

Forgoing Consumption for the Sake of Others

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Summary

Prior research has shown that scarcity and exclusivity tend to drive greater demand for products and experiences, due to consumers' tendency to seek uniqueness and superiority. This research expands our knowledge of how consumers respond to others' lack of access to desired products and experiences by examining situations where inaccessibility does not lead to increased consumption.

We argue that **the salience of others lacking access decreases**, rather than increases **willingness to buy or upgrade a desired consumption experience**. This stems from consumers projecting their own desire onto those without access and presuming they would experience negative emotions, thus **inducing guilt, and leading them to forgo consumption**. We further predict the propensity to forgo consumption to be more pronounced **when the other consumer lacking access is someone close** versus a distant other. In these situations, **consumers will also hold less favorable attitudes toward brands that, by causing others' lack of access, induce them to forgo desired consumption experiences**.

Conclusion

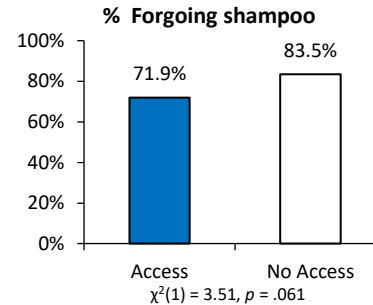
Across six pre-registered experiments (N = 1,844), we demonstrate consumer willingness to forgo consumption when a salient other lacks access to the same experience using different products and services (i.e., sweaters, donuts, jeans, toiletries, airplane seats), different reasons for the lack of access (i.e., financial constraints, size availability, dietary restrictions), different manifestations of forgoing consumption, and participant populations. Despite the documented appeal of scarcity and exclusivity in consumer behavior, these results highlight conditions under which consumers' desire for products that others cannot access does not translate into actual consumption.

Study 1B: Field study



Method:

- Participants (N = 180, non-vegan) completed a survey and could choose between two rewards (shampoo or body wash).
- 2 conditions between-subjects (Access vs. No access): In the no access condition, the experimenter added they could not use the shampoo because it was not vegan.

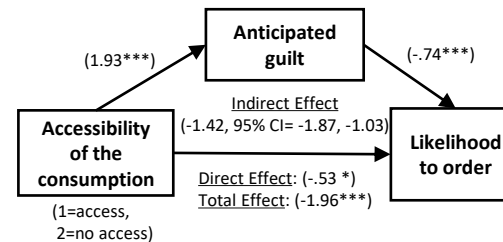
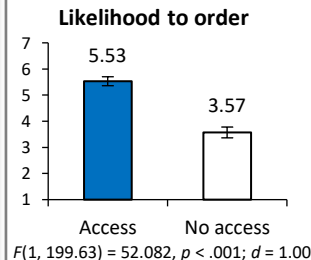


Study 2: The mediating role of guilt



Method

- Participants (N = 207) imagined going for coffee and donuts with a gluten-intolerant friend.
- 2 conditions between-subjects:
 1. Access: gluten-free donuts were available
 2. No access: gluten-free donuts were sold out.



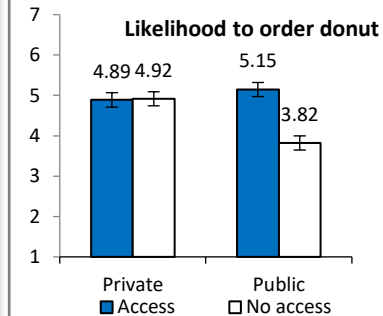
Study 3B: Forgoing consumption in public and attitudes toward stores



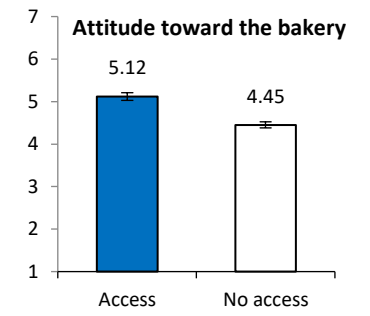
Purpose: Further process evidence by manipulating degrees of observability and, thereby, the potential for guilt to be evoked.

Method

- Students (N = 392) imagined going for coffee and donuts with a gluten-intolerant friend.
- 4 conditions between-subjects:
 1. Access: Bakery offered gluten-free donuts
 2. No access: Bakery did not offer gluten-free donuts
 3. Private: Friend had to leave before the order
 4. Public: Friend remained in the bakery.



Interaction $F(1, 388) = 15.27, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = 0.04$



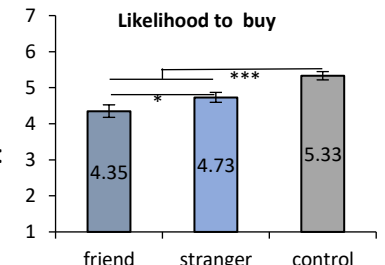
$F(1, 366.24) = 33.60, p < .001; d = 0.58$

Study 4: Interpersonal closeness as a moderator



Method

- Participants (N = 301) imagined considering buying a sweater.
- 3 conditions between-subjects: *A friend (vs. a stranger) could not afford the same garment. In the control condition, no information about another person.*



Main effect $F(2, 199) = 13.42, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = 0.07$
NOTE: * $p = .061$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$