales website "I don't have too many options in general on many websites. It's not just this one".

The findings provided insights about the **strategies** used by the respondents to cope with choice overload. The first is establishing a limit of **price** to spend with the product "So, I went there looking for, like, the cheapest one" (Henry); "And depending on the price so I would buy" (Anna) and also **price comparison** "I think is easy because you have more options and can compare prices more easily" (Henry). The second strategy mentioned is the use of other people's opinion through **social media** and **reviews and ratings**. Anna, who shops online more than twice a month said "and you can get other people's opinion online", adding that she would cope with choice overload on Amazon or eBay by picking the seller that had the best reviews "Then I had to pick which seller was the best with the best reviews". Anna also mentioned that social media is a source of decision and information "check on Facebook or Instagram and snapchat photo".

The third strategy is the consideration of **brands**. Cristina, a young professional who shops online frequently explained: "branded stuff is easier to buy online because you've seen it in someone else and it's kind of limited edition so it makes the decision easier and faster". Tom, an IT Analyst who also is a frequent online shopper said that the number of options did not affect this selection process because he wanted a pair of shoes of a specific brand "No, because I went on with clear thought I'm gonna get a pair of Under Armour, the brand.".

Finally, Cristina also suggested that she uses the strategy of **checking the product in person**, in a store, then decide which one to buy online. "There was a time where all the options were so many I just felt like I need to go see it in live, touch it, feel it and then buy".

Regarding feelings about the number of options, on the one hand **positive feelings** appeared, such as happiness, excitement, surprising and satisfaction. "Happy, excited" (Anna); "I was excited when I opened it, because the whole idea of buying is fun" (Cristina). "Surprised... I couldn't believe that you could have different colours

options, brands, this, that…" (Daniel). On the other hand, **negative feelings** such as annoying, exhausting, overwhelming and frustrating also showed up on the responses. "I just got exhausted beyond a point because I couldn't decide as to which one I wanted" (Anna); "a bit overwhelming because there were too many" (Daniel); "sometimes it can be frustrating and you can say "you know what? I give up" (Daniel); "annoying but I have no option because was the only online store that I could buy at the moment." (Michael); "It was a little bit annoying trying to figure out which one's actually looked the nicest and which ones I could actually get away during work hours." (Tom).

The **positive effect** of having too many options found in the data was a tendency to **shopaholic** behaviour. Commentaries related to increased expenditure due to number of options was made by the female respondents only. "If I'm in doubt between two, I purchase both" (Maria); "you can't stop shopping once you go on to it" (Anna); "I wanted to spend more money" (Cristina); "I found all the excuses just to buy because just to buy because it was just so tempting" (Cristina); "You know… for a shopaholic you wanna buy everything"(Cristina). Cristina also added that it happens owed to the low physical strain required to buy online "it's because you're not physically straining yourself in walking around [the shop]".

In contrast, Henry, who purchases online at least once a month commented that people are more inclined to spend more on physical stores because they cannot compare prices on the spot. "I think you are inclined to spend more money buying in a physical store than an online store because you don't about the prices in other ones".

The **negative effect** of having too much number of options was first, **choice deferral**. Respondents commented that "actually when that happens I don't buy anything, because they are too similar and I can't make a decision" (Claire); "Yes, it gets hard to choose so it happens that sometimes I give up on buying" (Henry); "Yes, then the whole price comes into and can't decide. So, it's a case of the way just go out of one or just flip a coin or just walk away" (Tom).

Second, respondents stated that due to the large number of options, one had to **think too much**, and even if one had shortlisted a few options, still would not be able to see all the options. "I was thinking too much into them, and had too much of a choice" (Anna); "But if I really had the time and space to see I would forget, even if I

shortlisted a few" (Cristina); "No of course not [looked at all the options], was too many" (Daniel).

Third, **time taken to decide**, which is negative because respondents mentioned the time spent to search and make a decision was an issue. Michael, who buys online once a month commented "I think it just takes time to make a decision because it makes the process longer'. Anna stated that it "took ages to figure out which one I wanted" and Cristina said "it's rare that you have a product and price in the same thing, but it takes a lot of searches, keywords to type to get that good one".

The fourth negative effect is **postponing the decision**. Evidence of that are the statements: "Just go back to it the next night and then, kind of rethink" (Anna); "I'll leave it for any other day" (Daniel) and "I just didn't have time to look that and I did it on a different day because it was kind of annoying" (Michael).

2.2 Variety

The network or map depicted in Figure 3 outline the findings related to variety in this study. Variety is the central theme because this subject was highlighted during the interviews. The participants gave many ideas about variety presented in the rectangle shape (sub themes), which are perception of variety, strategies to deal with the excess of variety, positive and negative feelings and negative effects.
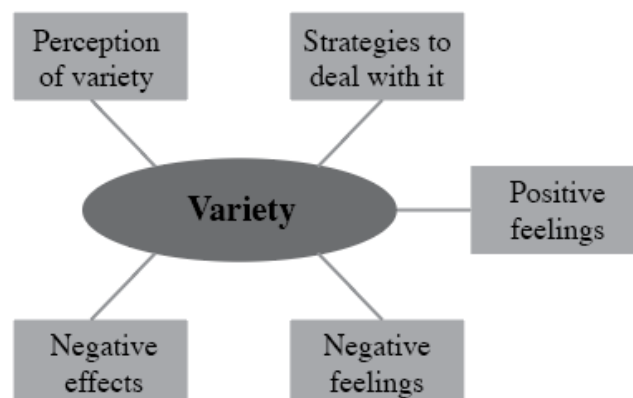

Figure 3: Network created for the Variety Analysis

The interviewer brought up the subject of variety by defining it as the similarity between the options in a choice set. Regarding the **perception of variety**, Anna and Cristina said it was too much; Claire said it depends on the website; and Maria, who purchases online with a high frequency said that physical stores provide more variety than online stores, as it can be noticed in the comments: "sometimes it could be too much" (Anna); "oh yeah they still they have huge variety" (Cristina); "I think depends on the website, if you go to big companies with really good websites you can get a variety of colours. Not in sales… but the website I told you they don't have a big variety of products" (Claire) and "I just went to a sports shop and saw the variety. And then tried to compare on Amazon whether I'm getting it for a cheap price, but I couldn't see the same patterns and designs" (Maria).

Male respondents added that the wide variety brought feelings of confusion "Even though I have an idea that I wanted the ones that I got [...] I was very close to get the Reebok ones, or the Lacoste ones…" (Daniel). The variety reaches a point that, according to the interviewees, products start being the same, just differing in few attributes such as colour, sizes and comfort, which does not impact on their decision. "Basically, most of the options are quite similar so it's just variety in the colour and design but the specifications are the same and the price is almost the same, so you have plenty of options and plenty of the same" (Michael) and also "Possibly yes [would make the same choice if more options were given] because more different colours, more probably shows a little bit more comfortable maybe..." (Tom). In addition, variety for Tom is synonym of a healthy business. "Yes pretty much every website nowadays needs to provide a variety otherwise they go out of business".

Seek for more information about the product was mentioned as a **strategy** to **cope with too much variety**. "So, if I have to think of something I need to understand it properly in terms of the price change in terms of shape, colours, dimensions to actually get it out from that ocean of choices" (Cristina) and "If I had all the options I would select all the things that attract me more and read the details and I would decide based on that, but it would take more time." (Michael).

Concerning the **positive feelings** associated with variety, the ones that appeared in the respondents' answers were happiness, satisfaction, good experience. "I was happy once there was lots to choose" (Cristina); "so it's better for me to purchase

at a place where I have a lot of varieties and then I feel satisfied" (Maria); "bigger websites provide a good variety, so you can have a better experience shopping" (Henry); "I felt happy... I felt that I didn't have to go browsing on to jump to other websites for look other styles. I felt that everything that I needed was on that particular website so there was no need to go browsing open other tabs" (Tom).

Claire emphasised that she would not buy of a website that provides limited variety: "Maybe I wouldn't use the website. I would find another". Also, Maria, who shops online at least twice a month, stated that a wide variety means making the best choice possible "Satisfaction becomes less when you see that okay you have to select only from two products but when you select from 100 products you are satisfied that you have made the best choice and you have selected that product".

