

## **What??!! I cannot get it from you??!! I will get it from your competitor instead! When product scarcity leads to anger and brand switching.**

Scarcity and low availability seem to be an important heuristic to determine choice desirability. This is the case in nature, where scarcity of resources prime animals to adapt accordingly, for example, by fighting with others or to stock up for the cold season (Drummond and Cavelas, 1989). Scarcity also works in a shopping scenario, where cues of scarcity are often used to create elitism (e.g. through luxury products or limited editions), especially if their possession is relevant within an individual social group (Amandoss and Jain, 2010).

However, research has shown that scarcity may also push consumers to exhibit higher levels of anger and aggression to obtain limited availability products (Kristofferson et al., 2017), unravelling the possibility that scarcity promotions can trigger a dangerous side effect among consumers. Recently, Cannon and colleagues (2018) proposed that individuals need to ultimately resolve resource scarcity through different reparation techniques, including experiencing averted feelings or engaging in compensatory consumption.

While in the past, emotions like sadness and grief have been proposed as the ultimate emotional consequence when consumers do not have the chance of getting their favourite products (e.g. Martin, 2002), research still needs to uncover if sentiments like anger and frustration induced by not getting the desired product can ultimately harm the brand itself. Consumers experiencing sentiments like anger and frustration can also express higher reactance towards messages and promotions, sometimes also engaging in sabotage actions towards a brand (Kahr et al. 2016).

In this paper we examine how not getting (vs. getting) an item in a scarce situation (e.g. a promotion on Black Friday/Cyber Monday) can induce higher (vs. low) anger in individuals and instil a desire to get the same item from a competitor brand. We propose that triggering the desire to get a product through scarcity appeals creates emotional arousal that ultimately must be resolved (e.g. by getting the desired product or a similar one). Specifically, if consumers feel angry by having acquired the product they want, they may resolve their emotions by punishing the target brand and ultimately satisfying their need through a competitor.

We test our predictions in four studies and across different product categories. In the pilot study, we recruited 114 respondents on Amazon's Mechanical Turk completing a real-world survey a few days after Black Friday 2017 in relation to their purchase experience. We ask them to describe a product on a limited sale that they got (vs. they did not get). Before accessing the survey, respondents were asked whether they took part in limited sales during Black Friday and if they got and missed at least one item they wanted. Those that did not were not able to proceed and excluded from the study, as suggested by Meyvis and Van Osselaer (2017). After describing the experience, participants completed measures relating to their level of anger ("To what extent do you feel the following in this shopping situation?" 1 = not at all angry – 7 = very much angry) and switching intentions ("I would buy a similar item from a competitor" 1 = strongly disagree – 7 = strongly agree). A paired sample T-test revealed that those who did not get the limited-edition product were angrier ( $M = 4.55$ ) compared to those who did ( $M = 2.07$ ;  $t = -2.064$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Similar results were found for brand switching ( $M_{\text{getting}} = 3.96$ ;  $M_{\text{notgetting}} = 4.44$ ;  $t = -2.275$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

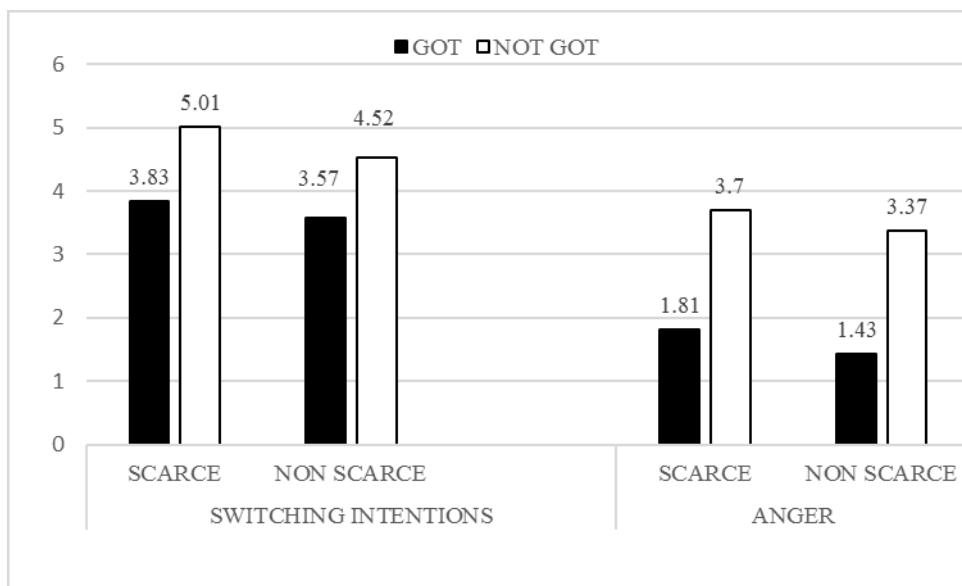
In Study 1, we recruited 91 respondents via Amazon's Mechanical Turk to complete a single factor experiment examining the impact of getting versus not getting a limited-edition product (a whisky) on switching intentions. We conducted an ANCOVA, controlling for product familiarity and expertise with the category. The results indicated a significant effect

between the independent variable and anger ( $M_{\text{getting}} = 2.51$ ;  $M_{\text{notgetting}} = 4.04$ ,  $F (2, 88) = 15.663$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as a significant main effect on switching intentions ( $M_{\text{getting}} = 4.03$ ;  $M_{\text{notgetting}} = 4.97$ ,  $F (2, 88) = 15.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In Study 2, we recruited 234 respondents via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. A single factor experiment was conducted to determine if anger mediates the link between getting [not getting] the product (an iPhone 8) and their willingness to buy a similar product from a competitor (switching intent). To test this path, we employed Process Model 4 (Hayes, 2008) and found a significant mediation (CI = .0100 to .2496), whereby not getting the product significantly impacted anger ( $t = 1.993$ ,  $p < .05$ ), which in turn affected switching intent ( $t = 3.281$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

In Study 3, we collected data from 402 respondents on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. In this study we manipulated both the availability of the object – a pen - (scarce vs. non-scarce) and whether respondents managed to buy it (get vs. not get) in an online shopping scenario. Using a two-way ANOVA, we found a significant effect between the two independent variables and anger ( $F (3, 398) = 7.52$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A similar effect was found on switching intent ( $F (3, 398) = 4.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Figure 1 reports the detailed means.

**FIGURE 1**



To test the moderated mediation model, we used Process Model 8 (Hayes, 2008). We find support for our mediation (CI = -.1381 to -.0023) as the interaction effect of the two variables on the intention to switch to a competitor brand turned insignificant when anger was included in the model (CI: -.1842 to .1347). In other words, when a product was limited, to not get it had a positive effect on anger that in turn affected consumers' switching intent to a competitor brand.

The results of four studies demonstrate that consumers who fail to acquire a desired limited-edition product experience heightened levels of anger, ultimately leading to switching intent. This result remains stable across different product categories. On a theoretical point of view, this study attempts to unravel an often-underestimated effect of product scarcity and scarcity promotions – the loss of disappointed and angry consumers in favour of competitors.

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