

**HOW TO BRIDGE MATERIALISM AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOR:
EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SCARCITY APPEAL**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complex dynamics of consumer behavior, particularly focusing on materialistic individuals' propensity towards unsustainable consumption practices and their reluctance to engage with brands' purpose-driven initiatives. Drawing on existing literature, the study highlights strategies to minimize the detrimental effects of materialism on environmental concerns. It also aims to enhance ethical product preferences by examining consumers' consumption patterns. Materialistic consumers prioritize product acquisition for status display rather than practical utility. They often overlook the societal and environmental implications of their choices.

In response to this challenge, the research aims to investigate scarcity strategies as a means to incentivize materialistic consumers towards ethical consumption. Previous studies have primarily relied on message appeals such as fear, guilt, and self-benefit to encourage ethical choices, yielding inconsistent results. By addressing the gap left by previous studies, this research proposes aligning with materialistic consumers' existing values as a more effective approach. Leveraging the Naïve Theory of consumer behavior, which suggests that consumers make decisions based on readily accessible information and immediate benefits, the study argues that emphasizing scarcity appeal for ethical products can resonate with materialistic consumers.

The paper explores the concept of perceived value across functional, economic, social, and emotional dimensions, examining how it varies with levels of materialism. By integrating insights from limited edition collections and consumer psychology, the study underscores the allure of scarcity in fostering a sense of exclusivity and individuality

among materialistic consumers. Furthermore, the study addresses the gap in the existing literature by investigating the interplay between scarcity and socially responsible product attributes in shaping ethical behavior among materialistic consumers.

This research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical applications by offering insights into sustainability and scarcity strategies tailored to resonate with materialistic consumers. By examining perceived value across distinct dimensions, it enhances our understanding of consumer behavior in the context of ethical consumption. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform strategic advertising approaches and promote more sustainable consumption patterns among materialistic individuals.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In traditional consumer behavior, individuals with a strong emphasis on materialism typically did not give much consideration to a brand's purpose-driven activities. Materialism has been linked to a reduced concern for the environment and the shaping of product preferences, promoting unsustainable consumption (Kamal et al., 2013; Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Polonsky et al., 2014). Additionally, materialistic consumers tend to place greater importance on acquiring possessions to showcase them rather than their practical utility (Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Weidmann et al., 2009; Wong, 1997). They are also more inclined to value products that symbolize achievement, enhance social status, and improve their appearance (Richins, 1994; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Consequently, they care about themselves and the value of products themselves rather than the subsidiary meaning of their consumption process, including the brand's effort on society and the environment.

The goal of this research is to explore scarcity strategies to encourage materialistic consumers to make ethical consumption choices. Most studies have concentrated on how to encourage materialistic consumers to make ethical choices using various message appeals, including fear and guilt, negative and positive, abstract and concrete, self-benefit and other-benefit appeals (Chen & Chiu, 2016; Green & Peloza, 2014; Ryoo et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2015). However, these studies have revealed inconsistent results, and many of them have identified a need for additional variables to influence ethical behavior among materialistic consumers. In this research,

the study seeks to inspire ethical choices among them by aligning with their existing values. According to the naïve theory, consumers can be activated with minimal cognitive effort and can be readily applied to guide inferences regarding marketing communications, products, services, and so on (Kardes et al., 2004). Let's imagine parents trying to fix picky eaters and try new foods. They can make funny faces with the foods on their plate or hide the foods they don't like under their favorites. Similarly, in the realm of consumer behavior, materialistic consumers can make hasty naïve decisions focusing on peripheral information that is readily accessible and discerning the immediate benefits. Therefore, the study suggests that emphasizing the values they already hold is more effective and efficient than pressuring them to stop unethical choices or imposing ethical behavior on them. As a strategic advertising approach, using scarcity appeal for ethical products is likely to be persuasive among materialistic consumers because it highlights the prompt benefits and unique reasons why they should possess these products to achieve their goals. According to the naïve theory (Kardes et al., 2004), consumers must fill in missing information that is valuable to them before deciding to purchase a product. If they perceive the price of the product as expensive, they assume that the product quality would be better than the cheaper one, despite having no clue about the actual quality of the product (Kardes et al., 2004). In this sense, highly materialistic consumers can place a higher value on products that are rare, symbolizing their individuality.

Furthermore, the study will explore how their perceived values, encompassing functional, economic, social, and emotional dimensions, may vary depending on their

level of materialism. According to Schindler (1998), consumers actively participate in limited collections to gain both economic and psychological rewards through winning the tactic buy competition. It also generates the status of themselves as “smart shopper” and “winner” which sparks positive evaluation toward not only the functional aspects of products but also the social and emotional value they can get. Despite the potential values of ethical products and limited collections, there were few studies explored distinguished attributions of products like scarcity but prosocial products which can have materialistic consumers engage in ethical behavior. Based on this, the study will deliver two significant contributions to the existing literature. First, the study aims to provide practical implications and recommendations for sustainability and scarcity strategies that can be more impactful in persuading materialistic consumers. Second, the study aims to enhance the understanding of perceived value by examining four distinct dimensions – performance, economic, social, and emotional – and investigate the disparities between highly materialistic and slightly materialistic consumers under products with scarcity in sustainable advertising.

This dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter Two provides a theoretical foundation by exploring the concepts of ethical consumption, materialism, and perceived value, establishing logical connections between them, and formulating hypotheses. Chapter Three details the experimental methodology and procedures employed. The results, including interaction effects and moderated mediation effects, are presented in Chapter Four using statistical analysis. Chapter Five engages in a thorough discussion of the significant findings, elucidating their theoretical implications and providing a

rationale for the study's conclusions. Furthermore, practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Consumption

The general idea of combining ethics and consumption has become a mainstream concept for companies and consumers, and ethical consumerism is the broad label for companies providing products that appeal to consumers' ethical values. From a consumer's perspective, ethical consumption is defined as 'the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values' (Crane & Matten, 2004). These choices can contribute to ethical issues ranging from controversial to matters of social justice, including labor rights, abortion, animal protection, environmental protection, and charitable donations. Ethical consumption is linked to the ability to exercise control over one's consumption habits, guided by personal and moral principles (Barnett et al., 1998; Huh, 2011). Oh and Yoon (2014) further defined ethical consumption as 'conscientious consumption that takes into account health, society, and the natural environment based on personal and moral beliefs.' Thus, ethical consumption involves prioritizing moral principles throughout the consumption process, emphasizing values over the mere possession of products. This makes it a manifestation of altruistic consumer behavior and socially desirable behavior.

However, several studies on ethical consumption have indicated that consumers' ethical attitudes do not always align with ethical choices (Atkinson & Kim, 2015; d'Astous & Legendre, 2009). For instance, 85 percent of respondents said that they are likely to purchase a product based on a brand's social responsibility and ethical efforts,

showing that they care about what they support, even though many also care to learn about other attributes such as product design and quality (Zane, Irwin, & Reczek, 2016). As not all consumers prioritize morals and ethics in their purchase behavior, this inconsistency tends to be exacerbated when the focus is on socially desirable behaviors (Ulrich & Sarasin, 2012). Consequently, ethical market growth is a long-term trend, with a total of 16% of consumers stating that they have been buying fewer ethical products, and 11% saying they had been buying more (Ethical Consumer, 2022).

