

WHEN MORE CHOICE SOLD LESS

What a jam display reveals about attention, choice and purchase.

IYENGAR & LEPPER / 2000

Study 1 at Draeger's, California.
An editorial analysis of external research.



24



6

Does more attention mean more buying?

A tasting display offered either 24 jams or six.

ATTRACTION

Who stops at the display?

PURCHASE

Who subsequently buys a jar?

Research lens: measure the whole decision, not only the first response.

THE DISPLAY CHANGED. THE SHOPPING CONTEXT STAYED.

ROTATING DISPLAYS

Two Saturdays; displays alternated hourly.

SAME INCENTIVE

Visitors received a \$1 coupon; all flavours remained available on the shelf.

TRACKED BEHAVIOUR

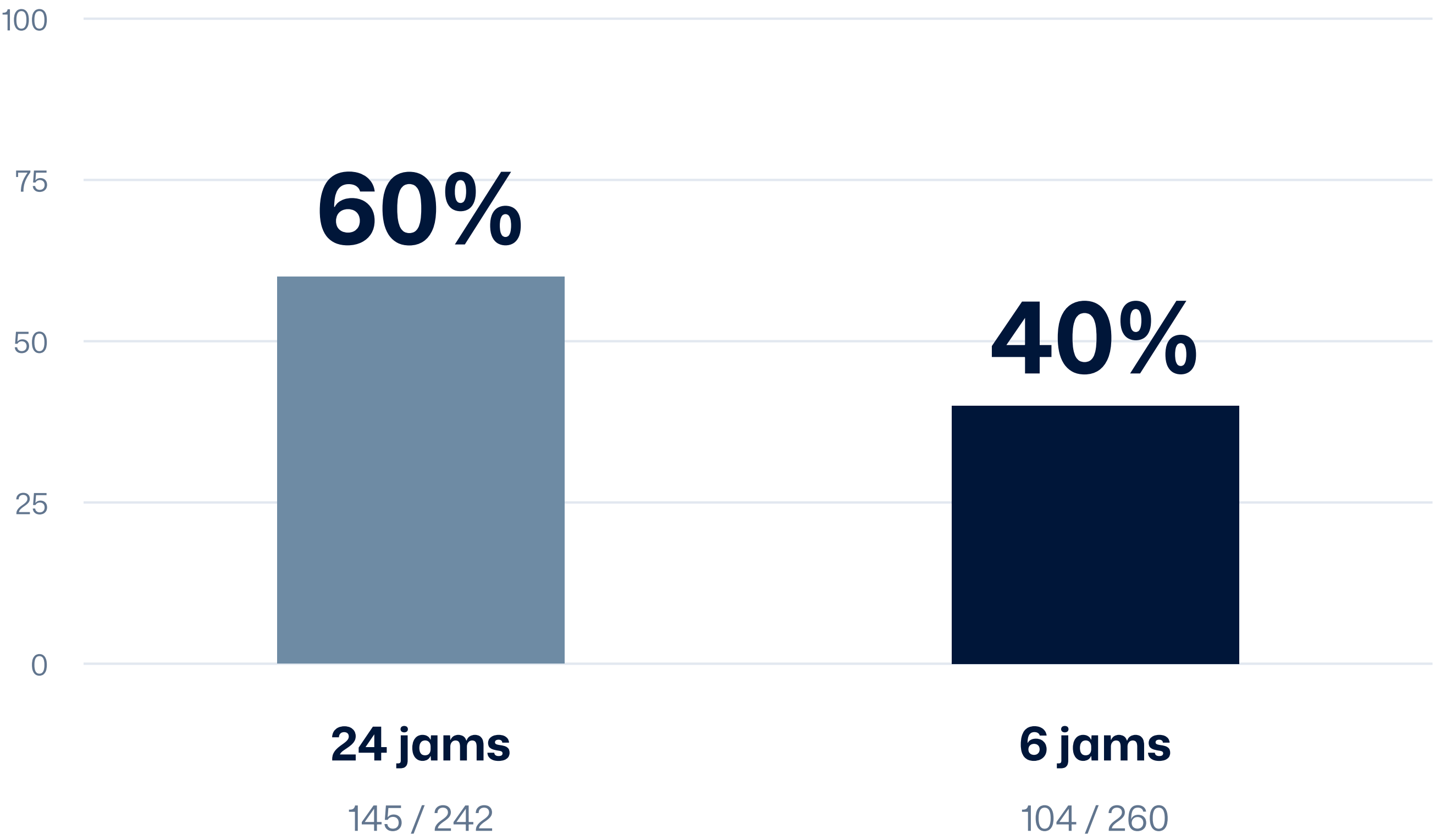
502 passers-by encountered a display; 249 stopped.

The setup tested the initial display, not a permanent reduction in the store's range.

