

A question of choice





CONTENTS

Spoilt for choice?	page 4
Choose Fairtrade	page 6
Chosen	page 8

These texts are all about making choices. This can be difficult, especially when there are many options to choose from or when the choices you make have important consequences.

In this article, the writer explores the impact of the increasing amount of choice people have today.

Spoilt for choice?

Have you ever panicked when faced with too much choice and not been able to decide what to eat in the canteen? Or which flavour crisps to buy? Or what channel to watch on TV? You are not alone. We now have so much choice in our lives that psychologists believe it is making us unhappy.

Most superstores provide us with more than 40,000 products and each year they add more: one major supermarket chain boasts that they sell 146 different kinds of cereal, 60 kinds of bread and over 400 soft drinks. They even sell 36 different kinds of milk! Of course, it doesn't stop at groceries – just think of the choice there is when it comes to clothes, shoes, accessories, mobile phones, DVDs, gadgets ...

According to Barry Schwartz, an expert in human behaviour, people like having some choice, for example deciding which cereal to have for breakfast. But if people feel they are constantly being bombarded by a hail of products, they end up finding it difficult to make a choice at all. Schwartz explains what happened when he found himself trying to buy a pair of jeans: 'I just wanted to buy an ordinary pair. But I discovered that they didn't exist any more. Instead there were relaxed fit, easy fit, button fly, zip fly, boot-leg, stone-washed... The jeans I got were OK, but because there were so many to choose from and I'd spent so much time searching, I thought they'd be perfect - but they weren't!'





David Shanks, another expert, supports Schwartz's view: 'Firstly, so much choice makes decision-making increasingly complex. Secondly, we feel bad every time we do make a choice because it seems we are missing out on other opportunities. And this makes us feel unhappy with what we have chosen. We only think about what we still want to buy, rather than appreciating what we have.'



Experiments suggest that the less choice we have, the easier it is to choose. For example, people who were offered six kinds of jam to choose from, bought more jam than those who were offered 24 different varieties to try. Another experiment showed that giving students a choice of fewer essay topics made them produce better work. Yet the number of consumer choices available to us continues to multiply and we are still seduced by the idea that more choice must be better. So every shopping trip becomes a marathon task.

But if all this choice is actually causing us stress, what can we do about it? We could stop worrying about everyday choices and save our decision-making effort for serious things that really merit time and effort. We need to live in the moment, appreciate what we have and not think about all the other things that we could choose instead.

This leaflet aims to persuade young people that choosing food products with the Fairtrade Mark can change people's lives for the better.



CHOOSE FAIRTRADE



A farmer collecting cocoa pods

Food for thought

Did you know that when you spend £1.75 on a cup of coffee in a café in Britain, the farmer who grew the beans may get as little as 5p? Or that some farmers get less than 2p for every kilogram of bananas that they grow?

So, what is Fairtrade?

Farmers in developing countries depend on rich countries to buy their products, whether it is cocoa from Africa or bananas from South America. But many companies in wealthy countries pay very low prices so that we can too. The Fairtrade Foundation helps farmers to get a fair price from companies. Produce sold in the UK with approval from the Fairtrade Foundation gets the Fairtrade Mark.



And the Foundation's vision?

The Foundation's vision is to make products with the Fairtrade Mark part of everyday life – to make sure that these products can be bought all over the UK, in every newsagent, supermarket, café and school canteen. Buying food with the Fairtrade Mark is the only way to be sure farmers get a fair price.



Focus on cocoa



There are about 1.5 million cocoa farmers in Ghana (West Africa). They sell most of their cocoa beans to European countries, where the beans are then made into chocolate.

Lucy Mansa, like other cocoa farmers, used to sell her cocoa to companies who did not pay a fair price. Despite the gruelling work she had to do, she struggled to make enough money even to feed her children.



Lucy,
a cocoa farmer

Fair? Of course not. But there was very little she could do about it. As a poor farmer she was powerless. That is until she and several other cocoa farmers in the same desperate situation got together to sell some of their cocoa beans to companies approved by the Fairtrade Foundation.