Considering **negative feelings** related to too much variety, the ones that emerged are frustrating, exhausting and annoying. "After two hours of searching I was exhausted" (Cristina); "it's frustrating in the end" (Cristina); "What annoys me is [that is] not well shown on the website and when you need to look for that and decide what you want, it's kind of difficult because it's plenty of options but it's not well shown" (Michael).

Further, there were also negative feelings due to not having variety at all. The respondents mentioned frustration and disappointment. "I was a little disappointed because the colours were not there but the quality that I wanted was there" (Maria) and "I feel frustrated because I liked the colour but don't find my size" (Claire).

Similar to the **negative effects** of having too many options, too much variety occasioned **indecision**, leading to **decision difficulty**, as described by Maria: "All of them have 75% discount you will be confused what to buy because all of them are in equal good quality [...] so it becomes too difficult to choose". **Choice deferral** also appeared in Claire's response, "sometimes when I find two products similar… I'm not gonna buy today. I'm not sure what I'm going to buy". Males did not express any concern with too much variety. As mentioned before, some of them think that the options, although different, were basically the same.

2.3 Decision satisfaction

Figure 4 displays the network of map created to analyse decision satisfaction, which is the central theme. Among the sub themes brought up during the interviews were the perception of satisfaction, strategies to deal with decision dissatisfaction, how time and price influence on satisfaction, accuracy provided by the online store and some ideas that emerged about regret.

Figure 4: Network created for the Decision Satisfaction Analysis

The respondents appeared to be **satisfied with the decision** made, as follows: "No, I selected the best I feel. I selected the best because it was in terms of discount, the discount was very good the product was very good the reputation of the band is good, moreover I was getting a free delivery so I feel that I made the best choice" (Maria); "No, I think I chose the best that was there." (Anna); "Satisfaction, really satisfied I just wanted that it fulfils all the idea" (Daniel); "I was quite happy, really pleased [with the decision made]" (Tom).

Two respondents mentioned **price** as a reason for not having chosen the best option. For them, price is associated with quality and they purchased the inexpensive option. "Yeah, they had better options but they were more expensive, and I bought the least expensive shoes" (Claire); "Yes, definitely, because I didn't buy the best one I could as I bought the cheapest. I knew like the majority of the other products were better than the one I was buying, so, I didn't buy the best one" (Henry).

Decision satisfaction also emerged as a consequence of the **time spent on searching** the option. Anna said she knew she had made the best option because she took a long time to select it. "I think I chose the best that was there. I really took my

time looking for that because I really needed this". This idea was confirmed by Cristina, who said that if one have patience (time), will find the best match. "They have huge variety just needs patience to search and get what you want" and "It's my own energy that I lost in searching. If I had sat down to search a little more I might have got a better product".

Additionally, satisfaction with the decision was strongly associated with the **accuracy of the picture** that represents the product and thorough **description** of the features. When these elements were not accurate, **regret** with the decision made came up on the responses. "Sometimes I feel that the that the colour that is displayed on the online store is not accurate like when the product comes in it is not the same." (Maria); "On that shopping experience I was not so happy with the clothes they didn't seem to be the same size that I was thinking of, I don't know... The small seems to be too small, the medium seems to be small" (Cristina); "It's because when I got the product I thought it didn't look anything like the images they had in the website." (Henry).

Cristina commented that she would regret of the choice made due to the high number of options and she would rather defer choice: "It was more peaceful don't buy it, than buy and think that the other colour was better".

2.4 Online store

Features exclusively related to an online store appeared in the interviews and were included in the findings as a theme. As exhibited in Figure 5, the sub themes are trust, choice and tools.

Figure 5: Network created for Online Store Analysis

For the respondents, an online store is **reliable** when it offers a wide variety and high number of options. "If a website can afford a lot of brands onto it goes out to show that this website is genuine." (Cristina); "[So for you a good website is a website that provides good prices…] Yeah, and variety of products, the size, colour and good price." (Claire); "If I need t-shirts, pants, I can go to that website because it's reliable [...] I know they have a wide variety so I can check it out for any other kind of thing I need to buy" (Henry).

According to the interviews, online stores must provide **tools** to facilitate the process of searching for a product and finding of a perfect match. The responses cited the following tools to mitigate the choice overload effect: filtering, accurate search bar, design, organisation of the page and products, categorisation, description of the items, suggestion of similar products on the same page. "My filtering is accurate, that's why the site gives me the right product that I'm looking for and I'm happy now." (Maria); "Yeah, divided by type of products, trousers, heels… some websites are messy with that." (Claire); "firstly the thing is the website is not properly organised and sometimes is kind of messy looking for all the items you need to complete your purchase." (Michael).

Maria and Michael perceive that the online channel offered fewer variety than the physical store. "No, in my opinion I feel that physical stores provide more options than the online store, because the as I said in terms of colour and everything" (Maria) and "I think online stores provide fewer options than physical stores" (Michael). In contrast, other interviewees said that online stores provide more variety and number of options. "Yes, they do because they don't have to store it." (Daniel); ""so it's better to buy online because you have more options." (Henry); "Of course, online has more options." (Cristina); "Yes they provide a lot more options because they don't have to worry about the store houses" (Tom).

2.5 Genders

The image below shows the network created to analyse the genders theme, which is composed by the sub themes female and male, discussed as follows.
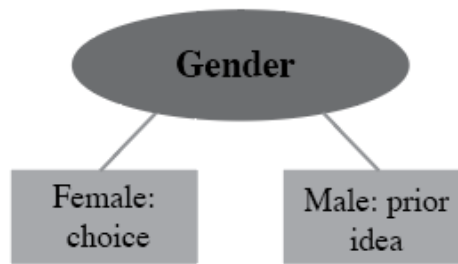
Figure 6: Network created for the Genders Analysis

In this research, **female** participants tend to **prefer a large choice set**. One respondent said she would not buy of a website that offered few options. "I won't be satisfied [if] there were two options that I bought one. But, you know, I might buy the same product from a physical store, but [...] I will be satisfied going to five physical stores and seeing 500 products then I bought this so I made the decision" (Maria); "Maybe I wouldn't use the website. I would find another, because 100 is a lot…" (Claire).

Male respondents had a similar characteristic of establishing a specific target to make the purchase. In other words, males established a **prior idea** of what they wanted to buy and did not seem to change their minds, even with a high number of options. This behaviour seems to be a strategy used to cope with too much choice and variety. "no no because I kind of had a premade idea of what I wanted so I only had to go through the options to tailor my decision" (Daniel); "I entered the website with something in my mind already" (Henry); "When I try to buy something online I usually know what I want and I just go to try to find it specifically what I want" (Michael); "No [number of options did not affect the decision], because I went on with clear thought I'm gonna get a pair of Under Armour, the brand." (Tom).

2.6 Personality traits

Figure 7 depicts a theme manifested in the interview analysis, which confirms findings of previous literature related to the personality traits satisficer and maximiser.
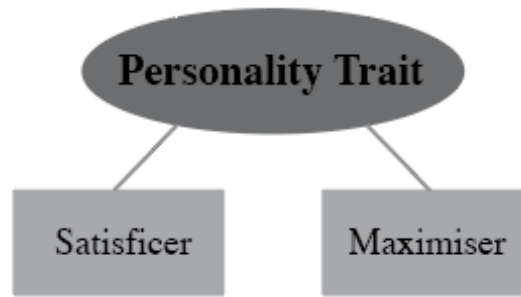
Figure 7: Network created for Personality Traits Analysis

The concept of personality traits as a moderator of the overload effect is conceptualised by Schwartz et al. (2002), who defended that are two types of customers: **maximisers** and **satisficers**. The former stands for a person that seek the best option available and is only satisfied when the perfect match in found. The data of this study agrees with the idea that these traits exists. Evidence for maximisers: "Yes. I looked at all the options, and then I made a selection because I wanted the best one" and "I will be satisfied going to five physical stores and seeing 500 products, then I bought this so I made the decision" (Maria) and satisficers: "I knew like the majority of the other products were better than the one I was buying, so, I didn't buy the best one [...] I knew I wasn't buying the most expensive one therefore I knew I wasn't buying the best one" (Henry).

3. Discussion

This study has the main objective of "exploring choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction using the lens of gender". The eight interviews held with four men and four women that purchased online recently brought up many insights that, on the one hand, are aligned with the previous literature of choice overload and on the other, bring a novel perspective on the phenomenon, as discussed below.