Numerous factors that contribute to the gap between people's attitudes and their actual behaviors have been identified in research. The literature commonly mentions factors related to products and situations, such as product quality and price, company's responsible reputation, and brand familiarity (Carrigan & Attala, 2001; d'Astous & Legendre, 2009; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Öberseder et al., 2013). Moreover, demographic characteristics like age, gender, ethnicity, and employment status often recognized as important influences on this disparity (Dickson, 2001). While these factors can explain the attitude-behavior gap to some extent, there is also evidence that psychological factors, particularly materialism, play a significant role in shaping people's ethical consumerism (Banerjee & McKeage, 1994; Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Kozar & Marcketti, 2011; Srikant, 2013).

Materialism and Ethical Consumption

One segment that does not value ethical consumption consists of materialistic consumers. Materialistic consumers rely on physical possessions to manifest and perceive otherwise invisible personal characteristics such as happiness, status, and social

competence (Richins & Rudmin, 1994). They tend to desire prestige along with concern for status due to the lack of satisfaction with status-conforming products (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Shafer, 2000). Thus, their consumption focuses on how they appear to others and external rewards and praise, which hinder them from making independent decisions based on their beliefs and principles (Kasser, 2002, Ch. 7). Previous studies have demonstrated that materialistic values are reflected by the importance people assign to goods and wealth as keys to success and well-being (Becerra et al., 2023). As a result, they are usually related to subjective well-being and low self-esteem, which lead to low life satisfaction, lack of self-realization, and negative emotional and mental health (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Mick, 1996; Kasser et al., 2004; Rindfleisch & Burroughs, 2004). Therefore, materialism is correlated with adverse environmental attitudes and consequences because of the clash between the desire for wealth and actions that promote sustainability (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). Muncy and Eastman (1998) found that individuals with stronger materialistic tendencies tend to have lower ethical standards compared to those with fewer materialistic inclinations. Srikant (2013) proposed four perspectives on materialism, positing that individuals with a pronounced materialistic orientation tend to prioritize material possessions over spiritual values. This inclination manifests in their pursuit of personal contentment and societal advancement predominantly through the accumulation of material goods and wealth. Moreover, previous studies have demonstrated that social issues such as child labor, abortion, and human trafficking are related to individuals' levels of materialism and their cultural settings (Arli & Tjiptono, 2014; Chowdhury & Fernando, 2013; Lu & Lu, 2010).

However, not all behaviors related to materialism hinder people's self-identity development, happiness, self-principle and value (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Kilbourne, et al., 2005; Shrum et al., 2013). Ownership can serve as an alternative means of constructing and maintaining identity, evoking a sense of self-worth through possession of a desired self-image (Shrum et al., 2013). Therefore, individuals with high levels of materialism prioritize acquiring possessions primarily for showcasing purposes rather than for their practical utility (Belk, 1985). Because of its focus on personal desires and egocentrism, materialism is often seen as a challenge for people who want to do good for others. Instead of telling materialistic people to change their values, we should figure out how to work with them and create ideas and strategies that encourage them to make ethical choices when they make purchase decisions. The next chapter suggests a new way of marketing that tries to find a middle ground between materialism and ethical shopping so that both values can coexist.

The Role of Scarcity Appeal

Marketing strategies, encompassing advertising, packaging, design, and sales promotions, have the potential to mold materialistic values (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Marketing segmentation in advertising is essential and discrete consumer groups by their materialistic values should be considered for success in pro-social campaigns. Especially, an appropriate message strategy may be key to encouraging ethical consumption behavior toward materialistic consumers by targeting their tendency to prefer high social status with recognizable quality and reputational products which can boost one's identity (Dekhili et al., 2019; Gil et al., 2012; Kamal et al., 2013; Wiedmann et al., 2009). Gil et

al. (2012) asserted that materialistic consumers have a desire for wealth and material ownership positively associated with social consumption motivation and suggested that marketing efforts should focus on materialistic and status-oriented aspects of brands. As a nudge, the study assumes that a scarcity appeal message would be an effective strategy in triggering them to ethical behavior.

Scarcity appeals are widely employed in advertising and marketing strategies, particularly to enhance the perceived value of products or services and thereby stimulate purchase intentions (Aggarwal et al., 2011; Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2013; Roy & Sharma, 2015; Sharma & Roy, 2016; Shi et al., 2020; Wu & Lee, 2016; Xu et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2018). These appeals typically involve limitations on availability either in terms of time or quantity, and they are classified into supply-driven or demand-driven, as well as limited-quantity or limited-time appeals (Gierl et al., 2008). While time-limited appeals, such as "available only this weekend," are commonly used, limited-quantity or limited-edition appeals may exert a stronger influence on consumer purchase intentions (Aggarwal et al., 2011). The notion of a limited edition suggests urgency for consumers to make immediate purchases due to the possibility of unavailability in the future. Research indicates that limited-edition appeals positively impact product attitude and foster price competition among products (Balachander & Stock, 2009). Marketing managers frequently leverage limited-edition appeals to heighten consumer desire and prompt purchases (Dörnyei, 2020; Jang et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2012). Jang et al. (2015) observed that the effectiveness of limited-quantity messages is enhanced when the product is conspicuous, while limited-time messages are more persuasive for less

conspicuous products. Moreover, limited-quantity messages, often communicated through "limited edition," tend to strongly influence purchase intentions by positioning consumers as savvy shoppers and winners in a bargain, fostering feelings of exclusivity and uniqueness (Kim et al., 2019). Given their associations with high value and exclusivity (Balachander & Stock, 2009; Deval et al., 2013), scarcity appeals are actively targeted towards status-seeking consumers (Kim et al., 2022).

Scarcity Appeal on Ethical Products

Unfortunately, scarcity appeal does not always work for advertising campaigns. When we come to scarcity appeal on sustainability, negative outcomes were generated according to the previous studies. For instance, sustainable luxury brands have conflicting values, balancing the high quality of their products and the perception of scarcity, while also striving to protect the environment through the sustainable use of natural resources (Cervellon, 2013; Hennigs et al., 2013). Also, consumers in a scarcity appeal context are less likely to purchase sustainable products due to the incongruent values they perceive (Cervellon, 2013; Hennigs et al., 2013). Moreover, since luxury brands have similar characteristics to scarcity, many researchers view the relationship between luxury and sustainability as antagonistic (Beckham & Voyer, 2014; Davies et al., 2012; De Angelis et al., 2017; Dekhili et al., 2019; Han et al., 2017).

To narrow this gap between materialism and sustainable behavior, various approaches have been employed to promote ethical consumption, adopting message appeals such as scarcity, self/other benefits, and injunctive/descriptive messages, considering individual differences (Dekhili et al., 2019; White & Simpson, 2013). For

example, Dekhili et al. (2019) discovered that the perceived scarcity of sustainable luxury products effectively influenced consumers when they had a positive brand attitude.

Similarly, White and Simpson (2013) observed that descriptive appeal, as opposed to injunctive appeal, elicited positive responses among individuals with a self-activated disposition. This is because injunctive appeals regarding sustainability can infringe upon individuals' sense of autonomy in making their own decisions. Also, self-benefit appeals activate highly materialistic consumers' enhancement and protective motivation which generates a more favorable attitude toward advertisements and brand campaigns (Ryoo et al., 2020).

According to the naïve theory, consumers must fill in missing information that is valuable to them before deciding to purchase a product (Kardes et al., 2004). To bridge these information gaps, consumers can be easily influenced by advertising messages, which serve as peripheral cues within the overall marketing process. Consequently, they form inferences about what they do not know based on the information available through advertising (Kardes et al., 2004).

