

Scarcity Marketing across Economies: Contrast between Global North and Global South Market Strategies

Jaiveer Makkar

Student, Strawberry Fields High School (Chandigarh)

Abstract

This research paper investigates the application and effects of scarcity marketing strategies across the diverse economic environments of the Global North and Global South. Differentiating itself from other promotional strategies, scarcity marketing, founded on theories such as commodity theory and psychological reactance, has become a popular tool in the marketing arsenal especially in the digital age — however, its form and effectiveness differs based on economic context. This study shows contrast here with the ways in which scarcity is used in the Global North to claim luxury, exclusivity and technological sophistication for brands by building their scarcity strategies around digital platforms, while in the Global South, genuine scarcity or rarity is more common so that the talk tends to be of building scarcity with more nuance. These differences make it crucial to adopt the methods that take into account concerns about affordability, cultural values and earning the trust of communities. While acknowledging the limited nature of the current literature, especially the shortage of literature on the Global South, this review paper strives to lay the groundwork for the establishment of contextually relevant, ethical, and sustainable marketing practices in both Global North and Global South markets. It adds on the ongoing discussion about how marketing approaches need to adjust to shifting economic landscapes and consumer priorities.

I. Introduction

The most critical part of the supply-demand mode was at the beginning of the 21st Century, the global market assumed marketers shifted their Marketing strategies to identification and analysis of the psychological motive behind consumer behaviours instead of simply reconciling the supply-demand figures. (Cialdini, 2021). One form of promotion that is proving to be especially powerful and influential is scarcity marketing, which has shown mixed and varying impacts within diverse economic situations and cultural landscapes.

There have always been differences in marketing styles based on respective economic development stages, with strategies in the Global North differing sharply from the Global South due to the varied economic dynamics of supply and demand. Although the Global North has received considerable attention of conventional marketing scholarship, the swift expansion of emerging markets in the Global South has generated more concerns regarding how marketing practices need to be adapted to meet the voices of these heterogeneous contexts. (Douglas & Craig, 2010) (Viswanathan & Sreekumar, 2021)

1.1 The Current Situation of Global Marketing Practices and the Effect of Scarcity

The emergence of digital transformation in the last ten years has restructured how businesses conduct scarcity marketing in the existing market. 73% of the e-commerce platforms used scarcity messaging of

some kind, with "limited time" and "limited quantity" dominating the top strategies. (Moorman, 2022).

1.2 Theoretical framework of Scarcity Marketing

Scarcity marketing works on a number of well-theorized foundations:

1. Commodity Theory; This theory proves that scarcity increases the value of the product and the experience (Brock, 1968).
2. Psychological Reactance Theory; It shows that restrictions on availability increase consumer desire. (Clee & Wicklund, 1980)
3. An Evolution of Scarcity Principle in Today's Market: Extends traditional scarcity theory to the digital era. (Shi et al., 2020)

Therefore, these theoretical foundations explain why scarcity marketing is still working and highly effective in other cultural and economic environments, even if its manifestations and consequences are varied.

By analysing how scarcity marketing tactics appear and function variously in various economic circumstances, such as Global North vs Global South, this study fills a significant gap in the field of marketing research. It offers information on how to modify and adjust marketing tactics for various economic settings. Along with that, it also investigates the moral implications of scarcity marketing in areas with actual scarcity of resources.

Outline of Global North-South Economic Differences

The Global North and Global South are commonly used terms to describe the wealth divide that sets their economies apart. Per capita income for Global North countries is higher than for those in the Global South, according to the World Bank's Economic Development Report, 2024. This disparity is manifested as a reflection in the areas of Market Characteristics, Consumer behaviour and Economic Infrastructure.

Such differences have a tremendous effect on the ways scarcity marketing is done and how it is adopted in various geographies, marking a unique market that demands scrutiny.

Studying scarcity marketing in this context enhances our understanding of the theoretical foundations of marketing strategy as well as its implications in different economic environments. Consequently, this review paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions on adaptive marketing strategies that are effective as well as ethical in different global locations.