How genders perceive the number of options

According to the interviews, both genders view the online stores as offering too many options, except one female who prefers buying on clearance sales websites, which run out of stock very rapidly. When faced with too many options, the interviewees use strategies to deal with the issue, which is: price, social media, reviews and ratings, brands and checking the product in a store, in person. Those strategies integrate the idea design of the decision-making process described by Gao et al. (2012). According to the authors, it is composed of three steps: intelligence, design and choice. Intelligence is the gathering of information to make the decision, the design is the formation of criteria to select deal with the problem, and lastly, choice is the final decision, which is in line with the criteria developed. Some of these strategies were investigated in literature, whereas others not.

Research on price should be carried out within the choice overload literature. Most experiments present number of options to be selected by participants, but did not control for the price factor. Alvarez et al. (2014, p. 9) contributes with research including price, and find that choice overload depends on personality traits of customers (maximisers and satisficers, as already mentioned) and likewise on the "mean of prices and dispersion of low prices".

The idea of recommendation (reviews) was already defended by Aljukhadar et al. (2013), who found it plays a crucial role in diminishing the negative effects of overload. Social media appeared in the data collected, however, no previous literature studied this fact. It could be utilised as a source of information and help in the selection process the same fashion a review or ratings. For instance, on the page of the product, a social media plug-in could be installed and bring people's opinion about the product, as well as user information.

When it comes to feelings related to the number of options, positive and negative ones were mentioned in the interviews. Examples of positive are happiness, excitement, surprising and satisfaction and negative are annoying, exhausting, overwhelming and frustrating. Here lies the contradiction of the choice overload phenomenon, which is suggested to exert a favourable and adverse impact on customer satisfaction. A conclusion that could be drawn based on the data collected is that

initially, the significant amount seems exciting and intriguing, "but are subsequently more likely to hamper people's intrinsic motivation" (Iyengar and Lepper, 2000, p. 999). In other words, satisfaction peaks until a point when the number of options reaches a maximum number, dropping significantly and becoming annoying or exhausting. This idea aligns with previous findings, which says that an inverted U-shape function is found between the variables number of choices and satisfaction (Szrek, 2017; Reutskaja and Hogarth, 2009; Shah and Wolford, 2007).

Likewise, evidence for the idea that humans have limited capacity was also found (Simon, 1955). Some of the interviewees said they could not process all the options to select the perfect fit.

Having too many options impacted positively and negatively on the participants. Females were positively affected by the number of options and presented a shopaholic tendency, buying without the real need for the product. There are two manners to analyse this behaviour: the influence of the large assortment and a female characteristic. Both ideas are in line with the previous literature. Ma (2016) researched the effect of large choice sets on consumer spending and found that online shoppers spent 10% more when compared to the physical store. This fact is attributed to the ease of search and the insignificant search cost, regarding physical and money costs, as a respondent commented. Moreover, the literature states that women are inclined to make unplanned purchases more than men (Rook and Hoch, 1985; Tifferet and Herstein, 2012).

The negative effects that both genders felt were choice deferral, time taken to decide and to postpone the decision. Choice deferral is also called choice paralysis, in which the customer avoids making the decision, as suggested by Iyengar and Lepper (2000). Kuksov and Villas-Boas (2010) states that it can happen when one faces too much or too fewer options. The authors defend that in a large choice set, consumers must dedicate more time to find a good fit and give up. If the choice set is too small, then customers might be inclined to think that a satisfactory fit is unlikely. The data collected found evidence for both cases.

The respondents said that the time taken to search for a product was an issue to make the best choice. Perhaps it is the case of e-tailers to consider an assortment reduction to increase search efficiency and their profits. Sloot, Fok and Verhoef (2006)

researched on that, finding that although in the short-run the reduction decreased sales, in the long-run brought new customers, increased conversion of the category in question and did not impact on sales. Furthermore, Broniarczyk, Hoyer and McAlister (1998) adds that reduction in assortment did not impact on the perception of variety, which in turn did not impact on performance.

Procrastination was another negative effect of choice overload. Scheibehenne et al. (2009) discuss that procrastination might lead to no decision at all, as individuals tend not to make any decision once it is delayed (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002 cited in Scheibehenne et al., 2009).

How genders perceive variety

The perception of variety varied according to each respondent experience shopping online. Female interviewees brought different ideas that there was too much variety and not enough variety at all. Although Zhang, Farris, Irvin, Kushwaha, Steenburgh and Weitz (2010) defended that online stores can carry a larger assortment when compared to brick-and-mortar stores due to high costs of storage and limitation of space, two respondents perceive the online channel as offering less variety than the physical store. The reason might be that it depends on the type of site, as it could be a marketplace reselling products from other suppliers, or a website that sells an owned brand. More importantly, the layout, organisation of the page and usability tools such as filtering, the structure of information, customer flow, and so on. This aspect will be detailed below. Thus, Amazon is perceived as offering too much variety (it has over 200 sub categories), unlike the clearance sales website M and M Direct.

Male participants suggested that variety can reach a point that products start being the same, differentiating in only a few attributes. This idea is consistent with Szrek (2017, p. 50) findings, who find that "having more options is desirable if they are perceived as differentiated options". If options are too similar, feelings of confusion are common among the male respondents. Furthermore, variety for one of the interviewees is a synonym of a healthy business, which agrees with the idea that more choice denotes competitive advantage for a company (Bown et al., 2003).

The strategy used by the sample to deal with too much choice is the search for more information. Correspondingly, Huff and Johnson's (2014) experiment found that individuals tend to click-through more when more choices are offered. They explained this fact arguing that it only happens because people seek more information to reduce the indecision caused by the high number of options. Nonetheless, it also reaches a point that the number of attributes overloads customers (Huff and Johnson, 2014). To solve the problem of too much information on the website, Fasolo et al. (2007) suggest that retailers could first, spotlight the most substantial number of attributes, and second, present secondary attributes, which is seen on some websites with a drop-down text box on the product page.

The positive feelings associated with a wide variety appeared to be happiness, satisfaction and good experience. One female respondent said she is satisfied when choosing from a vast and varied assortment. This viewpoint is shared with previous research, which finds that perceived variety positively influences the consumer satisfaction (Szrek, 2017; Turri, 2011; Broniarczyk, et al., 1998). Emphasising the same idea that variety means satisfaction, another woman said she would not buy from a website that provided short variety. This behaviour is well documented in the literature, suggesting that a choice set needs to incite intrinsic motivation to be engaging and satisfactory (Katz and Assor, 2007). Following the same thinking, negative feelings came out in the data set with two situations: having too much variety and not having variety at all. As already commented, too much is confusing and too less is disappointing.

The negative effects of having extensive variety were found to be the same as when the customer faces a large number of options. It was indecision, decision difficulty and choice deferral.

How gender perceives decision satisfaction

Most of the respondents stated they were satisfied with the decision made when compared with other options available. Two of them (one male and one female)

associated decision satisfaction with price, saying that they have not made the best choice because they selected the least expensive option. This idea of price and satisfaction is an obvious line of thinking in common sense and also the scientific sphere. According to Gerstner (1985), customers cannot ascertain whether a product has quality only by appearance, so they use market cues such as advertising, brand popularity and price to do so. In a real situation, unlike experiments, customers are bombarded with many signals to judge the satisfaction with their decision. Perhaps future experiments related to choice overload should involve price to create a real-world scenario and back up more precisely the generalisation of the phenomenon.

As defended before, time spent on searching for the perfect match was brought up in the interviews as a negative effect of an extensive number of options. Regarding decision satisfaction, two women said that their satisfaction with the selected one depended on the time spent on searching, meaning that the more time spent, the more satisfaction. Haynes (2009) found a similar attitude in his research, suggesting that the participants only felt choice overload when they were time bounded. As indicated previously, time pressure affects the selection process and satisfaction with the decision completely. Thus, it must be a controlled moderator on future studies (Scheibehenne et al., 2010).

Moreover, decision satisfaction emerged as a consequence of the accuracy of the pictures on the website, as well as a thorough description of the product (although not long to cause overload, as mentioned by Fasolo et al., 2007). On an online environment, the representation of the product is vital as it is the only way the customer will have contact with the product. Regret with the choice made was only mentioned when those elements were absent, apart from a female respondent that once avoided to choose because was faced with an enormous number of attributes. This behaviour is suggested by Lenton and Francesconi (2011, p. 3), who found that "choice variety yields greater confusion rather than greater choosiness".