The study hypothesizes that utilizing a scarcity strategy can mitigate the adverse effect of materialism on ethical consumption. This is possible because people in general need to see themselves as moderately unique (Belk, 1988; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), so consumers tend to place a higher value on products that can symbolize their individuality. Essentially, product scarcity fulfills this need by affording some individuals the opportunity to possess items that others do not, thereby attracting consumers with a strong desire for uniqueness (Lynn, 1991; Wu et al., 2012). Thus, it is possible that highly

materialistic consumers may be more obsessed with limited value which gives them exclusiveness and uniqueness by enhancing their social status because they strive to seek the value of products as a possession. In contrast, those who are only mildly materialistic do not have a strong intention to maximize their decision by considering the value of possession itself. By this logic, the study assumes that the negative influence of materialism on ethical products can be mitigated by scarcity appeal.

H1: Scarcity appeals (vs. non-scarcity) are more effective in generating positive responses such as a) attitude toward brand, b) willingness to purchase, and c) campaign involvement among highly (vs. moderately) materialistic consumers.

Perceived Value

Individuals have different assessments of the usefulness of products and perceive the value of the same product differently based on their circumstances (Cooper, 1988; Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value of products is a key driver for purchase, and it is widely examined under the scarcity status of products (Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Seo, 2017; Sheth et al., 1991). For instance, consider a person who constantly feels the need to purchase the latest limited edition key rings, even if their current key ring is perfectly functional. They often pre-order new releases and are willing to wait and rush to buy a newer version as soon as it becomes available, without a practical need for the upgrades. In this case, the individual's behavior is materialistic because they prioritize the accumulation of material possessions over other aspects. Schindler (1998) also argues that individuals participate in these activities to gain both economic and psychological rewards through winning the tactical buying competition. Specifically, consumers who

want to purchase scarce products for their own use can find substitutes even if they fail to make the purchase (Seo, 2017). However, consumers who collect or resell these items cannot easily replace them and their purchase intention is higher due to the higher perceived value they have. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) take a multidimensional approach to studying perceived value, considering the overall evaluation of a product rather than focusing on a single aspect of customer interest and the product's associated risks. They define perceived value as encompassing performance, emotional, and social value. Firstly, performance values have two types including economical and quality aspects of products. Economical value relates to the price and value for money, derived from the perception of short-term and longer-term costs. Quality and performance contribute to the utility aspect of functional value, which is derived from the product's ability to enhance one's social self-concept. Secondly, emotional value pertains to the utility derived from the feelings or affective states that a product generates. Lastly, social value is related to the enhancement of social self-concept through a product's ability.

Perceived Value and Materialism

This study will measure four aspects of perceived value related to product scarcity. According to Chae et al. (2020)'s study, limited-edition shoes are associated with perceived value because characteristics like uniqueness, investment potential, and self-expression positively affect each aspect of perceived value. Thus, performance, economic, social, and emotional values will be measured to assess the influence of materialism and scarcity of products. Thus, the study suggests the following hypotheses.

H2: Perceived values will mediate the positive effects of scarcity appeal (vs. non-scarcity) among highly (vs. less) materialistic consumers, which increase a) attitude toward brand, b) willingness to purchase, and c) campaign involvement.

H2-1: Perceived performance value will mediate the interaction effects of message appeal and materialism, especially toward those less materialistic consumers, which enhance a) attitude toward brand, b) willingness to purchase, and c) campaign involvement.

H2-2: Perceived economic value will mediate the interaction effects of message appeal and materialism, especially toward those less materialistic consumers, which enhance a) attitude toward brand, b) willingness to purchase, and c) campaign involvement.

H2-3: Perceived social value will mediate the interaction effects of message appeal and materialism, especially toward those highly materialistic consumers, which enhance a) attitude toward brand, b) willingness to purchase, and c) campaign involvement.

H2-4: Perceived emotional value will mediate the interaction effects of message appeal and materialism, especially toward those highly materialistic consumers, which enhance a) attitude toward brand, b) willingness to purchase, and c) campaign involvement.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Research Design and Participants

The experiment is a between-subjects design with two conditions (message appeal: scarcity vs. non-scarcity) and materialism will be measured as a continuous variable. A total of 230 participants were recruited from Prolific, where participants devoted more attention to the questions of the study, comprehended instructions better, answered questionnaire items carefully, and behaved more honestly when allowed to cheat to increase their gains (Eyal et al., 2021). All participants were at least 18 years old, residents of the United States, and native English speakers. They are widely distributed in age and 67% were female.

Stimuli Development

To develop ethical product offerings, the study introduced shoe collections in collaboration with the Special Olympics. Ethical consumption, also known as ethical consumerism, involves making purchasing decisions based on ethical and moral considerations alongside traditional factors like price and quality (Oh & Yoon, 2014). This approach considers the social, environmental, and ethical impact of products and services. Therefore, the study chose Special Olympics for this endeavor due to its consistently high standing, maintaining a four-star rating out of five on the charity's score since 2019 (Charity Navigator, 2021). In 2023, it secured the 76th position among the 100 largest US charities according to Forbes (Barrett, 2023). Furthermore, through partnerships with major corporations such as Coca-Cola and Bank of America, the organization has demonstrated significant recognition among consumers, with 95%

acknowledging it as a brand worthy of respect, loyalty, and goodwill in the United States (Special Olympics, 2024). Hence, the study concluded that the Special Olympics enjoys widespread public familiarity and holds a positive perception among charitable organizations.

Moreover, shoes are a widely consumed, gender-neutral, ethical fashion item in the market, with moderate levels of consumer involvement (Lee & Workman, 2011). Thus, the stimuli were based on the recently launched Didion x Special Olympics New Collection, with profits from its sales being donated to the organization. The fictional shoe brand 'Didion' supports the cause of the Special Olympics, a non-profit organization providing year-round sports training and athletic competitions for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The stimuli demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility by supporting such a non-profit organization.

In the scarcity appeal, the advertisement highlights the limited availability of the Didion x Special Olympics New Collection, featuring limited-edition products with only 500 units available. Conversely, in the non-scarcity appeal, the advertisement promotes a Didion x Special Olympics New Collection, emphasizing its availability without any limitations (See figure 1 and 2).

We are a proud partner of [Special Olympics](#), a non-profit that provides year-round sports training and athletic competitions for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.



Didion x Special Olympics **Limited New Collection**

Introducing the NEW Didion x Special Olympics sneaker edition.
Only 500 will be made.

Don't miss out on your chance to own these limited-edition sneakers and show your support for Special Olympics.



Figure 1. Scarcity Appeal

We are a proud partner of Special Olympics, a non-profit that provides year-round sports training and athletic competitions for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.



Didion x Special Olympics **New Collection**

Introducing the NEW Didion x Special Olympics sneaker edition.
Don't miss out on your chance to own these sneakers and show
your support for Special Olympics.



Figure 2. Non-scarcity Appeal

Procedure

Upon joining the online study, participants will be asked about materialism. To mitigate the negative bias associated with materialism and encourage honest responses, the study will first normalize material concerns. It acknowledges that material concerns are a natural part of human life; everyone has material needs, and it's normal to seek comfort, security, and well-being. The study then guides participants in practicing self-reflection by encouraging them to reflect on their values and priorities. This process helps them understand the role that material concerns play in their lives and how these align with their overall sense of purpose and happiness. Importantly, the study emphasizes that materialism and self-worth are different. Self-worth is not solely determined by material possessions or achievements. Participants are encouraged to explore and appreciate their unique qualities, skills, and contributions beyond the material realm. By establishing a non-judgmental environment, participants are more likely to comfortably answer questions about materialism.