II. Literature Review-

The role of scarcity in marketing research, within the field of consumer behaviour and its potential consequences for companies, has been a subject of great interest. Marketers widely leverage scarcity tactics to increase both perceived values as well as desirability of products, and in turn consumers purchase following intention. (Barton et al., 2022). This inconsistency and the piecemeal nature of extant research into scarcity marketing indicate a fragmentation of the research landscape and the necessity of a deeper understanding of the processes underpinning the effect, as well as its boundary conditions. (Barton et al., 2022)

With particular focus on the differences between the Global North and Global South, along with some similarities, this overview of the present literature attempts to summarize the existing information of research on scarcity marketing.

A Global Perspective on Scarcity in Consumer Markets

Consumer market scarcity is a global phenomenon that reflects the growing complexity of consumer markets around the world. Scarcity tactics have been studied for their diverse applications in revenue

management and supply chain optimisation. Scarcity has also been linked to various social and economic aspects, indicating that the role it might play in purchasing behaviour might vary depending on the market context.

Scarcity Marketing Basics

Before we tackle those cross-market analyses we need to review the basics of scarcity marketing (Cialdini 2001) identifies scarcity as one of the six principles of persuasion, stating that people have a higher regard for things if they are perceived to be limited or hard to get. (Lynn 1991) offers an “operational definition” of scarcity as “a relative lack of resources.”

Now, economists have recognized different kinds of scarcity:

Scarcity with Limited Quantity: This refers to limiting the quantity of products available, introducing urgency and exclusivity. (Aggarwal et al., 2011)

Scarcity with Limited Time: More commonly known as flash sales or promotional windows which build pressure to buy before time runs out. (Inman et al., 1997)

Psychological effect of Scarcity

Scarcity drives a basic psychological response grounded in the fear of missing out (FOMO). This leads to increased perceived value and therefore desire when consumers think a product is scarce. This response is consistent across cultures and economic strata. Empirical research has demonstrated that scarcity can have a powerful effect on consumers’ cognitive capacity and lead to more impulsive and reckless decision-making. (Novotney, 2014.)

Scarcity appeals also increase the allure and distinctiveness of a product thereby increasing its desirability among consumers. (Gupta 2013).

Scarcity Marketing in the Global North

Scarcity marketing has a lot of play in developed economies with disposable incomes, access to information, and more developed consumer markets. This is a culture where consumers will typically be receptive to more advanced’s forms of scarcity tactics, which have become the norm for creating demand.

- **Exclusivity and Luxury-** Brands in the Global North mostly use the tactic of Scarcity to create the idea of Exclusivity and Luxury. The limited production, high price point and selective distribution supporting a sense of exclusivity are important for luxury brands (Vigneron and Johnson 2004). The ‘dope’ culture of streetwear and the collaborations marketed as limited edition, are the best examples of this tactic. (Damian Fowler 2018)
- **Integration of Technology:** With the advent of digital platforms and targeted advertising, Global North marketers have learnt to create the need for having things online. These typical platforms include countdown timers on e-commerce sites and alerts about limited availability. (Luo et al 2019)
- **Awareness of Consumer and Cynicism:** In these markets, consumers are becoming more aware of scarcity tactics. How subsequent marketing techniques affect the communication between consumers and advertisements, specifically how persuasion knowledge might form attitude scepticism toward artificial scarcity. This means falling back on authentic and transparent scarcity appeals. (Friestad and Wright 1994)

Scarcity Marketing in the Global South

On the other hand, the Global South is a patchwork of heterogeneous economies, cultures, and consumption patterns. Scarcity marketing needs to be adapted to address these differences. And this income-based differences exists in Global South markets too due to high income urban and low-income rural end of the spectrum.

- **Actual Scarcity vs. Perceived Scarcity:** Physical scarcity of goods and resources are a reality in large parts of the Global South. That does make consumers more sensitive to limited availability (Deaton, 2024). Consumers might only be willing to spend on necessities, rendering scarcity marketing for non-essentials ineffective.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Consumers respond differently to scarcity appeals in different cultural context. In collectivistic cultures where the social group is valued over individuals, scarcity messages that encourage competition might backfire. A far better tactic would be role-speaking community access or group preferred. (Hofstede, 2001). For example, a limited offer for early bird access in an environment in which trust and long-term partnerships are warmly accepted.
- **Price sensitivity:** Due to economic constraints, price sensitivity is a broader driver across the majority of Global South markets. Scarcity marketing only works up to a point, when the price goes above what consumers are willing to pay. More likely though is the argument that value for money and accessibility will matter more than the appeal of the rare. (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006)
- **Significance of Trust and Local Context** - Scarcity may manifest in plain sight, with informal economies driving word-of-mouth access to goods and services. Marketers should utilize these channels to build scarcity strategies. Portes and Waller 2010. One of the main reasons for this trust could be the limited digital presence in these countries.

