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The Impact of Scarcity Strategies on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour: A Case Study of Dubai Chocolate

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Abstract. In the digital economy, scarcity marketing and social media amplification shape consumer buying behaviour, and viral food products offer a compelling empirical context. This research will investigate the emergence of Dubai Chocolate and the role of scarcity and social media in consumer purchase behaviour. The research examines how FIX Dessert Chocolatier's limited supply helped establish its perceived exclusivity, value, and curiosity, and how TikTok and influencer marketing quickly increased awareness and demand. These strategies also brought risks, including paying too much for scarce items, buying out of FOMO, confusion, and herd mentality with imitating items. The study suggests solutions for these problems: increase price transparency and official restocking systems, increase authenticity in social media marketing, and increase product authentication and supply-chain transparency. The results indicate that creating scarcity can help build consumer interest and can help spur rapid growth for a brand, yet too much scarcity and FOMO can lead to decreased consumer trust and spur less calculated purchases. Hence, businesses should weigh the pros and cons of exclusivity while maintaining clear communication and consumer safeguards. The study offers actionable takeaways for viral brands looking to deploy social media and scarcity tactics to sustain their consumer relationships.

Keywords: Dubai Chocolate, Scarcity Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Intention and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

1. Introduction

1.1. Research context and phenomenon overview

Social media websites like TikTok and Instagram have been growing their impact on consumer buying with viral videos and the recommendations of influencers in recent years. Dubai chocolate is one of the most obvious examples of how this development has been clearly displayed in one product: the product from Dubai's FIX Dessert Chocolatier. Its most renowned product is Can't Get Knafeh of It, which is a mixture of milk chocolate, pistachio cream, and knafeh-inspired kataifi, a delicious Middle Eastern pastry. Since its founding in 2021, FIX has made headlines globally, following a viral TikTok video that showcased the chocolate being opened and tasted, which had garnered more than 70 million views as of August 2024, and the demand extended beyond the UAE [1]. Scarcity and exclusivity were also factors in the popularity of Dubai chocolate. According to

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FoodNavigator, the handmade production of FIX was only about 500 bars per day, and the products ran out of stock within minutes. At first, having the chocolate was elusive and was delivered on the Deliveroo app in Dubai, so it was highly sought after and increased in value. Based on research, it was concluded that scarcity, in general, has a positive effect on product desirability and purchase intention; thus, it could be inferred that, on the contrary, social media reinforced the effect of scarcity by making Dubai chocolate seem desirable and popular [1].

Thus, Dubai chocolate is a good case study as it relates to the effects of scarcity and social media on purchase behaviour. Rarity can drive up the perceived value and interest in a product, but it can also lead to impulsive buying, paying for something above its actual value, and the FOMO mentality.

1.2. Theoretical foundations and scarcity marketing

Scarcity marketing refers to strategies that emphasize a product's limited availability, such as limited quantities, time, or high demand. A meta-analysis by Hamilton et al., covering 416 effect sizes from 131 studies, found that scarcity increases a consumer's perceived value and desirability, which can influence their purchase intentions [1]. However, its impact depends on the type of scarcity and the product, for example, limited-quantity scarcity, since Song et al. found that scarcity messages can increase purchase intentions partly because consumers feel competition to get the product [2]. If there is a shortage of the product and/or quantity, then the consumers may feel a greater urgency to buy the product, which increases the incentive for them to buy the product. But scarcity is not always good: Biraglia found that when consumers were unable to obtain products promoted with a scarcity appeal, they might have a negative response and be more likely to switch to other brands [3]. This means that though a shortage can stimulate demand, too much can actually cause it to decline, depending on the reaction of the consumers to the shortage.

Another key element is social media – TikTok, Instagram and others influence what consumers want and what is trending. Dinh et al. revealed that the influence of FOMO on influencer exposure and purchase intention was significant [4]. Likewise, Dinh and Lee discovered that FOMO had a positive impact on conspicuous consumption and social media sharing behaviour [5]. This is especially true of products such as viruses, which the consumer might buy as an element of some popular movement. These relationships are reflected in the Dubai chocolate case. Social media, exclusivity and regional flavours all played their part in its rapid growth, FoodNavigator reported [6]. While there was some limited supply due to actual handmade production, high demand and restricted distribution also contributed to the limited availability of the product.

