

The Number of Alternatives and the Role it Plays in Decision Making

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Abstract

This experiment was designed to test two related hypotheses. By applying Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance to a marketing situation it was expected that a clearer understanding of consumer behaviour would be developed. Basically, the hypotheses stated that once the choice decision had been made there would be a greater magnitude of dissonance created in the four alternative situation than in the two alternative situation, and a greater magnitude of dissonance created in a conflict situation than in a preference situation. As in other experiments dealing with dissonance, an increase in desirability for the chosen alternative was taken to mean a reduction of dissonance in desirability for the rejected alternative(s) was taken to mean a reduction of dissonance. The greater the magnitude of dissonance created by the choice situation, the greater would be the pressure to reduce dissonance through a re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternatives. Each of eighty college juniors and seniors was asked to participate in a business study. The results generally confirmed both hypotheses, however, the difference between the two alternative conflict situation and the four alternative conflict situation were not large enough to confirm or reject the first hypothesis. It can be concluded that once the decision has been made, the greater the number of alternatives the greater will be the magnitude of dissonance; hence, the more pressure to reduce dissonance through a re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternatives, and the closer the desirability of the initial ratings and the higher the desirability of the initial ratings, the greater will be the magnitude of dissonance with the resulting pressure to reduce dissonance through a re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternatives.

Keywords: cognitive dissonance, number of alternatives, desirability

1. Introduction

Recently there has developed an increasing awareness of the need for additional communication and cooperation among the various disciplines in order to establish a workable and more comprehensive understanding of human behavior. Among those disciplines included in such research are psychology, sociology, economics, business administration, anthropology, and others. Many psychological theories have been developed which are applicable to the studies of human behavior. Marketing people are aware of the need to apply these new theories and techniques to business situations if a more complete understanding of individual and family behaviour patterns is to be developed. This interest stems not so much from the desire to sell goods and services which are not really needed, but rather from the desire to make a better and more intelligent consumer out of the individual or family (Doohwang at., al. 2011; Chaudhuri at., al, 2011). Being a more intelligent consumer should increase the individual's or families' satisfaction with the final buying decision, and hence, in the long run the position of the seller should be improved through increased consumer confidence in and knowledge of the buying situation (process).

There has been a considerable amount of research into the predecision process which the individual or family must go through before deciding upon the purchase of a particular product (Silvia., 2005). Bales (1960) has gone so far as to classify the predecision process into twelve distinct steps which lead to the actual buying decision. Brehm (1955) points out that most studies of choice decisions were based on various theories predecision conflict.

These studies attempt to show what factors caused predecision conflict and what “some of the consequences of conflict” would be. While these studies relate to the predecision process, there has been very little research done in the area of the post-decision process.

Festinger's (1962) theory of cognitive dissonance throws some lights on the consequences of a choice decision. Briefly, Festinger's theory states that an individual holds certain cognitions which may be, “any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior.” Where two or more cognitions pertaining to the same situation do not fit into a proper relationship dissonance arises. It is difficult to define dissonance but in general dissonance connotes anxiety, displeasure, discomfort, etc. It should be understood that two or more elements can be dissonant only if the cognitions are relevant to each other. By relevant it is meant that both cognitions pertain to the same situation or item. The magnitude of dissonance is directly dependent upon the perceived importance of each of the cognitions. Depending upon the degree of dissonance between the relevant cognitions there will be a resultant pressure to reduce dissonance either “by changing the environmental element or the behavioral element involved.” One of the ways to reduce dissonance is to change the behavioral element to fit that of the environmental element. However, once the individual has committed himself to one form of behavior it becomes necessary to alter the environmental elements or be faced with continued dissonance. If the individual finds that neither the behavioral nor the environmental elements can be altered, Brehm states that, “the person is forced into juggling the awareness, importance, relevance, etc., of the relevant cognitive elements in a such way as to reduce dissonance.” In a buying decision where the individual must choose one alternative to the exclusion of all other alternatives it would seem that if dissonance was created, the individual, in order to reduce dissonance, would in some way re-evaluate the chosen and rejected alternative(s) by means of changing the “awareness, importance, relevance” of the cognitive elements. To reduce dissonance the chosen alternative would be given an increased desirability and the rejected alternative(s) would be given a decreased desirability. This, in effect, changes the perceived importance of each cognition and reduces post-decision dissonance.