Participants are then informed that they will be involved in consumer reactions to an advertisement for charitable shoes on behalf of the Special Olympics. Then, scarcity appeal will be manipulated by a limited edition of new shoe collections, in collaboration with Special Olympics. Charitable shoes encompass a wide range of ethical considerations related to people and society. Therefore, charitable shoes are expected to effectively attract materialistic consumers, and their preferences in this regard are anticipated to be significantly influenced by the type of appeal. Following a brief

discussion about a brand campaign, participants are randomly assigned to either view an advertisement for the shoes with a scarcity appeal or without one.

Subsequently, participants responded to questions about the scarcity appeal after viewing the advertisements at their own pace. Finally, they proceed to answer questions regarding their attitudes toward the brand, willingness to purchase the charitable shoes, and campaign involvement. After answering demographic questions, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Measures

The study measured independent variables' items through a 7-point Likert scale. Materialism is measured through four items based on previous research (Alzubaidi et al., 2021; Talukdar & Yu, 2020), demonstrating to what extent they agree with 'I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes,' 'The things I own say a lot about how well I am doing in life,' 'Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure,' 'My life would be better if I owned certain things I do not have' ($\alpha = .70$).

Also, perceived values are defined as the overall evaluation of a product so that it includes multiple aspects such as functional, emotional, and social value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). This study defined four dimensions of perceived value into performance, economic, social, and emotional, adjusting with our research: 1) performance value – 'has consistent quality,' 'is well made,' 'has an acceptable standard of quality,' and 'would perform consistently,' 2) economic value – 'is reasonably priced,' 'offers value for money,' 'is a good product for the price,' and 'would be economic,' 3) social value – 'would help me to feel acceptable,' 'would improve the way I am perceived,' 'would

make a good impression on other people,’ and ‘would give its owner social approval,’ 4) emotional values – ‘is one that I would enjoy,’ ‘would make me want to use it,’ ‘Is one that I would feel relaxed about using,’ ‘would make me feel good,’ and ‘would give me pleasure.’

Lastly, attitude toward the brand is measured through a seven-point semantic differential ‘unfavorable/favorable,’ ‘bad /good,’ ‘negative/positive,’ and ‘unlikable/likable,’ which were taken from previous studies (e.g, Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Dolbec & Chebat, 2013). Also, willingness to purchase the product is measured through ‘I unlikely/likely purchase the advertised product,’ ‘I improbably/probably purchase the advertised product,’ and ‘I uncertain/certainly purchase the advertised product.’ Lastly, campaign involvement was measured by ‘How likely are you to engage in Didion’s donation program?’ ‘How willing are you to purchase the sneaker edition and engage in the donation program?’ and ‘How likely are you to recommend the sneaker edition to others?’

Regarding the manipulation checks for scarcity and non-scarcity commercials and type of advertising, three items were used, ‘Didion’s collection said it was *Limited, only 500 will be made*’ ‘With whom did the Didion shoes collaborate?’ and ‘What is the purpose of this collaboration?’

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The study aims to explore the interaction effect of scarcity appeal and materialism through H1. The manipulation check showed that scarcity and non-scarcity products did not differ in terms of their reality ($M_{scarcity} = 5.7$ vs. $M_{non-scarcity} = 5.7$, $t = .05$, $p > .05$). Also, manipulation check questions on scarcity appeal filtered respondents who put wrong answers on products that are limited but answered non-limited or vice versa. Furthermore, to assess the internal consistency of the scales, Cronbach's α was computed for each scale.

Using the PROCESS macro for SPSS Model 1 with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017), the study tested H1 which demonstrates the interaction effect between message appeal and materialism. First of all, a significant main effect emerged for scarcity appeal on attitude toward brand ($b = 2.67$, $se = .66$, $t = 4.04$, $p < .001$, CI 1.37 to 3.97), willingness to purchase (WTP) ($b = 4.09$, $se = .79$, $t = 5.17$, $p < .001$, CI 2.53 to 5.65), and campaign involvement ($b = 3.05$, $se = .78$, $t = 3.89$, $p < .001$, CI 1.50 to 4.6). Also, materialism showed a significant main effect on attitude toward brand ($b = .45$, $se = .10$, $t = 4.51$, $p < .001$, CI .25 to .64), WTP ($b = .61$, $se = .12$, $t = 5.18$, $p < .001$, CI .38 to .85), and campaign involvement ($b = .55$, $se = .12$, $t = 4.69$, $p < .001$, CI .32 to .78). The two-way interaction between message appeal and materialism showed significant interaction effects on attitude toward brand ($b = -.70$, $se = .15$, $t = -4.55$, $p < .001$, CI -1.00 to -.40), WTP ($b = -1.00$, $se = .18$, $t = -5.42$, $p < .001$, CI -1.36 to -.64), and campaign involvement ($b = -.75$, $se = .18$, $t = -4.12$, $p < .001$, CI -1.11 to -.39).

Specifically, conditional effects showed that moderately materialistic consumers ($M_{\text{materialism}} = 3.00$) have a more positive brand attitude toward non-scarcity appeal compared to scarcity appeal ($M_{\text{scarcity}} = 4.7$ vs. $M_{\text{non-scarcity}} = 5.3$; $b = .57$, $se = .24$, $t = 2.32$, $p < .05$, CI .09 to 1.05) whereas highly materialistic consumers ($M_{\text{materialism}} = 5.25$) showed a more positive brand attitude toward scarcity appeal than non-scarcity appeal ads ($M_{\text{scarcity}} = 5.71$ vs. $M_{\text{non-scarcity}} = 4.69$; $b = -1.01$, $se = .24$, $t = -4.23$, CI -1.48 to -.54). Similarly, WTP is also positively related to non-scarcity appeal with moderately materialistic consumers ($M_{\text{scarcity}} = 2.73$ vs. $M_{\text{non-scarcity}} = 3.82$; $b = 1.09$, $se = .29$, $t = 3.73$, $p < .001$, CI .51 to 1.67) and scarcity appeal with highly materialistic consumers ($M_{\text{scarcity}} = 4.11$ vs. $M_{\text{non-scarcity}} = 2.95$; $b = -1.16$, $se = .29$, $t = -4.06$, $p < .001$, CI -1.72 to -.60). Regarding campaign involvement, moderately materialistic consumers showed high involvement on campaign when they view the non-scarcity appeal ($M_{\text{scarcity}} = 3.27$ vs. $M_{\text{non-scarcity}} = 4.06$; $b = .79$, $se = .29$, $t = 2.72$, $p < .01$, CI .22 to 1.36) whereas highly materialistic consumers showed high campaign involvement when they were exposed to scarcity appeal ($M_{\text{scarcity}} = 4.51$ vs. $M_{\text{non-scarcity}} = 3.61$; $b = -.91$, $se = .28$, $t = -3.19$, $p < .01$, CI -1.46 to -.35). Thus, H1a, H1b, and H1c were supported. More details of two-way interaction on brand attitude, WTP, and campaign involvement are in the below figures.