Overall, it is found that a lack may lead the consumer to perceive the value more and therefore, increase the desire to buy, and social media may lead to an increase in FOMO and therefore demand. However, negative reactions can also be the result of scarcity, as the consumer may perceive this as unfair or feel that the product is over-hyped.

1.3. Research gaps and problem statement

The scarcity marketing, purchase intention and social-media influence have been extensively researched, but there is a lack of research specifically on viral foods like Dubai chocolate. Scarcity has been studied extensively in a laboratory environment or in the context of online shopping without considering the social media aspect in the context of a real-world food trend. For instance, Hamilton et al. discovered that, in many studies, scarcity could affect a consumer's desire to buy a product, but did not seek to determine the dynamics between scarcity and TikTok virality with a

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culturally unique product, such as Dubai chocolate. Dinh et al. also concluded that FOMO can reinforce the link between exposure to influencers and purchase intentions, but in a study that did not specifically examine viral foods [4].

Another is the possible "scarcity effects". Limited supply can drive up demand, but consumers may rush, buy a product for a higher price from resellers, or may become frustrated if they cannot have a product. According to FoodNavigator, the original retail price for the chocolate in Dubai was approximately US$20, and reseller prices could be even higher. The popularity of the product has also resulted in many substitute and imitation products, the meaning of the product is not always clear, raising the question of consumer trust and what can be considered "Dubai chocolate" [7].

Hence, this study aims to explore the interaction between scarcity, social media, FOMO, perceived value, and consumer behaviour in the case of Dubai chocolate.

2. Case study: the Dubai Chocolate phenomenon

Dubai chocolate has gone global thanks, at least in part, to the popularity of bar maker FIX Dessert Chocolatier's Can't Get Knafeh of It bar. FIX was launched in Dubai by Sarah Hamouda, and she based her product on knafeh by mixing milk chocolate, pistachio cream and crispy kataifi. This blend of look, feel, and Middle Eastern taste was a differentiator from traditional chocolate. The food creator behind the TikTok video, Maria Vehera, saw her video go viral, racking up over 70 million views by August 2024, in part due to social media, as reported by FoodNavigator. The National later said that the video had reached 90 million views. With reviews and reaction videos appearing from people and food creators, the product's awareness was quick to grow beyond Dubai.

Meanwhile, the supply of the original product was restricted. At its height, FIX products were accessible via Deliveroo in Dubai at fixed delivery times with just two time slots initially being available as the company worked to ramp up production. This resulted in a demand that rapidly outpaced supply. The chocolate may be in and out of the stores in a matter of minutes, and resellers sold the chocolate at a much higher rate than the original retail price reported by FoodNavigator [6]. The craze didn't stop with FIX; other countries' chocolate shops and retailers developed their own versions, using chocolate, pistachio and kataifi. These versions were spotted in supermarkets and online retailers and included products of well-known companies, the National reported [8].

So, Dubai chocolate is a good example in the real world of a combination of scarcity and social media virality. Because there was limited availability, this product was seen as exclusive and social media helped build up awareness and the need to have it, making it easy to see and hard to acquire. Such an interaction is a good foundation for discussing the pros and cons of scarcity marketing. Table 1 collects the key figures of this phenomenon, giving an extensive empirical foundation that examines this phenomenon from two perspectives: on the one hand, as scarcity, and on the other, as viral social media.

Table 1. Core metrics of the Dubai Chocolate phenomenon

Dimension	Key Indicator	Data Point / Observation
Product Origin	Formulation	Milk chocolate, pistachio cream, kataifi (Knafeh-inspired)
Social Media Virality	Peak Video Views	>70 million (Aug 2024); >90 million (subsequent reports)
Supply Constraints	Production Capacity	~500 bars/day (handmade)

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Table 1. (continued)

Distribution	Sales Channel	Deliveroo-exclusive; limited daily time slots
Market Dynamics	Sell-out Rate	Minutes after release
Pricing & Arbitrage	Retail vs. Resale	~US$20 (retail) vs significantly higher (resale)
Market Expansion	Imitation Proliferation	Widespread supermarket & online generic versions