Until the individual has committed himself to one form of behavior there is no dissonance as all the alternatives are still available to him. This does not rule out the idea of pre-choice conflict. Martin (1922), and others have found that the individual may undergo a considerable degree of pre-choice conflict when making a decision among several alternatives. However, once the individual has made a public commitment to one course of action he cannot change this public commitment that in some way he has made a real mistake. Therefore, the individual must alter the importance of the dissonant cognitions if he is to reduce post-decision dissonance. Brehm and Cohen (1962) explains that, “two hypotheses may be stated with reference to a person in a choice situation: (1) conflict prior to commitment will produce reevaluation of the choice alternatives, and (2) dissonance after commitment will produce reevaluation of the choice alternatives.” They further state that, “an unequivocal test of the dissonance hypothesis is possible by measuring changes in evaluation of alternatives after an overt and irrevocable commitment to one of the alternatives.” They proposed an experimental test for his dissonance hypothesis which is quite similar to the one used in this experiment. If this dissonance hypothesis is correct, then the individual will re-evaluate the alternatives in such a way “as to enhance the chosen alternative relative to the unchosen.”

Festinger's theory also lends evidence to the fact that as the number of alternatives increase the post-decision dissonance will increase. Brehm states, “if all the benefits given up by making a choice create dissonance, than more dissonance should be created by having to give up several alternatives rather than one.” Festinger points out that because “all the cognitive elements corresponding to the desirable features of the rejected alternatives are dissonant with the action taken, the more alternatives that are involved in a decision, the greater will be dissonance following the decision.” It follows that if the cognitions about two dissimilar alternatives create dissonance, then cognitions about four dissimilar alternatives will create more dissonance; hence, there would be even greater pressure to reduce dissonance through re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternatives. Also, if dissonance is created by choosing between two or more alternatives, it follows that as the degree of desirability increases for each alternative there would be a greater magnitude of dissonance to reduce post-decision dissonance.

The decision to replace either the three year old television set or the three year old air conditioner would not cause as much dissonance as the decision to buy, for the first time, either a television set or an air conditioner.

If the decision is highly significant to the individual, then the magnitude of dissonance becomes great and the pressure to reduce post-decision dissonance increases. The post-decision dissonance would be greater for the individual choosing between a new car or a vacation than the individual choosing between a clock radio and an electric fan.

In a study conducted by Martin (1922), subjects were asked to make a series of 26 hypothetical decisions and then give an introspective account of their decision process, their degree of confidence for each decision, and the difficulty in making the decision. Granted these decisions did not involve the degree of commitment that signing a contract to buy or paying cash for some good or service would involve, but on examination of the available evidence it was found that the subjects underwent: real discomfort when considering the alternatives, conflict when making the decision, and great difficulty when asked to reconsider the decision and make reversal of the original decision. On the basis of the 26 hypothetical decisions Martin was able to define three specific types of decisions which would seem to apply to all types of decision processes. The three decision types were: (1) ***Preference***. These decisions involved one alternative that was clearly more desirable than the other alternatives. Martin described the decision process as one of “rationalization” in which the individual followed a process of justification for his choice after the decision was made. (2) ***Conflict***. The conflict decision was very difficult to make “because the alternatives were so nearly equal in attractiveness.” Martin found that, “*The decision comes slowly and with effort... The choice may be attended with doubt and a disagreeable feeling tone as opposed to assurance and satisfaction; there may even sometimes occur a tendency to wish afterwards that the other had been chose.*” (3) ***Indifference***. The indifference decision is of little importance to the individual making the decision, and there is no particular preference for one alternative over the other. These three decision types are important because they will serve as a basis for establishing the experimental situations. These three decision types should approximate the type of buying situations which the consumer finds himself in when purchasing the many goods and services which are necessary to his way of life.