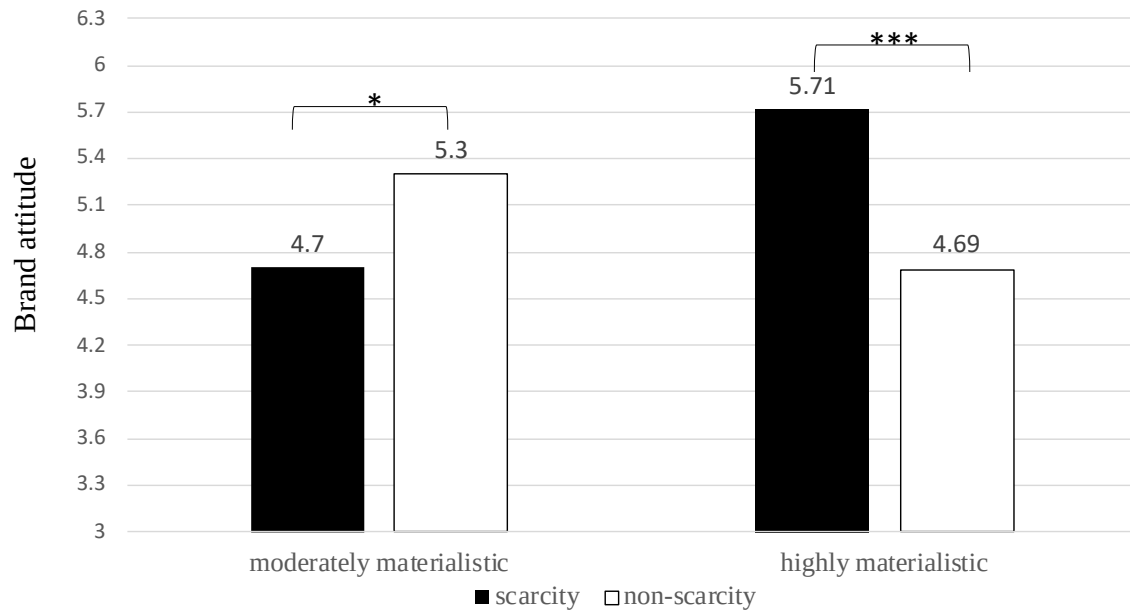


Figure 3. Two-way interaction of message appeal and materialism on brand attitude (H1a); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

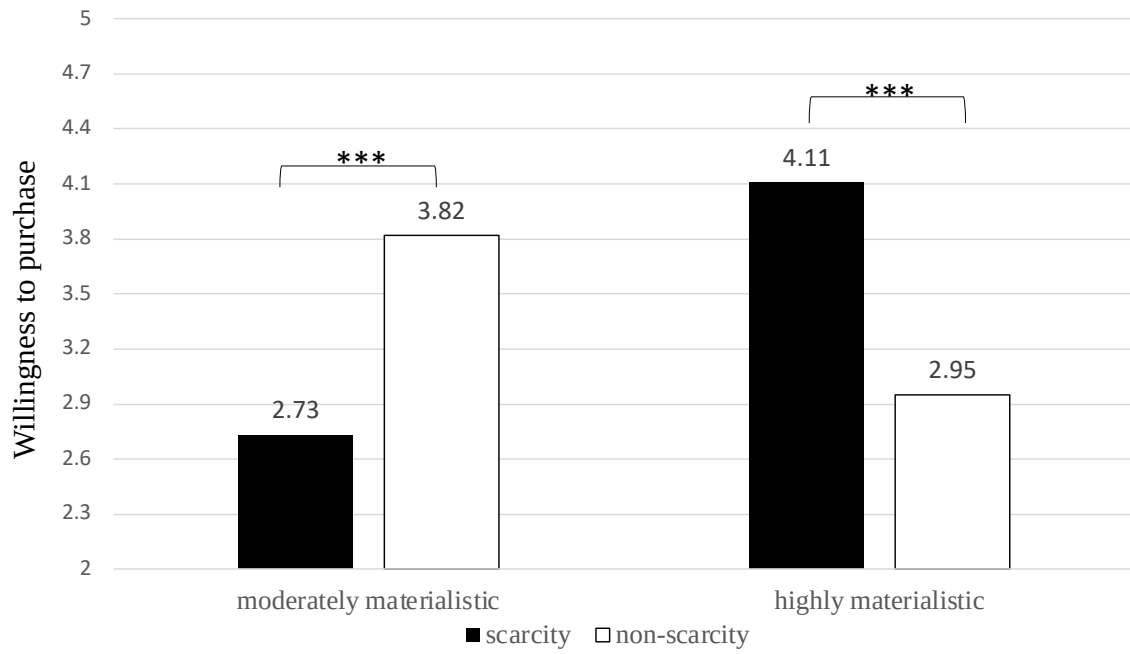


Figure 4. Two-way interaction among message appeal and materialism on WTP (H1b); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

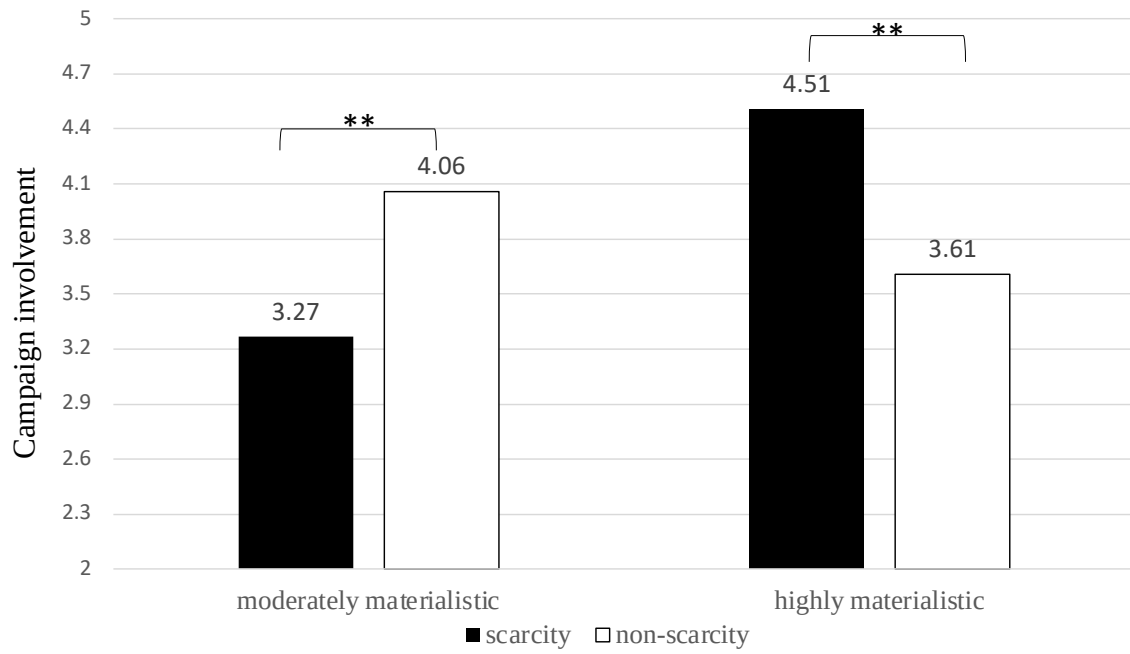


Figure 5. Two-way interaction among message appeal and materialism on campaign involvement (H1c); $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

Next, to test a mediating role of perceived value through H2, the study tested in a moderated mediation process using the PROCESS macro for SPSS Model 8 with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017). As hypothesized, the results confirmed that scarcity (vs. non-scarcity) messages toward highly (vs. moderately) materialistic consumers enhanced overall perceived value and subsequently increased brand attitude (Index = $-.34$, $SE = .10$, CI $-.55$ to $-.18$), WTP (Index = $-.47$, $SE = .13$, CI $-.74$ to $-.25$), and campaign involvement (Index = $-.50$, $SE = .13$, CI $-.77$ to $-.27$).