The influence of online store layout and usability

An extensive variety in the choice set was related to reliability on a web store. This idea connects with Bown et al. (2003) argument that humans rather having choice than no choice at all, even if these choices do not contribute to the final outcome. The

authors suggest that this preference emerged and evolved due to our ancestors, who would select a place to hunt based on the number of options, rather than an area with little or no choice.

The interviews likewise emphasised the use of tools to increase search efficiency and the probability to find the right option. The mechanisms described are filtering, accurate search bar, design, the organisation of the page and products, categorisation, description of the items, suggestion of similar products on the same page. Past literature already studied some of those tools. Turri (2011) find that filtering decrease choice difficulty. Aljukhadar et al. (2013) indicates that recommendation agents, i.e. people who leave their opinions about the product on the web page have a positive effect on decreasing overload. Mogilner et al. (2008) research the categorisation effect and states that the presence of it increases customer satisfaction because, among other reasons, facilitates the selection process.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that user interface is the primary factor to be considered when designing an online store that enables the user to search efficiently and practically and find more rapidly what they are looking for. Likewise, a useful product description and an intelligent search bar on the website that makes correct assumptions and take fewer keywords to localise the product. Past studies have already emphasised the importance of a website layout on customer shopping behaviour (Vrechopoulos, O'Keefe, Doukidis and Siomkos, 2004), even more with the tremendous increase of purchases made through mobile devices (Wang, Malthouse, Krishnamurthi, 2015). Thus, would be an advantage for future studies in overload on online settings to account for that variable.

Genders' differences observed in the data

Females enjoyed a large choice set when compared to men. One of them has gone further saying that she would not buy from a website that offered limited options. The reason for that might be that women tend to be more fastidious than men when it comes to analysing products and ads, as defended by Kempf et al. (2006). As large

assortments increase the probability of experience overload (Iyengar and Lepper, 2000), thus is possible to conclude that women are more likely to be impacted by the overload effect. To a certain extent, this conclusion agrees with Williamson and Eaker (2012) and Ji et al. (2014) findings that women are more likely to experience information and consequently choice overload than men.

Tifferet and Herstein (2012) concluded that women are more committed to brands than men due to their risk averse behaviour (Croson and Gneezy, 2009). This research did not find evidence to support this affirmation, however, unveil that brands might be a strategy for coping with too much choice and variety, for both genders.

Males, on the other hand, seem to develop a different strategy while shopping, which can reduce their propensity to face the detrimental effects of an extensive number of options and variety. They establish a prior idea in their minds and go shopping searching for that product in specific, ignoring other alternatives. It may happen because, as mentioned by Friedmann and Lowengart (2013), males tend to be more utilitarian. The practicality of this behaviour replicates on shopping, making them go through the purchase process focused on one item and disregarding the others.

Maximiser x satisficer behaviour

This research found evidence for the maximiser and satisficer personal characteristics, although this was not the objective. The concept of personality traits as a moderator of choice overload is conceptualised by Schwartz et al. (2002), who defended that are two types of customers: maximisers and satisficers. The former stands for a person who seeks the best option available and is only satisfied when finds the perfect match. The previous study found that maximisers are more likely to experience choice overload because they are prone to consider all the options on the store (physical or online) to guarantee the best choice (Alvarez et al., 2014). Satisficers, on the other hand, consider a good enough option, instead of relentlessly searching for the best match. Schwartz et al. (2002) explain that satisficers draw a scale and set a point for an acceptable option. Once one finds a good option that exceeds the pinpointed mark that is the selected.

It is important to highlight that this study neither finds enough evidence to suggest that maximisers tend to experience choice overload nor conclude that this behaviour might be associated with a particular gender. Further research for this will be required.

Chapter V • Conclusions

1. Conclusion

The objective of this investigation was to explore the perspectives of gender in relation to choice overload, perception of variety and decision satisfaction. This study

found that there are similarities and differences in the perceptions genders have about the three subjects aforementioned. Eight semi structured interviews were held with four males and four females, who purchased apparel or shoes recently. The researcher enquired about their past shop experience and also the general thinking about the number of choices, variety and decision satisfaction.

Concerning the number of options, both genders have similar perception of the number of options and use similar strategies to deal with this difficulty, which is establishing a price limit; using other people's opinion with social media, reviews and ratings; selecting a brand or interacting with the product in person, in the physical store. The past literature already studied some of those strategies, however, price, social media and brand should be investigated in depth.

Positive and negative feelings appeared in the analysis and present contradictions as the choice overload studies. Owed to the feelings described and how the participants described them, this investigation is inclined to support previous literature that defends an inverted U-shape function of the number of options and satisfaction (Szrek, 2017; Reutskaja and Hogarth, 2009; Shah & Wolford, 2007).

Relatedly, the data also found positive and negative effect of the number of products. Females presented a shopaholic tendency when faced a vast assortment. Both genders shared the negative effects, which are choice deferral, too much time taken to decide and to postpone the decision of buying. Those negative consequences were already listed in literature and this study did not find any new effect.

In regards to variety, females suggested that it depends on the website, as some of them offer too much and others too little, and they are prone to prefer a wide rather than limited variety. Males said that when there is too much variety, products are almost the same as the difference in attributes is almost inexistent. Despite this affirmation, they stated that a website must have variety otherwise is not seen as a reliable and competitive business. Thus, variety for males is important, but they are inclined to ignore it and go straight to the option they had in mind. Seeking more information is a strategy used by both males and females to cope with too much variety. Additionally, positive and negative effects and feelings of variety were the same as of having too many options.

Three factors seemed to influence the decision satisfaction: price, time and accuracy. Two interviewees (one male and one female), suggested that the best option to select is the ones with the higher price. Furthermore, time spent in searching the product online was associated with decision satisfaction. The more time devoted, the higher the probability of finding the perfect fit. Likewise, the accuracy of the picture and information on the website was defended to exert great influence on one's satisfaction and avoid regret.

Related to online stores features, it was found that elements of user interface impact significantly on the perception of choice overload and variety. Aspects of the user interface would be the layout of the page, visual organisation and structure of information, website adaptability, optimisation of images and search and so on.

Females and males seemed to possess two main unique traits that differ their behaviour. Females prefer large assortments, and because of that are more likely to experience choice overload. Males tend to define a previous idea of what they want to purchase and are not lured by other choices while shopping.

Evidence was also found for the personality traits of maximiser and satisficer suggested by Schwartz et al. (2002). Some respondents said they look for the best option available and others that a good one is enough to satiate their wants. Although, this personal characteristic did not find evidence to be associated with gender.

2. Limitations

This research is not without limitations. First, this research was time constrained for the realisation of more interviews that could support more findings. Second, it relied on the memory of the interviewees, which is subject to several inaccuracies. Third, it also did not control for assortment structure, the amount of variety in the choice set, the complexity of options, information available, time pressure and so on, as suggested by Scheibehenne et al. (2010). Fourth, due to the qualitative nature, face issues of validity and reliability. Additionally, the findings of this research cannot be generalised due to the unrepresentative convenience sampling.

3. Recommendations for future research

This study benefit retailers, who need to define their strategies on inventory and decide whether offer a large, medium or a small number of choices and variety. It also is helpful to the overload literature, in order to diminish the contradictions and to provide insights for future studies on choice overload, perceived variety and decision satisfaction. It would be beneficial for the body of literature to focus future studies on the generalisation of the idea of a concave relationship between the number of options and choice satisfaction.

Additionally, price, social media and brand should also be investigated as a possible strategy to diminish the harmful effect of choice overload. Relatedly, decision satisfaction should be studied to understand the relationship with price, the time taken to decide and accuracy of the website pictures and descriptions. Likewise, research on the user interface (UI) as a moderator of overload would also be advantageous to understand the impact of it on consumers.

Replicate this study using all principles of grounded theory would be advised due to the flexibility of this research method and the possibility to change the focus of the research when different and meaningful information appears.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview guide

- This study is about the perspective genders have about choice overload, number of variety in a choice set and the satisfaction with the decision made.
- This research is being developed in conclusion of a MSc in Management at NCI
- The results will be used academically
- The participation is optional, voluntary and anonymous.
- May I record this interview?

Context

Did you shop online last month?

What did you buy?

Which website?