The researcher must be aware of the effects of cognitive overlap when testing the effects of various choice situations on the post decision dissonance (Trump et al., 2012; Mark H. & Davis et al., 1996; Festinger, 1962) Cognitive overlap basically means the “extent to which the alternatives have attributes in common.” (Brehm et al., 1962) The degree of cognitive overlap is high when many of the characteristics of the products being considered are similar. If there is no qualitative similarity between the characteristics of the alternatives, then there will be no cognitive overlap. There would be a high degree of cognitive overlap for the individual who must choose between the 12 gauge pump shot gun and the 12 gauge automatic shot gun, since either gun will, basically, do the same job only in a little different manner. There would be no cognitive overlap for the individual who must choose between a 12 gauge shot gun for himself and an electric sewing machine for his wife. The greater the degree of cognitive overlap between two or more products, the smaller will be the degree of dissonance created by a choice between these products. Cognitive overlap can be either real or imagined but whenever it exists in the mind of the individual there will be less post-decision dissonance. The individual may, in fact, use the idea or theory behind cognitive overlap as a means of reducing post-decision dissonance. The individual choosing between a new tennis net and new golf balls may reason that with either product he will be outside getting some exercise which is really the reason for buying either product; hence, there is very little dissonance created in this situation. However, where there is either real or imagined differences between the characteristics of the considered products, the individual will be unable to reduce dissonance as was done in the previous example. The researcher can avoid the cognitive overlap danger if he will establish separate groups of products which are homogeneous as possible. We would expect little post-decision dissonance in a homogeneous alternative situation and a high degree of post-decision dissonance in a heterogeneous alternative situation.

1.1. Hypotheses

From examination of available research, it is evident that there is a need for more exhaustive research in the area of consumer behaviour, if marketing people are to establish a more complete understanding of the consumer's post decision dissonance reduction process. This experiment was designed to test two basic hypotheses:

1. The greater the number of relatively attractive alternatives, the more dissonance will be created after the choice decision; hence, the more pressure to reduce dissonance by re-evaluation of the chosen and the rejected alternative(s)

2. The more equal the attractiveness of each dissimilar alternative and the greater the desirability of the alternatives, the more dissonance will be created after the choice decision; hence, the more pressure to reduce dissonance by re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternative(s)

2. Method

2.1. Manipulation

One-half of the subjects were given two alternatives to choose between while the other one-half of the subjects were given four alternatives to choose among. One-half of the subjects given the two alternatives to choose between were offered two product alternatives with a relatively high desirability while the other one-half of this group were offered one product alternative of relatively high desirability and one product alternative of relatively low desirability. One-half of the subjects given the four alternative situation were offered four products of relatively high desirability, while the other half of this group were offered one alternative of relatively high desirability and three alternatives of relatively low desirability. These four situations reflected Martin's conflict and preference decision types with the addition of either the two or the four alternative situation.

Table 1. The Four Situations Tested In This Experiment

| | The Conflict Situation | The Preference Situation |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Two Alternatives | Two alternatives, both high in desirability | Two alternatives, one high and one low in desirability |
| Four Alternatives | Four alternatives, all high in desirability | Four alternatives, one high and three low in desirability |

When applying the theory of cognitive dissonance to these four decision types it was expected that there would be a greater change in the desirability of the chosen and rejected alternatives in the four alternative situation than in the two alternative situation. Also, it was expected that there would be little if any change in the desirability of the chosen and rejected alternative(s) in the situation where one alternative was clearly more desirable than the other alternative(s). The degree of dissonance reduction was measured by the change change in the ratings of desirability for each product before and after the choice decision had been made by the subject. Of the subjects involved in the experiment some had to be excluded because of unusable information. The initial ratings had to permit the experimenter to set up one of the aforementioned situations. In three cases the subjects rated all the alternatives either too high (above 7.50), or too low (below 2.00) to permit the experimenter to continue the experiment. Also, subjects who picked an alternative other than the one predicted from the initial rating had to be excluded because their ratings were considered unreliable.

2.2. Rating Scales

The first rating scale had an eight inch vertical scale with numbers running from 0 to 8 at one inch intervals. At the 0 end of the scale were the words *not at all desirable*, at the mid-point on the scale (4) were the words *moderately desirable*, and at the top of the scale (8) were the words *completely desirable*. This first desirability rating scale included columns for four products on each page. The desirability rating scale for the second product rating had the exact same words, numbers, and scale size as the first rating scale. However, each product was placed on a separate page. The position of the products in both rating scales was altered periodically to eliminate any bias caused by the location of the products in the rating sheets. For the purpose of categorizing the desirability of each product on the rating scale, any product rated from 5.00 to 7.50 was considered relatively desirable (high in desirability) and any product rated from 1.00 to 4.00 was considered relatively undesirable (low in desirability). If the subjects marked any position other than a specific number the experimenter would determine the number to the closest .25 such as 6.25, 6.50, or 6.75. Any further numerical distinctions was considered unnecessary for this experiment.

