

For Immediate Release: July 26, 2013

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Why Are Consumers *Less Likely* to Buy a Product When It's the *Only* Option?

Consumers are more likely to search for alternatives when they are given only one option, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“There has been a lot of recent attention devoted to the pitfalls of presenting consumers with too many options. However, consumers may also react negatively when choices are too restrictive. Isolating an option, even temporarily, may increase how much consumers search and potentially the likelihood that they make no purchase,” writes author Daniel Mochon (Tulane University).

Suppose a consumer really wants to buy a camera. Narrowing the selection should make it easier to choose from one of the available options. Reducing the selection to just a single camera should make it even easier, but it doesn't. In fact, consumers may be less likely to choose a specific camera when it's the only option.

In one study, consumers were asked to purchase a DVD player. One group was presented with a Sony DVD player, a second group was presented with a Philips DVD player, and a third group was presented with both options. Consumers were more likely to make a selection when they were presented together than when each was presented alone.

Giving consumers only one option increases their desire to search for more options. As a result, they might reject a product they would otherwise purchase. For example, a consumer shopping for a DVD player may be willing to purchase a Sony model when another option is also available, but unwilling to purchase the same Sony when it's the only option.

“Companies should consider how options are presented to consumers. Restricting options can have lasting effects on choice. Consumers who are initially offered only one option are more likely to continue searching for alternatives even when other options are later presented,” the author concludes.

Daniel Mochon. “Single Option Aversion.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2013. For more information, contact Daniel Mochon (dmochon@tulane.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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