Choice overload

About your last shopping experience

- What do you think about the number of options on the website? (Give details)

- When you saw the number of options on the online store, what did you feel? Describe three feelings.

- Did the number of options affected the selection process of this product you bought? Why?

- Were you able to look at all the options the website provided to make your decision? Why?

In general

- In your opinion, online stores provide more options than physical stores? (Give more details)

- Have you ever given up on the decision because of the number of options you had to choose from? Why?

Perceived variety (perception of variety - difference between options)

About your last shopping experience

- What do you think about the variety (difference between options) of the online store? (Give details)

- What do you think about the variety this website offered?

- How did you feel about the variety in the online store? (describe feelings)

In general

- Do you normally find what you are looking for on online stores? Why do you think is that?

- Do you think websites in general provide the variety you expect? Why?

- On an online store, do you think that products similar to each other affect your selection process? Why?
- Have you ever given up on the decision because of the similarity of options you had to choose from? Why?

Decision satisfaction

About your last shopping experience

- How did you feel when the order arrived and you saw the product you chose? (describe feelings)
- Did you return or changed the product you chose? Why?
- Would you make the same choice if the website offered 100 options more than what they are offering at the moment? Why?
- Would you make the same choice if the website offered 100 options less than what they are offering at the moment? Why?
- Do you think the website offered better options than the one you selected? Why?

In general

- Have you ever returned or changed a product you bought online? Why?
- Have you ever regretted of a purchase you made online? Why?

Appendix 2 - Interview sample to a woman

<u>Context</u>

Did you shop online last month?

Basically, 1 month back

What did you buy?

Pair of workout shoes and some workout clothes

Which website?

I got it from Amazon of course.

<u>Choice overload</u>

About your last shopping experience

1. What do you think about the number of options on the website? (Give details)

- It's crazy. It just confuses me. It's nice to have a choice but it's too much now. It's just like… sometimes you feel that the price is good, but the product it's not good. But sometimes you feel that the product it's good but the price is not good. It's rare that you have a product and price in the same thing, but it takes a lot of searches, keywords to type to get that good one. Unless you're not very brand particular, that is the situation. But if you're a brand person I think it's easy. If you know it one or Nike workout shoes or workout clothes than you know that this is the one and the one to buy so. Because branded stuff is easier to buy online because you've seen it in someone else and it's kind of limited edition so it makes the decision easier and faster.

2. When you saw the number of options on the online store, what did you feel? Describe three feelings.

- First thing is, I was excited when I opened it, because the whole idea of buying is fun. But then when I started to like looking, I just got exhausted beyond a point because I couldn't decide as to which one I wanted, because everything seems good, everything is tempting. Now it's all up to me as to which one to pick and I tend to become flexible when you have so many choices. You know… for a shopaholic you wanna buy everything.

3. Did the number of options affected the selection process of this product you bought? Why?

- Yes. I was not really thinking of spending more than a certain price but then after looking into it, I was like, maybe this is one time thing, how would I lose, it's ok I can pamper myself. I found all the excuses just to buy because just to buy because it was just so tempting. Just the way it is presented, because it's nothing to do with, you know, I planned anything… it's just the look of it that got my attention and I just caught carried away.

4. Were you able to look at all the options the website provided to make your decision? Why?

- Well, it was endless. Because there were like really up to 20 pages and I couldn't really see that. But if I really had the time and space to see I would forget even if I shortlisted a few, there's no way I can shortlist out of that ocean of choices that is there in that online shopping websites.

In general

5. In your opinion, online stores provide more options than physical stores? (Give more details)

- Well, you know, but then again, all online choices are not really products in a certain sense because… ok, I'm just saying that the discussion is different if it's a brand, but if it's not a brand… I cannot say that those choices really count because some are just there because they are not getting sold out, but unlike physical stores, at least if it's not getting sold out they push it out somehow or refill it with something new there. That's a bit of a difference between a physical store and an online store.

Interviewer: but do you think there is more options or less options?

- Of course, online has more options. First thing is every vendor has a space to sell his product so and the cloud is just unlimited. So, everyone can get the product up there and sell it. So, I think that's the one of the main reasons why there's lots of space to let anyone sell their products. At the end of the day more than the vendor, the guy who's giving the space to sell these products make more money so, why wouldn't I want to sell my product up there (online store)?

6. Have you ever given up on the decision of buying because of the number of options you had to choose from? Why?

- Oh yes, I did. There was a time where all the options were so many I just felt like I need to go see it in live, touch it, feel it and then buy. There were these particular clothes that I wanted to buy that the price was so high and I had to second guess myself if I was sure of buying it online. I felt more like I would feel assure if I go touch it and see it and then buy it, try it on maybe once

because I didn't want to go to the entire process of returning it and then following up, call to the customer care… I didn't want that headache.

Perceived variety (perception of variety - difference between options)

About your last shopping experience

1. What do you think about the variety (difference between options) of the online store? (Give details)

- You know, it's nice to see that there is so much. One should just have the money to afford to buy all of that, but sometimes when you are just trickily thinking of a certain budget it gets confusing. But it's nice to see that there is so many out there. It gives you ideas as how you want to dress up.

2. What do you think about the variety this website offered?

- It's massive. I had huge choices. I was happy once there was lots to choose but then eventually, after two hours of searching I was exhausted.

3. How did you feel about the variety in the online store? (describe feelings)

- Some seem to be convincing, in the first look of it, but then it just like you want to buy everything. You want to put everything in the cart but when you're doing, when you're actually summing up the whole thing you realise that you don't need half of the things, but it's because you're not physically straining yourself in walking around the store and buying your just adding things onto your cart because they look they look tempting. It's just temptation you know there's nothing really... it's just more momently temptation, really has nothing to do with need... you know you're just silly when you're doing and online shopping just kind of make you silly as a person because you don't realise how many things you're buying you just go on buying.

Interviewer: but describe feelings.

- it's frustrating in the end, it's exciting in the beginning in the middle, you're more curious to see so it's exciting period frustrating.

In general

1. Do you normally find what you are looking for on online stores? Why do you think is that?

- Not in the first go for sure. It takes me nearly two, three keywords and searches until I get the right product with all the requirements that I would be looking for.

Interviewer: and why do you think that happens?

- well I think there is also there is too many filters to choose from. So, if I have to think of something I need to understand it properly in terms of the price change in terms of shape, colours, dimensions to actually get it out from that ocean of choices.

2. Do you think websites in general provide the variety you expect? Why?

- Oh, yeah, they still they have huge variety just needs patience and to search and get what you want.

3. On an online store, do you think that products similar to each other affect your selection process? Why?

- They do actually you know like you wouldn't think that there is another product which is like the same one you're thinking. It kind of surprises you because online market changes so rapidly. It's too much like I may not see the same that I'm seeing right now on the page that I would have seen, there would be something else which has more traffic that would be on the first page. So, it's crazy...

4. Have you ever given up on the decision because of the similarity of options you had to choose from? Why?

- Oh, I did yes. I did it. It was a particular dress that I wanted to buy and they call those were so many dead I couldn't figure out which one I want to go for I gave up I didn't buy it. It was more peaceful don't buy it, then buying it and thinking that the other colour was better.

<u>Decision satisfaction</u>

About your last shopping experience

1. How did you feel when the order arrived and you saw the product you chose? (describe feelings)

- On that shopping experience, I was not so happy with the clothes they didn't seem to be the same size that I was thinking of, I don't know... The small seems to be too small, the medium seems to be small online shopping you don't really have the right size generally is like, you know you're small sized clothing person, the small should be a standard small everywhere. in the physical stores it's like that, but the online store the sizes of the USA sizes and UK sizes are so different. It doesn't come out the same way as in the pictures. it looks very pretty, it looks very convincing but then when I put it on it's a big joke.

2. Would you make the same choice if the website offered 100 options more than what they are offering at the moment? Why?

- Not really, of course not, I would be carried away again. That's the thing, it doesn't let to decide.

3. Would you make the same choice if the website offered 100 options less than what they are offering at the moment? Why?

- If I had fewer options I would not buy it because I feel that this website is not having enough money to put in more products I don't think I would trust that website. if a website can afford a lot of brands onto it goes out to show that this website is genuine and they can actually deliver it because they have so many brands they have to keep up for each of the brands' images. So, there is no chance they would ditch a customer unless is a local website selling very few items you can't be sure that you really received that product until it comes to

your hand. because what makes you feel convinced about an amazon, it's because you know for a fact that it still comes to your house no matter what.