2.3. Subjects and Procedure

The subjects (N=80) were all juniors or seniors at the University of Mersin and were attending either fall or spring sessions of 2006-2009. Each of the eighty college juniors and seniors was asked to participate in a business study run by researcher himself. After the subjects arrived for the study the sixteen products in the research room were explained to him, and he asked to rate the desirability of each of the products for his own personal use or for gift purposes.

After the products were rated the subjects was told that the study was sponsored by two retailers and two wholesalers from Mersin. Because the sponsors hoped to gain valuable information from the study were willing to let the student choose one product among several that were on the table, if the student was willing to work for an additional four hours doing similar work. If this was agreeable to the subject he was asked to fill out a general information sheet. The subject was then offered one of four possible choice situations and asked to choose a product. After the choice, the experimenter asked the subject several questions which pertained to the chosen and rejected products. Finally, the subjects was asked to again rate the desirability of all sixteen products. After the subject' s final rating, the real purpose of the experiment was explained to him and he was asked not to tell anyone about the experiment.

3. Results

3.1. Expected from Hypotheses

According to dissonance theory there should be a greater magnitude of dissonance after the four alternative choice situation then after the two alternative choice situation, and there should be a greater magnitude of dissonance after a choice situation in which all alternatives are relatively desirable then after a choice situation in which one of the alternatives is clearly more desirable than the other alternative(s). The greater the magnitude of dissonance created by a choice situation, the greater will be the pressure to reduce dissonance through a re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternative(s). In this experiment the dissonance reduction was measured by the change in the desirability ratings for the chosen and rejected alternative(s), before and after the choice commitment was made. It would be expected that the chosen alternative would increase in desirability and the rejected alternative(s) would decrease in desirability because this changes the perceived importance of each cognition and reduces post-decision dissonance. According to the hypotheses, the chosen alternative would have a positive (+) movement on the rating scale and the rejected alternative(s) would have a negative (-) movement on the rating scales, and because both changes are means of reducing dissonance, the two changes when combined would have a positive (+) sign if there was a total reduction of dissonance after the choice situation.

3.2. Choice Situations

It was necessary to place each student' s data into one of four choice situations in order to determine the statistical significance of the information. These four situations were: the two alternative conflict situation, the two alternative preference situation, the four alternative conflict situation, the four alternative preference situation. Each of these situations would duplicate many of the buying situations which the individual encounters when purchasing a good or service. An additional set of alternatives was established to represent Martin' s indifference situation in which the individual does not care (or is indifferent towards) which alternative he chooses, because he believes that the utility or level of satisfaction will be the same from any of the available alternatives. However, this part of the experiment was discontinued after several subjects were tested. It was originally believed that by offering the subjects two or four alternatives that were rated relatively low in desirability an indifference situation would be established. This, however, did not seem to be the case because the chosen alternative was given a much higher desirability rating the second time. It seems that the economic value or the commitment to do an additional four hours of work was enough to make chosen alternative quite a bit more desirable than originally rated. This is not to say that there is no indifference choice situation, but rather that the products in this experiment were not of the nature to set up an indifference situation. Within each situation it was necessary to examine first the change in desirability for the chosen alternative, second the change in desirability for the rejected alternative(s), and finally the overall change in desirability of both the chosen and rejected alternatives. Once this was completed for all four situations, it was possible to examine differences between difference scores for each situation to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the results in each situation.

3.3. Two Alternative Conflict Situation

In the two alternative conflict situation there was a mean initial rating of 6.43 for the chosen alternative with an increase in desirability of +.61 after the choice was made by the subjects. This change was not statistically significant. The rejected alternative had a mean initial rating of 6.37 with a decrease of -2.13 after the choice was made. This change was significant at the .01 level of confidence. Taking the two changes in desirability together, there was an overall reduction of dissonance of 3.01 which was statistically significant at the .01 level of confidence.

In this situation as in the other three situations there was less of an increase in desirability of the chosen alternative than there was a decrease in the desirability of the rejected alternative(s). This may have been caused by the initially high rating of the chosen alternative. It was difficult for the subjects to rate the chosen alternative as being quite close to completely desirable when the first rating had implied that the product was only relatively desirable. The fact that there was a significant overall reduction of dissonance confirms the hypothesis.