Comparative Analysis of Global North and Global South

Key Feature	Global North	Global South
Prominent Motives	Exclusiveness, Prestige and Personal Desire	Social Consistency, Social Requirements, FOMO
Main Strategies	Limited-time Deals, Limited Versions and Technology	Local advertising, scarcity driven by communities
Cost Sensitivity	Medium to Low	High
Cultural Environment	Individualistic sometimes Materialistic	Shared traits, collective cultural values
Digital Accessibility	High and Extensive	Changes sometimes limited in rural areas

Scarcity marketing strategy that can have a dramatic impact on the consumer decision-making process. But the effectiveness of this approach depends on a deeper analysis of the specific market environment. The literature indicates significant consumer responses in the Global North as compared to the Global South due to the disparity in economic conditions, cultural values, and the access to technology. For companies looking to employ scarcity tactics, a culture-sensitive, context-informed approach is essential. There’s no way a one-size-fits-all approach will work. Brands should instead retarget their approach to appeal to the unique motivations, needs, and values of their target to create desired outcomes, humanely.

III- Key themes and Insights

The global economy is frequently described in terms of the “Global North” and “Global South,” highlighting wealth, resource availability, and historical development differences. Usually, the Global North includes industrialized, high-income countries, mostly in North America, Europe, and some parts of Asia and Oceania. On the contrasting side, Global South is used to refer to less industrialized countries, which are often developing nations in regions such as Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. However, despite these socio-economic differences, we argue here that the basic, human mechanisms by which we

react and adapt to perceived scarcity are shared timelines between these two regions which we can use to realise some commonalities existing such behaviours even in consumers in both timelines, especially, to marketing

3.1 Common Psychologies between Global North and Global South

Scarcity, after all, speaks a largely universal language — there is a lot of variation in economic, social, and cultural values, but at the end of the day, people, no matter their background, want to provide for their needs. Here are key commonalities:

1. **FOMO (Fear of missing out):** A global phenomenon, this is a great motivator, creating a tendency to grab products or services that may be low in supply. Sociocultural similarity is a factor that can drive behavior based on FOMO; individuals want to fit in and be connected with one another. Przybylski et al 2013.

Global North: FOMO is typically expressed in consumption of trendy products, limited edition luxury goods and exclusive travel experiences. The fear of being ‘left out’ in the latest trend socially leads to the purchase decision (such as a limited release sneaker that spikes the market value, or attending a sold-out concert).

Global South: There is great FOMO to access basic goods. Example include panic buying in times of limited food supply in order to feed their families. And so forth, with access to limited healthcare or education opportunities, the same behaviour will occur, driven by the fear of being without resources.

2. **Loss Aversion:** People exhibit a better response to avoid losses than they do to seek gains, and this is a well-studied bias. The fear of losing out on a limited item induces a feeling of loss, making purchases take place. (Kahneman & Tversky 2013)

Global North: Retailers regularly employ loss-aversion techniques, like “last chance” emails or time-limited sales, to influence consumer behaviour. This is extensively used in e-commerce.

Global South: Loss aversion hits harder, as scarce resources mean that not taking advantage of an opportunity can have an outsized effect on well-being. Whether it’s missing a window of price drop in essential goods, or a possibility of not accessing government subsidies, or missing a limited medical intervention offering can bring about a deep sense of loss.

3. **Leveraging social proof.** By limiting the availability of a product, it presents an image of increased demand and desirability which can, in return, draw more buyers. (Asch 2016). All the while, when something is marketed as scarce, this is only a signal that means that it is highly sought after, and that the demand to this object is only reinforced amongst a consumer base. Not just a geographical aspect but also this maxim is in our people social behaviour that they are probably very much inclined with imitation and we imitators.