4. Do you think the website offered better options than the one you selected? Why?

- sometimes I feel yeah, the website did have better options, it was my choice so I have to solely blame myself and no one else. Because I think for a reason there was the choice up there it was me who lost my patience in the searching process. So, in the end, I just decided ok let me just go with this one. So, what happens in the process is you really can't blame anybody. It's my own energy that I lost in searching. if I had sat down to search a little more I might have got a better product.

In general

1. Have you ever returned or changed a product you bought online? Why?

- oh yes, that's a very painful process, I have done that once. There was this one product that, it was a dress, it had no connection with what I saw up on the website, so I was really not satisfied. For the price, I paid because first think it was something of a very low price I would really care about, there is no point in doing the whole discussion calling them up. but then because I put a lot of money into it and I didn't want to lose my money, I thought I should return it according to the returning police they had.

2. Have you ever regretted of a purchase you made online? Why?

- yes, I did there were a couple of times. I felt like... sometimes you can't really see and believe what you see.

Appendix 3 – Table of codes (table 4)

Themes	Sub themes	Codes	Description of what the code means	Explanation
C - Choices	Number of options	C-NOP	Number of options	Statements about the number of options
	Strategy to deal with it	C-S	Strategy too much choice	Strategy used to decide when the person faces a large amount of choice
	Positive feelings	C-PF-NOO	Positive feeling - number of options	Whenever emerges a positive feeling related to the number of options
	Negative feelings	C-NF-NOO	Negative feeling - number of options	Whenever emerges a negative feeling related to the number of options
	Positive effects	C-PE-TMO-S	Positive effect - too many options - Shopaholic	When the quantity of products brings a desire to shop more
	Negative effects	C-NE-TMO-W	Negative effect - too many options - choice deferral	When the person gives up on buying because of the high number of options
		C-NE-TMO-TTM	Negative effect - too many options - Think too much	High cognitive activity when facing too many options
		C-NE-TMO-T	Negative effect - too many options - Time	When the person takes time to decide due to the high number of options

		C-NE-TMO-P	Negative effect - too many options - Postpone	When the person postpone action of buying due to the high number of options
	Strategy to deal with it	V-S	Strategy - variety	Strategies used to decide when there's too much variety
	Perception of variety	V-POV	Variety - Perception of variety	Statements that the person clarifies his/her perception of variety on the website
	Positive feelings	V-PF-VE	Variety - Positive feelings - variety enough	Statements that emphasises positive feelings the person felt, meaning that they had variety enough to choose from
	Negative feelings	V-NF-TMV	Variety - Negative feelings - too much variety	Statements that emphasises the feelings the person felt due to the big variety
V - Variety		V-NF-NV	Variety - Negative feelings - no variety	Whenever person states negative feelings because didn't have variety enough
	Negative effects	V-NE-TMV	Variety - Negative effect - too much variety	Statements that show a negative effect of having too much variety
		V-NE-TMV-I	Variety - Negative effect - too much variety - indecision	When the person declares that was paralysed because of the high number of variety
		V-NE-TMV-D	Variety - Negative effect - too much variety - deferral	When the person gives up on buying because of the high number of variety
	Satisfaction	DS-S	Decision satisfaction - satisfaction	Statements that show satisfaction with the decision made
	Time	DS-T	Decision satisfaction - time	Statements that show satisfaction with the decision made mediated by time searching
DS - Decision Satisfaction	**Price**	DS-P	Decision satisfaction - price	Statements that say that satisfaction is associated with price
	Accuracy	DS-A	Decision satisfaction - accuracy	Statements that say the satisfaction was associated with accuracy of the picture in relation to the product received
	Regret	DS-R	Decision satisfaction - regret	When the respondent purchased the product, but thought that other choice was better
	Trust	OS-TW	Online store - trust on website	Factors that highlight the respondent's view of what represent a reliable / trustworthy website
OS - Online Store	Tools	OS-T	Online store - tools	Tools used to cope with choice overload on online stores
	Choice	OS-C	Online stores - Online stores choice	Statements that show the opinion of the respondent related to options that online shops offer in comparison with physical stores

G - Gender	**Female**	G-F	Gender - Female - options	Statements in which females say they prefer a high number of options and variety
	Male	G-M	Gender - Male - idea	Statements that say males have a prior idea of what they want to buy
PT - Personality Trait	Satisficer	PT-S	Personality trait – "satisficer"	Person who the option chosen can be good enough
	Maximiser	PT-M	Personality trait – "maximiser"	People who seek the best possible option

Appendix 4 - Data set (table 5)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">C - Choices</th></tr>
<tr><th>Code</th><th>Description</th><th>Females</th><th>Males</th></tr>
<tr>
<td>C-NOP</td>
<td>Number of options</td>
<td>• "There's everything on that website" (Anna)
• "Well, it was endless. Because there were like really up to 20 pages and I couldn't really see that" (Cristina)
• "I don't have too many options in general in many websites. It's not just this one" (Claire)</td>
<td>• "A huge number of options. There were too many in fairness. quite a lot of them different colours, different brands" (Daniel)
• "I think I had a lot of options" (Henry)
• "Well it has plenty of options" (Michael)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-S</td>
<td>Strategy too much choice</td>
<td>• "Then I had to pick which seller was the best with the best reviews" (Anna)
• "And you can get other people's opinion online" (Anna)
• "Check on Facebook or Instagram and snapchat photo" (Anna)
• "And depending on the price so I would buy" (Anna)
• "But if you're a brand person I think it's easy. If you know it one or Nike workout shoes or workout clothes than you know that this is the one and the one to buy so." (Cristina)
• "Branded stuff is easier to buy online because you've seen it in someone else and it's kind of limited edition so it makes the decision easier and faster." (Cristina)
• "There was a time where all the options were so many I just felt like I need to go see it live, touch it, feel it and then buy." (Cristina)</td>
<td>• "So, I went there looking for, like, the cheapest one" (Henry)
• "Compare prices more easily" (Henry)
• "No, because I went on with clear thought "I'm gonna get a pair of Under Armour", the brand." (Tom)
• "(able to look at all the options?) yeah I've done a bit of window-shopping or website shopping, what you call… (laughs)... browsing." (Tom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-PF-NOO</td>
<td>Positive feeling - number of options</td>
<td>• "Happy, excited" (Anna)
• "I was excited when I opened it, because the whole idea of buying is fun." (Cristina)
• "That's the reason why I shop online, and I hate shopping in general and online make me feel really comfortable." (Claire)</td>
<td>• "The second surprised... I couldn't believe that you could have different colours options, brands, this, that…" (Daniel)
• "Satisfied but as I said a bit overwhelming because there were too many" (Daniel)
• "I went there specifically to buy this one product but I know they have a lot of options so I'll consider that in my next purchase" (Henry)
• "I know I can rely on this website next time I need to buy something." (Henry)</td>
</tr>
</table>

C-NF-NOO	Negative feeling - number of options	• "I just got exhausted beyond a point because I couldn't decide as to which one I wanted" (Cristina)	• "The first it's a bit like a 'wow'. let's see if I can find exactly what I want so a bit like, I would say overwhelmed." (Daniel) • "I had kind of an idea what I wanted it took forever and sometimes it can be frustrating and you can say "you know what? I give up" (Daniel) • "Annoying but I have no option because was the only online store that I could buy at the moment."(Michael) • "I don't want to spend more time that I wanted to looking on the website." (Michael) • "I just didn't have time to look that and I did it on a different day because it was kind of annoying." (Michael) • "It was a little bit annoying trying to figure out which one's actually looked the nicest and which ones I could actually get away during work hours." (Tom)
C-PE-TMO-S	Positive effect - Too many options - Shopaholic	• "If I'm in doubt between two I purchase both." (Maria) • "You can't stop shop once you go on to it" (Anna) • "I wanted to spend more money" (Anna) • "Yeah when I buy something really expensive of Topshop, and I'm like "why did I buy that? I don't even need it" (Anna) • "You know… for a shopaholic you wanna buy everything." (Cristina) • "I found all the excuses just to buy because just to buy because it was just so tempting" (Cristina) • "then it just like you want to buy everything." (Cristina) • "it's because you're not physically straining yourself in walking around the store and buying your just adding things onto your cart because they look they look tempting" (Cristina)	• "I think you are inclined to spend more money buying in a physical store than an online store because you don't about the prices in other ones" (Henry)
C-NE-TMO-D	Negative effect - too many options - Choice Deferral	• "Actually, when that happens I don't buy anything, because they are too similar and I can't make a decision" (Claire)	• "Yes, it gets hard to choose so it happens that sometimes I give up on buying" (Henry) • "Yes, then the whole price comes into and can't decide. So, it's a case of the way just go out of one or just flip a coin or just walk away" (Tom)