3.4. Two Alternative Preference Situation

In the two alternative preference situation there was a mean initial rating of 6.77 for the chosen alternative and a decrease in desirability of -.03 after the choice was made. This change was not statistically significant and, in fact went the opposite direction from that predicted by the hypothesis. The rejected alternative had a mean initial rating of 2.19 and after the choice was made a decrease of -.08 in desirability which was not statistically significant. The total reduction of dissonance was .11 which was not significant. It was interesting to note that in the two alternative preference situation there was an actual decrease in desirability for the chosen product after the decision had been made by the subjects. Although it was predicted that there would be no real changes in the desirability ratings of the two products, in this situation over one-half of the subjects did not change or decrease the desirability of the chosen product. This slight decrease could have been caused by the subject's belief that he would have more desirable alternatives to choose from, since he would still have to work an additional four hours to receive the chosen alternative. Nevertheless as was expected in the two alternative preference situation there was very little overall dissonance reduction. This confirms the hypothesis.

3.5. Four Alternative Conflict Situation

In four alternative conflict situation there was a mean initial rating of 5.99 for the chosen alternative and an increase of .39 in the desirability rating of the chosen alternative after the choice was made. This increase was statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. From the three rejected alternatives, the alternative with the next highest initial desirability rating to that of the chosen alternative was used for statistical comparison. The mean initial rating for the rejected alternative was 6.83 with a decrease in desirability for the rejected alternative of -1.91 which was statistically significant at the .01 level of confidence. The total reduction of dissonance in the four alternative conflict situation was 3.01 which was significant at the .01 level of confidence. This was the only alternative situation in which there was a significant increase in the desirability in the chosen alternative. In the four alternative conflict situation the subjects would occasionally reduce dissonance by reducing sharply the desirability of one of the rejected alternative and only slightly reducing the desirability rating of the other two rejected alternatives. The hypothesis was confirmed by the overall dissonance reduction

3.6. Four Alternative Preference Situation

In the four alternative preference situation there was a mean initial rating for the chosen alternative of 6.47 with an increase in desirability of .05 after the choice had been made by the subject. This change was not statistically significant. From the rejected alternatives the product with the highest initial rating was used for comparison with the change in desirability for the chosen alternative. The rejected alternatives had a mean initial rating of 3.71 and a reduction in desirability of -2.05 after the choice decision had been made by the subjects. This reduction of dissonance was statistically significant at the .10 level of confidence. Taking the two rating changes together there was an overall dissonance reduction of 0.99 which was statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. It was not predicted that there would be a significant reduction of dissonance in this four alternative preference situation. The hypothesis that the greater the number of alternatives the greater would be the dissonance creation after the choice was confirmed. The hypothesis that the closer the desirability of alternatives and the greater the desirability of alternatives the more dissonance will be created was not confirmed.

Because there was a significant reduction of dissonance in this four alternative preference situation it is believed that the number of alternatives was the most important factor in creating dissonance, and hence the resulting pressure to reduce dissonance through a change in the desirability of the chosen and rejected alternatives. The results from this choice situation may be interpreted as confirming the hypotheses.

3.7. Compare Alternative Situations

In general the hypotheses were all confirmed in all four situations with the greatest reduction of dissonance in the four alternative conflict situation and the smallest reduction of dissonance in the two alternative preference situation.

After each alternative situation was analyzed it was necessary to analyze the inter-group data to determine if there was a significant difference between situation scores. In this experiment there was four combinations of particular interest. The purpose of this final statistical analysis was to compare the two alternative conflict situation with the two alternative preference situation, compare the two alternative conflict situation with the four alternative conflict situation, compare the four alternative conflict situation with the four alternative preference situation, and compare the two alternative preference situation with the four alternative preference situation. These comparisons were necessary to determine to what extent there was a statistically significant difference between the four situation scores.

When comparing the two alternative conflict situation with the two alternative preference situation there was a statistically significant difference at the .01 level of confidence. From the hypotheses we expected a greater dissonance creation and reduction in the conflict situation than in the preference situation, and this was confirmed in the comparison. From the individual's point of view the two alternative preference decision is by far the easiest to make and the dissonance created by such a decision is at a minimum. On the other hand, the conflict situation even with only two alternatives creates enough dissonance to pressure the individual to reduce this dissonance through a re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternatives.