Global North: Marketers often use cues such as limited quantities or “most popular” labels to signal that a product is desired, drawing even more demand. This is evident in online reviews and popularity metrics.

Global South: Community and peer group. Social proof A perceived scarcity signals highly sought after resources and can trigger a 'rush' to secure the resource.

These psychological reactions to scarcity, such as FOMO, loss aversion, and the need for social verification, and forming a sense of urgency are highly effective in nudging human behaviour. These responses bridge cultural and socioeconomic gaps alike, appearing consistently in both Global North and Global South contexts. Policymakers, businesses, and individuals need to realise the importance of these principles in understanding the dynamics of scarcity on a local and global level.

3.2 The Gap between Affordability and Luxury

The global marketplace is not a one-size fits all business. On the contrary, it is an amalgamation of separate economies, each of which has its unique attributes influencing consumer behaviour and buying habits. From this vantage point, we can see that the Global North and Global South are two opposing forces with varying economies, wealth, access to resources, and even cultural values. This reflects the difference in consumption where the Global North is often considered to be more demand driven and oriented to luxury while the Global South is focused on getting enough food and basic services. The disconnect calls for a thoughtful assessment of the consumer mentality and a deliberate marketing framework that is cognizant of the dominant economic climate, sociocultural value systems and consumer demands.

Different strategies for scarcity marketing are required due to the varied realities of the Global North and Global South. Here's a thorough look at the differences:

1. Economic & Purchasing Power Disparities:

Global North: Higher disposable incomes enable consumers to better respond to scarcity marketing tactics. The dreaded fear of missing out (FOMO) can inspire impulse purchases based on limited-time offers and limited-edition products since, unlike other goods and services, affordability is usually not the underlying concern at the time of purchase.

Global South: Consumers are still mainly driven by essentials. Scarcity marketing should be more value-oriented and affordable and not to be used as a gimmick. It must be told carefully because, especially now, consumers are less inclined to fall for manipulative marketing tactics (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2013). For instance, an extremely helpful product accessible in limited quantities may be effective, but an overpriced exclusive version may just not resonate.

2. Channel of Digitalisation: Media & Communication

Global North: Marketers appropriate advanced digital platforms and social networks so easily to create scarcity-oriented campaigns. (Constantinides, 2006) Scarcity messages are often amplified through influencer marketing and targeted advertising.

Global south: Digital reach is growing, but traditional media such as radio, television (Kheeshadeh, 2017) still wields power, particularly in rural regions. Technology may be less available here, forcing marketers to make the best use of all types of media. Community Testimonials: In many communities, word-of-mouth endorsements are powerful (and can be tapped into)

3. Cultural and Societal Norms

Global North: Individualistic cultures, such as those predominant in the North, tend to respond positively to the prepossession of unique and exclusive possessions (Hofstede, 2001). Scarcity appeals to personal status and self-expression. Scarcity may also take root because high time-pressure is so culturally normal.

Global South: Group cultural beliefs tend to encourage an orientation that emphasizes community and sharing. Scarcity messages must connect to communal goals and common gains. Transparency and ethical marketing practices are essential here, and consumers may be wary of manipulative or excessive scarcity techniques. (Triandis, 2018)

4. Trust and Authenticity:

Global North: Consumers are sophisticated and understand manipulation. The brands need to be transparent to not damage the reputation (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977).. Then again, scarcity messages must be credible.

Global South: Trust is key and tends to be formed through relationships and connections within a community. Scarcity marketing needs to be legitimate, lest customers see it as exploitation. Brands need to invest (even more so) in building trust and rapport in consumers. Transparency and corporate social responsibility initiatives can be extremely powerful marketing tools. (Kang & Hustvedt 2014).

5. Examples

Global North: Scarcity marketing in the form of Apple's launch of a new iPhone. At the time of launching, limited stock, long waiting line, and the effect of being one of the first owners create a very strong effect of scarcity (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Moreover, luxury brands e.g., Louis Vuitton, manage supply strategically to keep the luxury perception and desirability. (Kapferer & Bastien, 2013)

In the Global North, scholars have turned to psychological characteristics as a potential explanation for the success of scarcity marketing. For example, studies show that perceived scarcity creates a sense of urgency, making consumers act faster. Furthermore, scarcity can create the perception of social proof, where consumers assume that when a product is in short supply, it must be a sign of quality and that their peers are fighting to be the first in line to get it, right?