The extra money that these farmers now earn has helped transform completely the lives of people in the whole community. Their situation has been dramatically improved and they can finally take control of their own lives. Lucy explains: 'In our village, we decided to build a brand new well, so at long last we have our very own supply of clean water. Now my children can even go to school. It makes all the hard work worthwhile.'



Children in
Lucy's village

More and more farmers want to sell their cocoa beans to companies approved by the Fairtrade Foundation. But they cannot, because not enough chocolate with the Fairtrade Mark is sold around the world.

Make a difference ... NOW!

- ☼ Choose products with the Fairtrade Mark. You'll know your pocket money has helped farmers in developing countries.
- ☼ Buy gifts which are approved by the Foundation. Your friends will love the quality of the products and they'll be proud of your concern for social justice.
- ☼ Use your power as a consumer. Ask your local shop or youth club to stock products with the Fairtrade Mark.
- ☼ Spread the word about the benefits of Fairtrade among your friends at school. The more people who know about Fairtrade, the better.

Remember, you can help to make Fairtrade's vision a reality. By choosing to buy products with the Fairtrade Mark, more farmers will benefit and you will be sending a powerful message that you want to help fight poverty around the world.



Publicising Fairtrade

This extract is from a short story by Doris Lessing. It is about a 14-year-old girl who chooses a puppy against the wishes of her mother.

Chosen

It was my father who decided we must have a dog, but choosing one turned out to be more difficult than we thought. After my mother had turned down a dozen puppies, we asked ourselves if any dog, anywhere in the world, could possibly be good enough. But, when we found it, this new puppy was to be my dog. I had decided this. And the fact was that I didn't want a good, noble and well-bred dog – the kind that my mother longed for. I didn't know what I did want, but the idea of such a dog bored me.

That summer we went to stay on an isolated farm with my father's friend, Mr Barnes. It was night when we arrived, and an almost full moon floated above the farm. The land around was black and silent, except for the small incessant noise of the crickets. The car drew up outside the farm and as the engine stopped there was the sound of a mad, wild yapping. Behold, around the corner of the house came a small black wriggling object that threw itself towards the car, changed course on almost touching it, and dashed off again. 'Take no notice of that puppy,' said Mr Barnes. 'It's been stark staring mad with the moon every night this last week.'

We went into the house and were fed and looked after. I was sent upstairs so that the grown-ups could talk freely. All the time came the mad high yapping. In my tiny bedroom I looked out onto the space between the house and the farm buildings, and there hurtled the puppy, crazy with the joy of life, or moonlight, weaving back and forth, snapping at its own black shadow – like a drunken moth around a candle-flame, or like ... like nothing I've ever seen or heard of since.

That, of course, was my puppy. Mr Barnes came out of the house saying, 'Come now, you lunatic animal... ', almost throwing himself on the crazy creature, which was yapping and flapping around like a fish as he carried it to its kennel. I was already saying, like an anguished mother watching a stranger handle her child: 'Careful now, careful, that's my dog.'



Next day, after breakfast, I went to announce my decision. My mother at once said: ‘Oh no, not that puppy. We’ll never be able to train him.’ Mr Barnes said I could have him with pleasure. My father said he didn’t see anything wrong with the dog, if a dog was healthy that was all that mattered: my mother sighed and sat silent. The atmosphere of adults disagreeing with each other was familiar to me. I didn’t say a word. I simply knew that things would work themselves out, and the puppy would be mine. Was right on my side? It was. Should anybody but myself choose my dog? No. Very well then, I had chosen. I chose this dog. I chose it. Too late, I had chosen it.

Three days and three nights we spent at the Barnes’ place. On the last night of our stay I crept out in the cold moonlight to sit and watch the tiny, black, hurtling puppy. When I finally went to my bed, I fell asleep dreaming of the little dog with brown, buttony, beautiful eyes, and I knew I couldn’t leave him behind.

We took him away next morning. It was a long drive home and all the way the puppy yawned and wriggled on my lap, then lay on its fat back, its four paws sprawled every-which-way. My father demanded irritably that the dog should be ‘thoroughly trained’, and I answered ‘yes’, only half hearing him. My head ran in circles like the puppy’s own wild movements, dizzy with a mixture of joy and alarm. This was my dog. My responsibility.

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