Additionally, highly materialistic consumers showed a more positive brand attitude toward scarcity appeal products compared to non-scarcity ones through increased perceived value ($b = -.36$, $se = .13$, CI $-.63$ to $-.10$), whereas moderately materialistic consumers exhibited a more positive brand attitude toward non-scarcity appeal products rather than scarcity ones through increased perceived value ($b = .41$, $se = .15$, CI $.16$ to $.74$). In terms of WTP, highly materialistic consumers also demonstrated higher WTP for scarcity products ($b = -.48$, $se = .18$, CI $-.86$ to $-.15$), while moderately materialistic consumers indicated higher WTP for non-scarcity appeal products through increased perceived value ($b = .56$, $se = .20$, CI $.20$ to $.99$). Regarding campaign involvement, highly materialistic consumers were more likely to engage with ethical brand campaigns when exposed to scarcity appeal ads ($b = -.52$, $se = .18$, CI $-.89$ to $-.16$), whereas moderately materialistic consumers were more inclined to engage in campaigns when exposed to non-scarcity appeal ads through encouraged perceived value ($b = .60$, $se = .20$, CI $.23$ to 1.03). Thus, the results supported H2a, H2b, and H2c, as well as the same direction of interaction effects of message appeal and materialism examined in H1. The

conceptual model and results are depicted in Figure 6 to 8. Moreover, the study proceeded to analyze each four dimensions of perceived value including performance, economic, social, and emotional, using PROCESS macro for SPSS Model 8 with 5,000 which is the same as H2.

First, regarding brand attitude, perceived performance ($b = -.09$, $se = .04$, CI $-.18$ to $-.02$) and emotional ($b = -.40$, $se = .10$, CI $-.63$ to $-.22$) values significantly mediated the interaction effect of materialism and message appeal but not economic ($b = .02$, $se = .03$, CI $-.03$ to $.08$) and social ($b = -.03$, $se = .03$, CI $-.10$ to $.01$) values. Specifically, pairwise comparison analysis showed that low materialistic consumers highly perceived the performance value of ethical products and formed a positive attitude toward the brand ($b = .12$, $se = .07$, CI $.01$ to $.27$). On the other hand, highly materialistic consumers highly perceived the emotional value of ethical products and formed positive attitudes toward the brand ($b = -.55$, $se = .15$, CI $-.87$ to $-.28$). Thus, H2-1a and H2-4a were supported.

Second, regarding WTP, perceived performance ($b = .07$, $se = .04$, CI $.01$ to $.15$), economic ($b = -.06$, $se = .04$, CI $-.14$ to $-.00$), and emotional ($b = -.58$, $se = .12$, CI $-.84$ to $-.36$) values were shown as significant mediators but not social value ($b = -.06$, $se = .04$, CI $-.15$ to $.00$). In particular, the mediation effect of perceived economic ($b = .14$, $se = .07$, CI $.03$ to $.30$) and performance ($b = -.09$, $se = .05$, CI $-.21$ to $-.01$) values were observed only from less materialistic consumers. Emotional value was observed both from less materialistic consumers ($b = .50$, $se = .20$, CI $.15$ to $.91$) and highly materialistic consumers ($b = -.80$, $se = .19$, CI -1.19 to $-.43$).

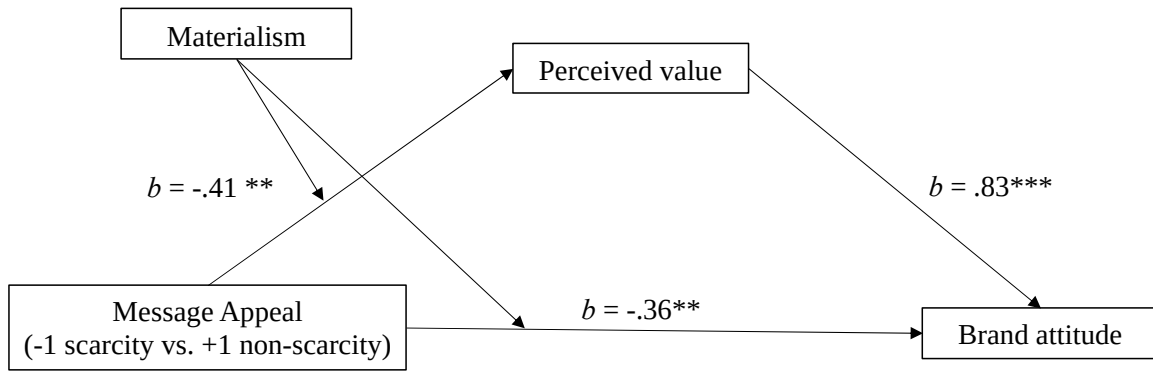


Figure 6. Moderated mediation effect of message appeal and materialism on brand attitude through perceived value (H2a); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

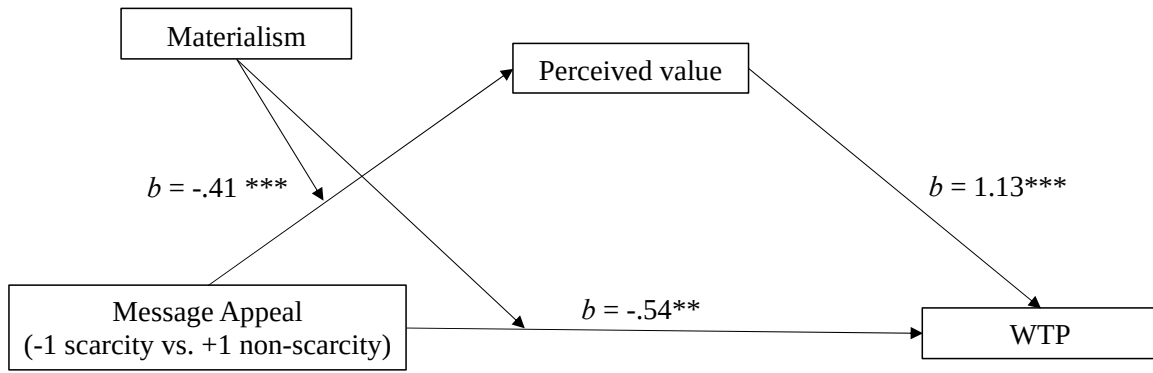


Figure 7. Moderated mediation effect of message appeal and materialism on WTP through perceived value (H2b); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

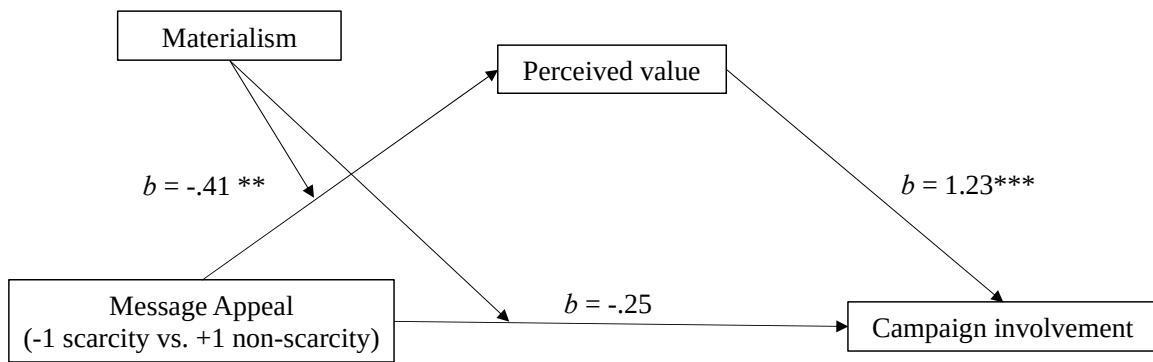


Figure 8. Moderated mediation effect of message appeal and materialism on campaign involvement through perceived value (H2c); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Nevertheless, perceived social value doesn't show a significant mediation effect on purchase intention, conditional mediation effects showed that highly materialistic consumers are more likely to perceive social values when they view scarcity appeal compared to non-scarcity appeal ($b = -.11$, $se = .07$, CI $-.26$ to $-.01$). Thus, H2-1b, H2-2b, and H2-4b were supported.