C-NE-TMO-T	Negative effect - too many options - Time	• "I waited for some more time for the options that were there you know the price was also high" (Maria) • "Took ages to figure out which one I wanted" (Anna) • "But I end up in the end finding something but it takes longer." (Anna) • "It's rare that you have a product and price in the same thing, but it takes a lot of searches, keywords to type to get that good one." (Cristina)	• "Because it's too much, if not, takes a bit too long" (Daniel) • "So, I go crazy when I try to buy on Amazon because of that (takes too long)." (Michael) • "Yes, I do but sometimes it takes time. (found what is looking for on online stores)" (Michael) • "I think it just takes time to make a decision because it makes the process longer." (Michael)
C-NE-TMO-TTM	Negative effect - too many options - Think too much	• "I was thinking too much into them, and had too much of a choice" (Anna) • "But if I really had the time and space to see I would forget even if I shortlisted a few" (Cristina)	• "I just didn't have time to look that. " (Michael)
C-NE-TMO-P	Negative effect - too many options - Postpone	• "Just go back to it the next night and then, kind of rethink" (Anna) • "I just leave it for another day, just too hard to choose" (Anna)	• "I didn't have the idea what I wanted so I went in looking for something and I was like "wow", I couldn't make my mind" (Daniel) • "I'll leave it for any other day" (Daniel) • "So, what happens is that then is that it will be a bit too much and I am not surprised because it's happened to me before that because did so many options I couldn't make my mind and after a few minutes it was like "no I live it, I too much, too much" (Daniel) • "I just didn't have time to look that and I did it on a different day because it was kind of annoying." (Michael) • "You're looking at all these different options and different prices that can be expensive so you're struggling to choose which is the best and you end up saying "no I'm not going to buy anything online" (Tom) • "So generally, if I am stuck completely I will just walk away and find something completely different." (Tom)

	V - Variety		

Codes	Description	Females	Males
V-S	Strategy - variety	• "So, if I have to think of something I need to understand it properly in terms of the price change, in terms of shape, colours, dimensions to actually get it out form that ocean of choices" (Cristina)	• "I know products that are similar and I think when they are too similar in appearance I tend to buy the more expensive one because it might be slightly better somehow." (Henry) • "No basically the same I just need more time if I do it it's because I have no time to deal with the situation. It's just a matter of time" (Michael) • "If I had all the options I would select all the things that attract me more and read the details and I would decide based on that. but it would take more time." (Michael) • "Yes, then the whole price comes into and can't decide. So, it's a case of the way just go out of one or just flip a coin or just walk away" (Tom)
V-POV	Variety - Perception of variety	• "I just went to a sports shop and saw the variety with it and then try to compare on Amazon whether I'm getting it for a cheap price, but I couldn't see the same patterns and designs." (Maria) • "It they provided almost all types of brands for the shoes, the good ones, that I was looking for and the varieties and all of them so it was good." (Maria) • "Sometimes it could be too much" (Anna) • "They have everything" (Anna) • "Anything you could think of like you type in and they will have it" (Anna) • "Oh yeah, they still they have huge variety" (Cristina) • "They do actually you know like you wouldn't think that there is another product which is like the same one you're thinking. It kind of surprises you" (Cristina) • "Were so many that I couldn't figure out which one I want to go for" (Cristina) • "That's the thing, it doesn't let to decide." (Cristina) • "But if you go to I don't know, Zara, H&M… they keep a really good	• "Pretty much covered everything, no? All the different products, sizes, sides, shades… everything. It was well covered." (Daniel) • "Even though I have an idea that I wanted the ones that I got, but the fact that I suddenly I saw some of it I was very close to say you know what instead of the Adidas ones that I got I was really close to get the Reebok ones, or the Lacoste ones…" (Daniel) • "Really, there were a lot of different kind of things." (Henry) • "Basically, most of the options are quite similar so it's just variety in the colour and design but the specifications are the same and the price is almost the same, so you have plenty of options and plenty of the same." (Michael) • "It was good… they had a wide variety of particular shoes" (Tom) • "I think is great that they can cover all different types of brands because. They're able to attract more customer base to that particular website, to bring in more revenue for themselves" (Tom) • "Oh, say on a scale of 1 to 10, I would probably say 9 and a half. Very very wide." (Tom)

		variety of products, permanently." (Claire) • "I think depends on the website, if you go to big companies with really good websites you can get a variety of colours. Not in sales… but the website I told you they don't have a big variety of products." (Claire)	• "Yes pretty much every website nowadays needs to provide a variety otherwise they go out of business." (Tom) • "Uhhh… possibly yes (would make the same choice if more options were given) because more different colours more probably show a little bit more comfortable maybe." (Tom)
V- PF- VE	Variety - Positive feelings - variety enough	• "I was happy that all the varieties are there online" (Maria) • "So, it's better for me to purchase at a place where I have a lot of varieties and then I feel satisfied." (Maria) • "Satisfaction becomes less when you see that okay you have to select only from two products but when you select from 100 products you are satisfied that you have made the best choice and you have selected that product." (Maria) • "It's good because I know if I ever need like something I know Ali express will have it" (Anna) • "If you go to town you'll have to go to like 100 shops to actually find and it's a waste of time" (Anna) • "Online it's easier to find" (Anna) • "You know, it's nice to see that there is so much" (Cristina) • "It gives you ideas as how you want to dress up." (Cristina) • "I was happy once there was lots to choose" (Cristina) • "it's exciting in the beginning in the middle, you're more curious to see" (Cristina) • "Maybe I wouldn't use the website. I would find another" (Claire)	• "It was very good for me to shop, in this website because they had a wide variety" (Henry) • "Bigger websites provide a good variety, so you can have a better experience shopping" (Henry) • "So, it's nice when you have that variety." (Michael) • "I felt happy... I felt that I didn't have to go browsing on to jump to other websites for look other styles. I felt that everything that I needed was on that particular website so there was no need to go browsing open other tabs" (Tom) • "So, it was just a much better experience to deal with it, having everything on one website." (Tom)
V- NF- TM V	Variety - Negative feelings - too much variety	• "It's good in a way but then sometimes it can be too much" (Anna) • "But sometimes when you are just trickily thinking of a certain budget it gets confusing." (Cristina) • "After two hours of searching I was exhausted." (Cristina) • "It's frustrating in the end" (Cristina) • "They have huge variety just needs patience and to search and get what you want" (Cristina) • "So, what happens in the process is you really can't blame anybody. It's my own energy that I lost in searching. if I had sat down to search a little more I might have got a better product." (Cristina)	• "The thing is that what annoys me is not well shown on the website and when you need to look for that and decide what you want, it's kind of difficult because it's plenty of options but it's not well shown." (Michael)

Code	Description	Females	Males
V-NF-NV	Variety - Negative feeling - no variety	• "I was a little disappointed because the colours were not there but the quality that I wanted was there." (Maria) • "I was little bit disappointed because to compromise on the colour of the shoe, I was like I'll take it at a lower price because the colour is not my favourite one." (Maria) • "The variety that I was looking for was there. As I told earlier only the colour options were not there" (Maria) • "There are few discrepancies in these like in terms of sizes and in terms of for like they show that they have the product, but when you dig further the other colours and the size is sometimes they lack" (Maria) • "Frustrated. And… yes. I had the problem because when I found something I like, I don't find my size" (Claire) • "I feel frustrated because I liked the colour but don't find my size." (Claire)	• "To be honest I don't think so I think they're online stores provide fewer options than physical stores." (Michael)
V-NE-TM V-I	Variety - Negative effect - too much variety - indecision	• "All of them have 75% discount you will be confused what to buy because all of them are in equal good quality they have good quality and you know they are going to last for a long time so it becomes too difficult to choose." (Maria)	
V-NE-TM V-W	Variety - Negative effect - too much variety - deferral	• "Sometimes when I find two products similar… I'm not gonna buy today. I'm not sure what I'm going to buy." (Claire)	

