

Synthetic Scarcity and Resentment: The Roles of Betrayal, Consumer Machiavellianism, and Structural Power

Abstract

Across eight studies, we explore consumer response to synthetic scarcity, a tactic used by marketers to manipulate consumers by communicating scarcity of products despite there in fact being sufficient supply. Results indicate that consumers experience greater resentment towards the firm sponsoring synthetic scarcity as compared to authentic scarcity, particularly those who are low and neutral in trait Machiavellianism (Low-to-Medium Machs; Studies 1, 2 and 3). This conditional effect stems from Low-to-Medium Machs' greater feeling of betrayal in response to synthetic scarcity (Study 4). Study 5 identifies structural power as a higher-order boundary condition and provides indirect process evidence that High Machs resent synthetic scarcity due to perceived loss of control. We illuminate the understanding of consumer response towards marketing Machiavellianism and provide marketers with feasible guidelines to navigate through consumer resentment.

Keywords: Synthetic scarcity, Social influencer marketing, Machiavellianism, Betrayal, Structural Power, Resentment.