Lastly, regarding campaign involvement, perceived social ($b = -.05$, $se = .04$, CI $-.14$ to $-.00$) and emotional ($b = -.56$, $se = .12$, CI $-.81$ to $-.34$) values significantly mediated the interaction effect but not price ($b = -.04$, $se = .03$, CI $-.12$ to $.00$) and performance ($b = -.00$, $se = .03$, CI $-.06$ to $.06$) values. Overall, highly materialistic consumers rate high social ($b = -.10$, $se = .1$, CI $-.24$ to $-.01$) and emotional ($b = -.77$, $se = .19$, CI -1.14 to $-.41$) values, which in turn increase their involvement in donation campaigns. Thus, H2-3c and H2-4c were supported. More details of the H2-1 to H2-4 tests are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of moderated mediation effects from four dimensions of perceived value (H2-1 to H2-4).

DVs	Four dimension of perceived value	Moderated mediation effect	High materialism x Scarcity appeal	Moderate materialism x non-scarcity appeal
Brand attitude	Performance (H2-1a)	<i>b</i> = -.09 *	<i>b</i> = -.07, <i>se</i> = .05	<i>b</i> = .11* , <i>se</i> = .07
	Economic (H2-1b)	<i>b</i> = .02	<i>b</i> = -.00, <i>se</i> = .02	<i>b</i> = -.05, <i>se</i> = .06
	Social (H2-1c)	<i>b</i> = -.03	<i>b</i> = -.05, <i>se</i> = .05	<i>b</i> = .00, <i>se</i> = .03
	Emotional (H2-1d)	<i>b</i> = -.40 *	<i>b</i> = -.55* , <i>se</i> = .15	<i>b</i> = .35* , <i>se</i> = .15
Willingness to purchase	Performance (H2-2a)	<i>b</i> = .07 *	<i>b</i> = .06, <i>se</i> = .04	<i>b</i> = -.09* , <i>se</i> = .05
	Economic (H2-2b)	<i>b</i> = -.06 *	<i>b</i> = .01, <i>se</i> = .04	<i>b</i> = .14* , <i>se</i> = .07
	Social (H2-2c)	<i>b</i> = -.06	<i>b</i> = -.10* , <i>se</i> = .07	<i>b</i> = .02, <i>se</i> = .05
	Emotional (H2-2d)	<i>b</i> = -.58 *	<i>b</i> = -.80* , <i>se</i> = .20	<i>b</i> = .50* , <i>se</i> = .20
Campaign involvement	Performance (H2-3a)	<i>b</i> = -.00	<i>b</i> = -.00, <i>se</i> = .03	<i>b</i> = .00, <i>se</i> = .04
	Economic (H2-3b)	<i>b</i> = -.04	<i>b</i> = .01, <i>se</i> = .03	<i>b</i> = .10* , <i>se</i> = .07
	Social (H2-3c)	<i>b</i> = -.05 *	<i>b</i> = -.10* , <i>se</i> = .06	<i>b</i> = .02, <i>se</i> = .05
	Emotional (H2-3d)	<i>b</i> = -.56 *	<i>b</i> = -.77* , <i>se</i> = .19	<i>b</i> = .49* , <i>se</i> = .19

Significant results*

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The study suggests that although materialistic consumers typically perceive ethical products as indifferent, positioning such products with scarcity enhances their perception, particularly in terms of perceived value. Through H1, the study revealed that highly materialistic consumers expressed a willingness to pay more and demonstrated a favorable attitude toward the brand, along with increased campaign involvement for ethical sneakers when positioned as limited-edition, thereby granting them exclusivity and prestige. Conversely, moderately materialistic consumers exhibited favorable attitudes and purchase intentions, with increased campaign involvement toward ethical sneakers when positioned as regular, not limited-edition. Thus, the study initially confirmed the efficacy of scarcity appeal on ethical products, particularly among highly materialistic consumers, influencing not only purchase decisions but also perceptions of ethical campaigns.

How do these consumers prefer different types of message appeal? The study delved into the prioritized values perceived by consumers and how perceived value can elucidate the interplay between message appeal and materialism. The results indicated that individual perceived value increases when highly materialistic consumers view ethical sneakers with scarcity appeal, whereas moderately materialistic consumers view ethical sneakers without scarcity appeal. This finding suggests that a brand's ethical initiatives are positively associated with perceived value among highly materialistic consumers, especially when products are positioned as limited. Moreover, highly and

moderately materialistic consumers perceive distinct values from ethical products. Highly materialistic consumers value the social and emotional aspects of limited-edition ethical sneakers, whereas moderately materialistic consumers mostly value performance and economic aspects of regular ethical sneakers.

The study provides insights into how materialistic consumers can engage in ethical consumption and increase their involvement in ethical campaigns. Additionally, it expands our understanding of consumer behavior by exploring the four dimensions of values they perceive.

Theoretical Implications

Our research offers new insights into how materialism and the appeal of scarcity intersect with ethical products, filling a notable gap in understanding the psychological motivations driving ethical consumption among materialistic individuals. Building upon existing studies, our research demonstrates that highly materialistic consumers do not necessarily oppose ethical consumption values when scarcity attributes are incorporated into ethical products, which can serve extrinsic goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

Additionally, the motivations underlying materialism often clash with those underlying more self-transcendent values like selflessness and concern for others (Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Nonetheless, our study proposes an alternative approach to enticing materialistic consumers to participate in ethical consumption.

Firstly, our research enriches prior literature on ethical consumption by introducing scarcity appeal as a critical motivator for materialistic consumers. Highly

materialistic individuals often experience greater negative emotions, specifically heightened anxiety and emotional instability (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2022). Coping mechanisms for these emotions often manifest in their buying behavior, such as impulsive purchases or acquiring fake luxury items, in an attempt to address their low self-esteem and psychosocial adjustment (Kasser, 2016). Previous studies have shown that highly materialistic consumers tend to report dissatisfaction and unhappiness in their lives due to their extrinsic goals, which prioritize possessions over intrinsic values like affiliation and community, known to promote individual well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Consequently, they may experience lower levels of self-actualization and higher levels of anxiety, depression, and other behavioral or psychological disorders compared to those with lower levels of materialism (Cohen & Cohen, 1996; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961). Our study suggests that scarcity appeal acts as a protective factor for highly materialistic consumers in their pursuit of external objectives. Limited edition products often exude an aura of exclusivity and prestige, qualities that highly materialistic individuals find particularly appealing. Possessing items that are rare or unique can enhance their social standing, boost their self-esteem, and provide the desired acknowledgment and validation through their purchasing behavior (Mukherjee & Lee, 2016). Consequently, the symbolic significance of scarce products, transcending their mere intrinsic worth, positions highly materialistic consumers to outwardly display their status and experience a sense of achievement, even if the ethical values associated with such products do not align with their preferences.