DS - Decision Satisfaction			
Code	**Description**	**Females**	**Males**
DS-S	Decision satisfaction - satisfaction	• " No, I selected the best I feel. I selected the best because it was in terms of discount, the discount was very good the product was very good the reputation of the band is good, moreover I was getting a free delivery so I feel that I made the best choice." (Maria) • "No, I think I chose the best that was there." (Anna)	• "Satisfaction, really satisfied I just wanted that it fulfils all the idea" (Daniel) • "So in reality I got what I was looking for." (Daniel) • "I was quite happy, really pleased (about the decision made)" (Tom) • "I think I selected the right one because I wouldn't have bought (the trainers, shoes) if I didn't like them." (Tom)

DS-T	Decision satisfaction - time	• "I think I chose the best that was there. I really took my time looking for that because I really needed this" (Anna) • "They have huge variety just needs patience to search and get what you want" (Cristina) • "It's my own energy that I lost in searching. if I had sat down to search a little more I might have got a better product" (Cristina)	
DS-P	Decision satisfaction - price	• "Yeah, they had better options but they were more expensive, and I bought the least expensive shoes." (Claire)	• "Yes, definitely, because I didn't buy the best one I could as I bought the cheapest. I knew like the majority of the other products were better than the one I was buying, so, I didn't buy the best one" (Henry)
DS-A	Decision satisfaction - accuracy	"• Sometimes I feel that the that the colour that is displayed on the online store is not accurate like when the product comes in it is not the same." (Maria) • "Looking nothing like in the photo" (Anna) • "On that shopping experience, I was not so happy with the clothes they didn't seem to be the same size that I was thinking of, I don't know... The small seems to be too small, the medium seems to be small" (Cristina) • "It doesn't come out the same way as in the pictures" (Cristina) • "It was a dress, it had no connection with what I saw up on the website" (Cristina) • "Sometimes you can't really see and believe what you see." (Cristina) • "When everything arrives, I don't have to change anything. Also, it's better than I thought." (Claire)	• "I knew what I was getting but anyhow it kind of a covered all my expectations." (Daniel) • "I had experiences before that what I bought wasn't exactly what I wanted." (Henry) • "It's because when I got the product I thought it didn't look anything like the images they had in the website." (Henry) • "Yes, more than twice. I bought a device on Amazon and wasn't working properly." (Michael)
DS-R	Decision satisfaction - regret	• "It was more peaceful don't buy it, than buy and think that the other colour was better." (Cristina) • "Sometimes I feel yeah, the website did have better options, it was my choice so I have to solely blame myself and no one else." (Cristina)	• "After see the picture online and you get your product is not exactly the same as you thought it was" (Daniel) • "Yes, more than twice. I bought a device on Amazon and wasn't working properly." (Michael) • "Yes, but I throw it out. I just couldn't be bothered gone to the return policy just got really came from China and I'm not returned until take the China because it could take a very long time." (Tom)

OS – Online Store			
Code	**Description**	**Females**	**Males**
OS-TW	Online store - trust on website	• "You don't know where they gonna come, and you can't return them. You have to be really careful when shopping on these websites" (Anna) • "Like, it it's not too risky I don't mind paying a little bit money and then when it comes it doesn't look well, it's not gonna cost that much so" (Anna) • "If I had fewer options I would not buy it because I feel that this website is not having enough money to put in more products I don't think I would trust that website." (Cristina) • "If a website can afford a lot of brands onto it goes out to show that this website is genuine." (Cristina) • "So, for you a good website is a website that provides good prices… Yeah, and variety of products, the size, colour and good price." (Claire)	• "Means that was very satisfactory, I chose this website and I know I can go there if I need to buy any other thing, later on" (Henry) • "If I need t-shirts, pants, I can go to that website because it's reliable, and I know they have this kind of thing. I know they have a wide variety so I can check it out for any other kind of thing I need to buy" (Henry)
OS-T	Online store - tools	• "I use right word, the right keyword to search for my product, some tools. Filtering is the word. My filtering is accurate, that's why the site gives me the right product that I'm looking for and I'm happy now." (Maria) • "Not in the first go for sure. It takes me nearly two, three keywords and searches until I get the right product with all the requirements that I would be looking for." (Cristina) • "Well I think there is also there is too many filters to choose from." (Cristina) • "And the other thing is the design of the website, it's another important factor I didn't say before" (Cristina) • "It's easy to find the products." • "So, a good design is the one you can find things easily…" (Claire) • Yeah, divided by type of products, trousers, heels… some websites are messy with that." (Claire)	• "Even though they allow you to do the tailor and everything… sometimes is overwhelming" (Daniel) • "I wanted that because it was for work, I want them in black, so I went and I clicked black." (Daniel) • "Firstly, the thing is the website is not properly organised and sometimes is kind of messy looking for all the items you need to complete your purchase." (Michael) • "And the description of the items is not that detailed either, so that's my experience with it." (Michael) • "The thing is that what annoys me is not well shown on the website and when you need to look for that and decide what you want, it's kind of difficult because it's plenty of options but it's not well shown." (Michael) • "They always want you to keep looking on the web, keep clicking. If they're pay by the ads, if it gets clicked it get paid. That's the way websites are nowadays." (Tom) • "If you click into one particular shoe you're going to see down the bottom

Code	Description		
			other shoes similar to that shoes, that are on sale or even t-shirts, that might even go with the shoe" (Tom)
OS-C	Online stores - Online stores choice	• "No, in my opinion I feel that physical stores provide more options than the online store, because the as I said in terms of colour and everything... " (Maria) • "Sometimes they show you that this has been over and this has been over so you have you are left with only few choices and it is my experience that no physical stores toes have more option than online." (Maria) • "You go online and you have like huge selection of different stuff" (Anna) • "Of course, online has more options." (Cristina) • "[online stores] have more variety." (Claire)	• "Yes, they do because they don't have to store it." (Daniel) • "I think is easier because you have more options and compare prices more easily" (Henry) • "So, it's better to buy online because you have more options." (Henry) • "I think that online stores provide fewer options than physical stores." (Michael) • "It should be the same actually because they should offer but they have in physical stores, so should be the same." (Michael) • "Yes, they provide a lot more options because they don't have to worry about the store houses" (Tom)

G - Gender			
Code	**Description**	**Females**	**Males**

G-F	Female - options	• "I won't be satisfied okay there were two options that I bought one. But, you know, I might buy the same product from a physical store but I will be satisfied going to five physical stores and seeing 500 products, then I bought this so I made the decision" (Maria) • "And then you go to the store you don't even have any of the things that it's online. It's completely different so I never shop in town." (Anna) • "Maybe I wouldn't use the website. I would find another, because 100 is a lot…" (Claire)	
G-M	Male - idea		• "No, no because I kind of had a premade idea of what I wanted so I only had to go through the options to tailor my decision." (Daniel) • "I entered the website with something in my mind already." (Henry) • "When I don't have anything specific in my mind to buy (give up on decision)" (Henry) • "Probably yes, I think I would because in this time I was looking for a specific product." (Michael) • "Because when I try to buy something online I usually know what I want and I just go to try to find it specifically what I want." (Michael) • "When I'm looking for something that I need I know specifically what I need, and I can find it ...but sometimes takes time." (Michael) • "Yes, because that was the one I was looking for" (Michael) • "No, because I went on with clear thought "I'm gonna get a pair of Under Armour", the brand." (Tom) • "I'm a very straightforward when it comes to making a purchase. If I have it in my head." (Tom) • "They do and they don't. It depends on what it is personally I'm looking for (similar products affect decision)" (Tom)

PT - Personality traits

Codes	Description	Females	Males
PT-S	Personality trait - satisficer		• "I knew like the majority of the other products were better than the one I was buying, so, I didn't buy the best one. I think we tend to associate price with the quality of the product, I knew I wasn't buying the most expensive one therefore I knew I wasn't buying the best one, the highest quality product." (Henry)
PT-M	Personality trait - maximiser	• "Yes. I looked at all the options, and then I made a selection because I wanted the best one" (Maria) • "I will be satisfied okay going to five physical stores and seeing 500 products, then I bought this so I made the decision." (Maria) • "It was more peaceful don't buy it, then buying it and thinking that the other colour was better." (Cristina)	