Global South: In India, a study found that communicating scarcity around limited-edition, local products spoke to consumers, not only filling the need for a product, but also tapping into cultural pride. Also, in South African Mobile network operators regularly run time-limited promotions on airtime or data bundles driving urgency and prompting purchasing by consumers. (Prior, 2019) In India, Flipkart — a top e-commerce platform — used a scarcity marketing strategy by only allowing a limited number of very desired products per person during sales.

Most of the research surrounding scarcity marketing in the Global South has so far addressed its impact on consumer behaviour with regard to poverty and resource constraints. For example, an experiment in rural India showed how people engaged in sustainable consumer behaviour during scarcity because they developed the awareness of saving the environment for future use (Maduku, 2023)

Though both the Global North and Global South adopt scarcity marketing strategies, the type of products and services marketed differ across these contexts, as do the motivations underpinning consumer behaviour. The Global North is about luxury goods and false urgency The Global South is about basics and real necessity.

3.3 Scarcity Marketing Trends: What's Next

Traditionally, scarcity marketing is defined as using limited availability to increase demand, but the old playbook with respect to scarcity marketing is evolving to meet different consumer expectations and technological capabilities. This section discusses emerging trends that are redefining scarcity marketing, with particular emphasis on the rise of sustainable and ethical practices to better align with their environmentally conscious connections and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics in personalizing experiences of scarcity.

3.31 Ethical Scarcity Marketing and Sustainability

This raises yet another red flag, as the growing public awareness (and concern) about ethical consumption shines a light on the potential for manipulation in scarcity marketing. As a result, a significant trend is the move to sustainable and ethical scarcity-marketing. This means adopting scarcity tactics that are transparent, honest and not taking advantage of consumer fears.

For example, brands are highlighting the limited quantities available because of responsible sourcing or small-batch production. This creates an interesting story that links the scarcity with value, which resonates with customers that value sustainability. work on ethical consumers, they are individuals who are more

willing to buy from brands that share their values. This requires, instead, a shift from strictly manipulative scarcity tactics to transparent, justified strategies. (Trudel and Cotte 2009)

3.32 The Emergence of Personalized Scarcity Experiences – Role of AI

This means instead of generalized “limited stock” notices, AI can provide personalized patterns of browsing, purchase history, individual consumer behaviour. This enables marketers to offer personalized offers with short windows of availability or draw attention to products whose stock is running low, depending on the predicted preferences of each individual.

For instance, AI-powered recommendation algorithms can track products a customer has expressed interest in and alert them when inventory is low, with a message such as "Only 3 left in your size!" For example, algorithms for dynamic pricing can alter price in line with current demand and individual customer profiles, generating a sense of urgency and scarcity for particular customer segments. Scientific research conducted by (Kumar et al 2016) revealed that one of the most influential forms of marketing is personalization and it has a beneficial effect on customer engagement and conversion rates. These principles can be applied to marketing scarcity to create a more nuanced and potentially more effective approach than just announcing scarcity on mass scale. But it's important to recognize the moral issues with confidentiality of data and the possibility of manipulative tailoring, which call for cautious use and awareness.

As more and more consumers are becoming more informed and value-oriented, new trends in scarcity marketing highlight a move towards the transparency and ethical implications of marketing with scarcity. At the same time, the rise of AI and data analytics is making it possible to offer more sophisticated and personalized experiences of scarcity. Additionally, future studies could examine the long-term implications of these emerging patterns on consumer behaviour and brand allegiance; and transparency of personalized scarcity tactics in terms of their ethical repercussions.

Gaps and Limitations

Although the literature on scarcity marketing has expanded considerably, important gaps persist — especially within the varying economic contexts of the Global North and Global South. These gaps leave us little understanding of the nuanced impact and long-term implications of such strategies. In this section, we highlight four areas with significant potential for more research: the intersection of scarcity marketing and sustainability across different economies, the longitudinal impact of scarcity on trust and brand loyalty, and the use of scarcity principles in the emerging industries.