Secondly, this study expands upon the perceived value of ethical products by examining various dimensions such as performance, economic, social, and emotional. Regarding performance and economic value, previous research has indicated that consumers consider ethical issues in evaluating the utility and quality of products in their purchase decisions (Suphasomboon & Vassanadumrongdee, 2022). They have emphasized that the functional benefits of ethical products enhance ethical concern and purchase intention. Additionally, it has been revealed that ethical-related values are positively associated with functional benefits and consumers' attitudes (e.g., Lee & Jin, 2019; Ryoo et al., 2020; Sivapalan et al., 2021). However, social and emotional values have not consistently shown strong relationships with purchase intention for ethical products (Suphasomboon & Vassanadumrongdee, 2022; Song et al., 2019), nor have they significantly affected purchase intention in some cases (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2017; Dai & Pelton, 2018; Ghazali et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2019; Sinha & Verma, 2020). As the perceived value constructs are far more complex, especially concerning ethical aspects and materialism, this study further enriches previous research that rarely considered the influence of scarcity appeal. This study supports that diverse perceived values are associated with ethical products, and depending on an individual's level of materialism, their perceptions differ, which may persuade them to participate or engage in ethical consumption.

Lastly, this study applies the concept of scarcity to ethical products and confirms that social and emotional values can overshadow ethical concerns, especially among highly materialistic consumers. We confirmed the potential effects of scarcity products,

aligning with prior research on limited editions. Due to their uniqueness, investment potential, and self-expression attributes, consumers tend to attribute more value to rare products and emphasize social and emotional benefits (Chae et al., 2020). This indicates that scarce products can convey a sense of self-efficacy through their representation of social status and position (Kim et al., 2001). Moreover, naïve theories explain the potential impacts of various marketing variables including price (Rao & Monroe, 1989), set size (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989), scarcity (Parker & Lehmann, 2011), packaging (Campbell & Goodstein, 2001), and product taste (Eccles, 2006). When consumers encounter a scarce product, they often attribute its limited availability to high demand, implying social approval (Parker & Lehmann, 2011).

In our study, this perspective suggests that individuals with high levels of materialism prioritize social aspects such as uniqueness and exclusivity over ethical considerations when making purchasing decisions, even if the product is associated with ethical attributes, which may not align with their core values. They may perceive products primarily as symbols to manifest their desired self rather than merely as utilitarian tools. As a result, their focus tends to be on external meanings or associations rather than the specific quality or ethical characteristics of the product itself. Thus, priming naïve theories with a societal, collective, and emotionally-driven perspective on ethical consumption can resonate with materialistic consumers who are indifferent to ethical considerations.

Practical Implications

Recognition of the diverse facets of value is pivotal for brand managers to craft nuanced positioning strategies for ethical campaigns. Our study underscores the importance of social and emotional value in swaying the purchasing decisions of materialistic consumers towards products labeled as scarce or limited. This discovery carries significant implications for marketing tactics. According to McKinsey and Company (2023), consumers increasingly favor products labeled as "environmentally sustainable," "eco-friendly," "fair trade," or other designations linked to environmental and social responsibility, with an average annual growth of 28% over the past five years. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that beliefs and priorities vary across different audience segments (Oldford, 2018). For instance, while cost-effectiveness and quality remain pivotal for baby boomers, brand values and beliefs hold paramount importance for Gen-Zers and Millennials. Our research further delves into psychological perspectives, suggesting leveraging the uniqueness and prosocial attributes that resonate with highly materialistic audiences. Industry professionals may need to adopt this effective scarcity messaging strategy to not only persuade ethically conscious consumers but also those less inclined towards ethical concerns, yet value possession and external validation.

Media placement becomes crucial to ensure that scarcity appeals reach highly materialistic consumers. Incorporating insights effective for both high and moderate materialistic groups, advertisements should focus on messages that resonate. Channels like lifestyle magazines, luxury publications, and social media platforms emphasizing

aesthetics and influencer marketing can effectively reach them through limited opportunities and participation in loyalty programs.

Also, since the study utilized a short-term advertising campaign - limited edition - businesses can consider long-term plans to allow customers to collect the products or establish a community to engage them in purchasing ethically over an extended period. For instance, integrating each limited edition product into a broader collection could sustain consumer interest over time. Implementing a loyalty program that publicly acknowledges social status based on patronage towards the cause could also foster continued engagement.

Furthermore, it is important to incorporate emotional and socially appealing strategies to cater to consumers' requirements for validation, recognition, and self-esteem. Creating content that elicits sentiments of desire, envy, and aspiration can effectively stimulate their interest in the products or services. Moreover, displaying testimonials, reviews, and endorsements from influencers and celebrities who resonate with the target audience can further enhance the brand's appeal and credibility among materialistic consumers.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study provides valuable insights into the motivations behind ethical consumption, particularly among materialistic consumers. However, certain limitations are here. Firstly, while this study examined and validated the influence of psychological factors, it did not delve into the interactions among consumers, brands, and various types of ethical campaigns, which play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and purchase

decisions. For example, the Special Olympics is a well-known nonprofit organization, yet consumer perceptions of it vary widely depending on factors such as brand activism and their level of awareness and knowledge regarding prosocial campaigns (Milfeld & Haley, 2024). Brand managers should research their target consumers on their stance on the social issue and how divisive their consumers' views are. It is essential to comprehensively investigate these dynamics to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in consumer behavior toward ethical initiatives. Secondly, this study examined four dimensions of perceived value and highlighted values for highly and moderately materialistic consumers. However, the complexity inherent in the nature of perceived value warrants deeper exploration. Lastly, diverse ethical products and ethical concerns, along with different types of prosocial campaigns, were not fully explored in this study. Investigating a wider array of ethical products, concerns, and campaign strategies would enrich our understanding of ethical consumption behaviors.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this dissertation has provided valuable insights into the complex interaction between materialism, scarcity appeal, and consumer perceptions of ethical products. Through a comprehensive analysis of consumer behavior, the study has shed light on the nuanced preferences of highly materialistic individuals and their response to ethical products positioned with scarcity appeal. The findings underscore the significance of scarcity as a powerful motivator for highly materialistic consumers, effectively influencing their purchase decisions and attitudes toward ethical products. By positioning ethical products as limited edition, brands can tap into the desire for exclusivity and prestige among this demographic, thereby increasing their engagement and willingness to pay. Moreover, the dissertation has contributed to theoretical advancements by enriching the understanding of perceived value constructs associated with ethical consumption. By examining dimensions such as performance, economic, social, and emotional values, the study has highlighted the importance of considering diverse motivations driving consumer behavior. Practically, the insights gleaned from this research have significant implications for marketing strategies aimed at promoting ethical products to materialistic consumers. Brand managers can leverage the findings to craft tailored messaging and positioning strategies that resonate with the preferences and values of different consumer segments. Overall, this dissertation advances our understanding of consumer behavior in the context of ethical consumption and provides actionable recommendations for businesses seeking to promote sustainability and social responsibility in their marketing

efforts. By leveraging the insights generated, brands can not only appeal to materialistic consumers but also contribute to positive social and environmental impact.

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VITA

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