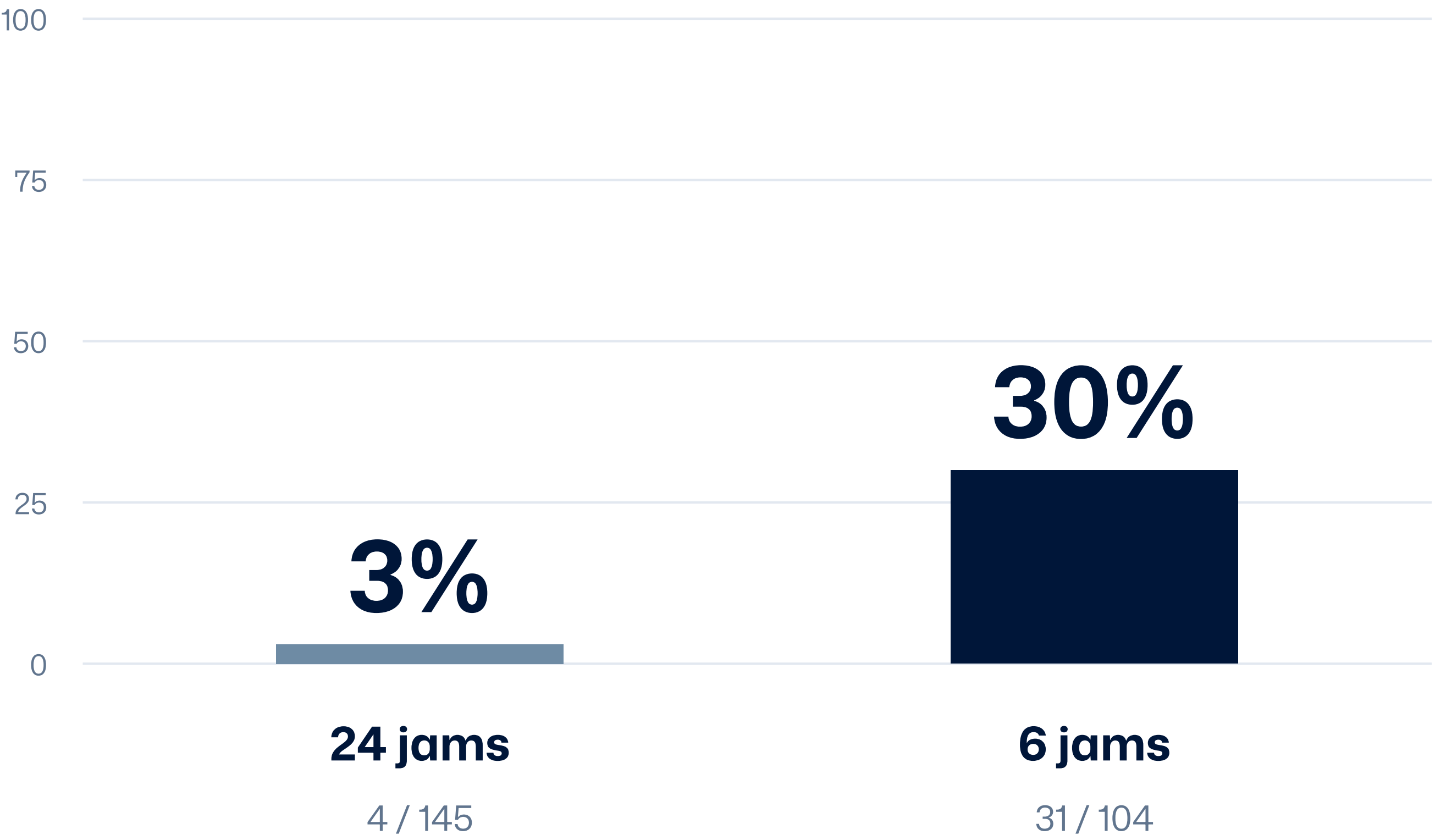
MORE STOPPED. FEWER BOUGHT.

The denominator changes between these two measures.

STOPPED / PASSERS-BY



BOUGHT / THOSE WHO STOPPED



Published rounded percentages; both vertical axes run from 0 to 100%.

A STRONG RESULT. A CONTEXT-DEPENDENT LESSON.

WHAT THIS SUGGESTS

An assortment can attract attention while making the next decision harder. Treat this as a hypothesis to test.

WHAT IT DOES NOT ESTABLISH

Six is not a universal optimum. Shopper self-selection and a single store limit generalisation.

Later evidence: a 2010 meta-analysis of 50 experiments found an average effect near zero, with substantial variation.

TEST THE WAY PEOPLE CHOOSE.

Proposed application - not an intervention from the published study.

OBSERVE

Watch shoppers compare products. Identify repeated switching, stalled decisions and missing distinctions.

EXPERIMENT

Randomise a curated first view against the full range. Keep products, prices and stock comparable.

EVALUATE

Track purchase per exposed visitor, margin and returns. Retain access to the complete range.

Choose a success metric before launch; calculate sample size from your own baseline.

MAKE CHOICE EASIER TO COMPLETE.

The useful question is not how many options a brand can display. It is how well customers can find an option that fits.

01 / ORIGINAL FIELD EXPERIMENT

Iyengar, S. S. & Lepper, M. R. (2000). When Choice Is Demotivating. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79(6), 995-1006. Study 1.

doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.6.995

02 / EVIDENCE IN CONTEXT

Scheibehenne, B., Greifeneder, R. & Todd, P. M. (2010). Can There Ever Be Too Many Options? Journal of Consumer Research, 37(3), 409-425.

doi.org/10.1086/651235

Published research, not Core Behaviour client work. Reviewed 27 September 2026.