EXERCISE 8

Questions **1** *to* **7** *are based on the following passage.*

The Simple Choice

1 We are entering an era of unprecedented choice. But is that a good thing? Amazon, iTunes, eBay offer variety on a scale unimaginable even a decade ago. Amazon sells more than 150 000 videos, 600 000 CDs and nearly three million books, to say nothing of a few millions toys, household goods and other items. Yet, as the variety expands, so does the grumbling about it, especially from those who worry about the effect of runaway consumerism on society and culture. *5*

The most influential of these sceptics is Barry Schwartz, who argues in "The Paradox of
2 Choice" (2004) that too much choice is oppressive. He cited a now famous study of consumer behaviour in a supermarket. Researchers set up one table with six choices of jam, and another with 24 choices. The more choices they offered, the less satisfied they were with their purchase. The extra options had put them outside their jam-selection comfort zone – strawberry, blueberry, *10* raspberry – and into the exotic territory of lemon curd and organic boysenberry. Indecision and buyer's remorse began to cloud the picture.

Now consider Amazon. It, too, sells jam, as it happens. Not six kinds, or 24 kinds, but more
3 than 1200 kinds. Surely its visionary Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Jeff Bezos, is familiar with the lessons of the jam experiment. Yet he drew the opposite conclusion about choices. More is *15* better, he decided. And if the growth of Amazon is any guide, he was right.

What Bezos understands is the difference between the physical and online worlds. In a store,
4 the only consumer guide is the marketing material on the package and possibly, the advice of a sales clerk. Online, there are nearly infinite ways to tap market information. You can sort by price, ratings, date, best sellers and customer reviews. You can compare prices across products, and you *20* can google endless reading on the product.

So Amazon has brought order to choice. The problem with the supermarket is disorder: all the
5 goods are shown simultenously, and all you have to sort them with is whatever brand information has been lodged in your brain by experience or advertising, and the marketing messages of the packaging and shelf placement. *25*

Most of the information on Amazon – popularity, prices, etc – is available to supermarkets,
6 too. But, they typically don't share it with the customer because there's no good way to do it, short of mini-screens on each shelf. While that's easy in an online store, it's impossible in the physical world.

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The curse of atoms is that they can be in only one place at a time. Bits, on the other hand, can
7 be copied and presented in new ways without limit. In the bricks-and-mortar world, all customers experience the same store. In the online world, it's possible for each customer to experience a different store, uniquely customised to his or her profile and preferences.

And therein lies the answer to the paradox of choice. If you make it easy for people to choose,
8 they'll always pick more variety over less. But if it's hard to choose, they settle for the simplicity *35* of limited variety. The paradox of choice is simply an artefact of the limitation of the physical world, where the information necessary to make and informed choice is lost.

The conventional wisdom was right: more choice really is better. But now we know that variety
9 alone is not enough; we also need information about that variety and what other consumers before have done with the same choices. The rise of Google with its seemingly omniscient ability to order *40*

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the infinite chaos of the Web so that what we want comes out on top, shows the way. Order it wrong and choice is oppressive; order it right and it's liberating.

(Adapted from *Newsweek*, Special Edition, December 2005 – February 2006)

1 The main idea of paragraph 1 is

A today's Web sites offer a wide variety of products
B abundant choices encourage consumerism
C a lot of choices can be a good or bad thing

2 In paragraph 2, the jam experiment proved that

A having a wide range of products was not a good thing
B customers preferred the more exotic types of jam
C with more choices customers would buy more

3 Jeff Bezos succeeded mainly because

A he believed that the more choices the better
B he learnt about marketing from the jam experiment
C he knew the difference between selling in a store and selling online

4 Which of the following is **not** an advantage of shopping online?

A Product information can be customised.
B The prices of products offered are cheaper.
C There is more information about the products.

5 ... *it's impossible in the physical world*. (line 29 – 30) What is impossible is

A to provide product information according to customer's requests
B to compare the prices of similar products in the market
C to put more mini-screens on each shelf

6 The writer is of the opinion that

A Barry Schwartz's view is right
B the critics of too many choices are wrong
C the paradox of choice is uncritically accepted

7 The writer is _____ online shopping

A sceptical of
B supportive of
C neutral towards

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