1. How Sustainability and Scarcity Marketing Intersect in Diverse Economies:

The study regarding how scarcity marketing interacts with goals of sustainability, especially in various economical situations, represents a substantial research vacuum. Because most studies approached scarcity simply as a manipulative means of generating demand, they neglected its larger social and environmental consequences. The use of scarcity techniques in Global North, which has a predominantly consumption-oriented culture, might have a completely different impact in Global South, where resource scarcity is quite often a lived experience. More in-depth research is needed on how scarcity marketing can support or undermine sustainable consumption patterns. Does it reward responsible purchasing or create undue demand and wasteful practices? Furthermore, do cultural values and different economic systems differing between the Global North and South moderate the effect of scarcity appeals regarding sustainability and overconsumption?

2. The lasting impact of scarcity marketing on brand trust and loyalty

Another important aspect that needs more research is the long-term effects of scarcity marketing on trust and loyalty to the brand. Although some prior work indicates that scarcity can increase value in the short term (Lynn, 1992), how repeated (or perceived manipulative) use of scarcity impacts brand attitudes over time is less clear. Does it inspire long-term loyalty or destroy trust, triggering consumer cynicism and brand rage? Scarcity tactics may only work if consumers view their scarcity as real. There is a need for longitudinal studies that measure how consumers respond to scarcity marketing over time and across different geographic regions to fully elucidate the complex relationship between scarcity, brand trust and brand loyalty.

3. Scarcity Marketing in Growing Industries e.g. NFTs, Digital Goods

Moreover, the literature fails to explore fully the application of scarcity marketing across new industries, and especially in the domain of digital goods and Non-Fungible Tokens NFTs. Digital goods are inherently finite as the conditions surrounding conventional scarcity do not necessarily apply. What unique markets are affected by artificial scarcity imposed by limiting access or release of items on consumers and how do consumers react both in perception and behavior? Do the principles of scarcity, as we know them to apply in the real world, hold true in the world of online shopping, or require a slightly different lens of the theory to study the efficacy of the principles? Also, we need to consider the role that cultural background and consumer behavior in Global North and South societies play in the adoption and consumption of novel virtual goods.

4. Limited Longitudinal and Cross-Cultural Studies-

One important note about the literature that is out there is that there is a general lack of strong cross-cultural and longitudinal studies. Most of the existing research is ultimately based on samples from Western, developed economies, which limits conclusions that can be drawn from the findings in these other parts of the world.

The absence of longitudinal studies also limits insights on how the impact of scarcity marketing develops over time. We require broader research to provide us a more nuanced understanding of scarcity marketing in diverse cultures and economic systems in the short and long run.

While existing research on scarcity marketing has offered valuable insights, many gaps exist, notably in understanding its effects in the unprecedentedly diverse economic and cultural contexts of the Global North and South. Future studies should focus on the interplay of scarcity and sustainability, examine the long-term implications on brand trust and loyalty, and probe the subtleties of scarcity marketing in the face of new-age industries.

Conclusion-

This paper has delved into the phenomenon of scarcity marketing in the Global North and Global South. The core human responses to scarcity, like FOMO and loss aversion, don't change much from one economy to the next, but the way they play out and their effects do.

In the Global North, scarcity marketing is a booster for exclusivity, luxury, and technology, manipulating through the digital platforms a sense of urgency and exclusivity. By contrast, the Global South tells a more complex story, as real scarcity is common. For these reasons, scarcity marketing has to be a lot more subtle here around affordability, cultural values, and the importance of trust and community.

This paper also calls for a more sustainable and ethical use of scarcity marketing, with greater consideration for Global South consumers who are vulnerable to exploitation. AI and access to data creates distortion and risk, allowing for the achievement of scarcity in a personalized way, but this also provokes

new challenges around data privacy and potential manipulation.

This study also recognises some limitations. First, despite the richness of literature reviewed, it needs further enhancement, especially empirical studies focusing on the Global South. On the second hand, the above paper failed to discuss the deep reasoning of ethical impacts in AI driven scarcity marketing. Lastly, the study is mainly theoretical and does not provide much empirical evidence to support all its claims. Together, this study provides areas of foundational knowledge for scarcity marketing in both the Global North and Global South. Understanding these diverse settings allows marketers to create marketing strategies and practices that are more relevant, ethical, and sustainable, aligning with the values and priorities of consumers.

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