When comparing the two alternative conflict situation with the four alternative conflict situation there was no statistically significant difference between the two scores. Although there was a slightly greater dissonance reduction total in the four alternative situation than in the two alternative situation the difference was not large enough to make any real conclusions. The sample size may have been too small or the number and types of alternatives may have affected the results. It should be noted that in the four alternative conflict situation the decrease in the rejected alternative was about the same as the decrease for the rejected alternative in the two alternative situation, but the increase in the four alternative situation was over twice as large as the increase for the chosen alternative in the two alternative situation. Perhaps the fact that the subject in the four alternative conflict situation would sometimes strongly decrease the desirability of only one of the rejected alternatives would explain why there was no significant difference between these two situations.

When comparing the four alternative conflict situation with the four alternative preference situation there was a statistically significant difference at the .01 level of confidence. Again the hypotheses were confirmed in that once the decision had been made by the subjects the conflict situation would create a greater magnitude of dissonance than would the preference situation. While both of these situations resulted in a statistically significant reduction of dissonance by themselves it is important to note that the difference between the difference scores was also significant.

When comparing the two alternative preference situation with the four alternative preference situation, there was a statistically significant difference at the .02 level of confidence. This confirms the hypothesis that as the number of alternatives increases there is an increase in the magnitude of dissonance; hence, a greater pressure to reduce dissonance through a re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternatives. It is interesting to note that even in the four alternative preference situation there was a significant reduction of dissonance while the two alternative preference situation created a negligible amount of dissonance reduction. The number of alternatives was the factor which created dissonance in this situation, because the relatively desirable and the relatively undesirable product situations were the same for both groups and only the number of alternatives was changed from two to four.

4. Discussion

This experiment tested two hypotheses which apply the theory of cognition dissonance to precise marketing situations.

While the results compare favorably with previous research data, there are several areas of possible conflict. Brehm(1955), Festinger (1962) and Chaudhuri et., al., (2011) suggest that there will be a greater degree of dissonance created in the four alternative situation than in the two alternative situation. This experiment found that while there was a great total dissonance reduction in the four alternative conflict situation than in the two alternative conflict situation, this difference between the dissonance reduction scores was not statistically significant. The lack of a statistically significant difference may well have been caused by the limited time delay between the choice decision and the second product desirability rating. Brehm and Cohen (1962) suggest that the time delay should be several minutes later but even better would be a time delay of a day or two.

Another possible cause for the lack of a statistically significant difference may be related to the number of alternatives offered. It may well be that it takes more than four alternatives to increase dissonance significantly above the dissonance created by a two alternative conflict situation. It is clear that more research will be necessary before a conclusion can be drawn. The research, until recently, has generally ignored the importance of situations other than those with highly conflicting alternatives. In a preference situation, in which one alternative is clearly more desirable than the other alternative(s), most research has implied that there would be little or no dissonance created after the choice decision. However, in this experiment the four alternative preference situation created, after the choice, a statistically significant dissonance reduction. It should be pointed out that the degree of dissonance reduction was not as large in the preference situations as in the conflict situations. Nevertheless, the four alternative in the preference situation did create a greater magnitude of dissonance with the resulting pressure to reduce dissonance through re-evaluation of the chosen and rejected alternatives than would be predicted by the hypotheses.

The conclusions or implications which can be drawn from this research project and others like it are still not completely clear. If anything, this experiment should lead to new areas of research before marketing people will be able to establish a theory of consumer behavior which will apply to most buying decisions. It becomes increasingly evident that other disciplines such as psychology and sociology have much to offer marketing people in their attempt to develop a theory of consumer behavior.

In general, the number of alternatives will affect the consumer's post-decision dissonance. The perceived desirability of the alternatives will also affect the consumer's post decision dissonance. The pressure to re-evaluate the chosen and rejected alternatives increases as the number of alternatives increases, and as the perceived desirability of the alternatives approaches some maximum desirability level the pressure to reduce post-decision dissonance also increases. If post-decision dissonance does, in fact, mean anxiety, discomfort, displeasure, then both the seller and the consumer must be aware of this fact so they can, where possible, reduce the amount of post-decision dissonance.

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