3. Analysis of scarcity-driven consumer behaviour

3.1. Positive externalities of scarcity Strategies

3.1.1. Premium perception and consumer curiosity

The rarity of Dubai Chocolate made it more desirable and valuable. Generally, the results of Hamilton et al.'s meta-analysis of 131 studies show that scarcity is likely to make things seem more valuable and more desirable to purchase [1]. This effect can be seen in Dubai Chocolate's limited availability. Purchasing the chocolate wasn't just about the chocolate itself; it was about the fact that the chocolate was hard to come by and associated with being exclusive. Geographical barriers for international consumers to buy the original FIX chocolate prevented consumers from accessing it, as it was only sold in Dubai. This restriction did not lead to a decrease in interest but was a part of the product's appeal. This was also seen in the resale prices of the product. The original food bar, which weighed 200g, retailed for around US$20, and resellers in other countries charged significantly more, FoodNavigator reported [6]. While not entirely an effect of FIX, these increased prices do indicate that some consumers were willing to pay more to compensate for the shortage of product. There was also a gap, a void, a lack of information, which stimulated curiosity. People who keep seeing these people talk about a product that is not so easy to obtain may be more interested in knowing what makes it special. This can cause them to go and look for reviews, view tasting videos and eventually attempt to buy it. The unique look of Dubai Chocolate, its pistachio filling and crunchy shell, also made it very fit for such online content.

Therefore, the scarcity contributed to creating the premium and exclusive image of Dubai Chocolate and increased the curiosity and purchase intentions. But this effect can only occur when consumers are convinced of the scarcity. The same strategy can have negative reactions if scarcity is perceived as artificial or misleading.

3.1.2. Social media amplification and viral spillover

The second big positive impact was the interplay between scarcity and social media. Social media has played a pivotal role in making a local product a global trend, disseminating awareness to consumers and influencers at a rapid pace. Relying primarily on word-of-mouth marketing, Dubai Chocolate attracted attention with shared videos and reviews of their respective experiences. According to FoodNavigator, two key drivers of its success in global expansion were social media and exclusivity [6]. This had a multiplier effect. A few consumers were the first ones to find the product and post about it online, hence making their followers aware of the product. Some of these followers then took to creating their content, which brought even more focus on the chocolate. This was accentuated by scarcity, as consumers could demonstrate not only what the product was like,

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but also how hard it was to obtain. Social proof by video of out-of-stock products, queues, and limited availability increased people's interest in trying it. There is also evidence of the correlation between social media and buying behaviour. Dinh et al. discovered that exposure to influencers positively influenced purchase intention, particularly FOMO consumers [4]. In the case of Dubai Chocolate, if the product was scarce, it made it seem like it was more difficult to obtain, and social media indicated that many others were purchasing it. All these combined made it even more desirable and contributed to Dubai Chocolate becoming a worldwide trend.

3.2. Behavioural risks and market distortions

3.2.1. Scarcity-induced overpayment and cognitive biases

Scarcity can increase the perceived value, but sometimes it can cause consumers to pay more attention to obtaining the product rather than determining if it is worth the cost. At Dubai Chocolate's heyday, the original bar of 200g was worth approximately US$20, and resellers demanded a premium price for the same bar [6]. Part of this increased willingness to pay may have been due to the FOMO effect. But for some consumers, the product may have seemed worth the price due to taste, novelty, or cultural interest. Another aspect of scarcity that Hamilton et al. discovered is that not all consumers of a product are affected by scarcity equally [1]. Generally, there is a positive relationship between scarcity and demand and willingness to pay, but excessive scarcity can lead to hasty and less rational purchasing.

3.2.2. Social media–driven herding and FOMO

Another big issue is a herd mentality effect: people are influenced by others and don't make their own decisions. This can be helped by social media as consumers see what others are purchasing, reviewing and sharing. A notable instance is the Dubai Chocolate trend. The popularity of the product became more apparent as more people began posting videos of themselves trying it. A high number of views and reactions may cause consumers to believe that it was something that everybody wanted to try. This effect can be even stronger with the influence of FOMO. Dinh et al. discovered that the FOMO level is positively related to purchase intention with regard to influencer exposure [4]. This is applicable to Dubai Chocolate as it was a phenomenon born out of social media that expanded chocolate beyond the confines of just a bar. Those who didn't sample it could feel they were missing out on something they could enjoy that others were enjoying. This means that some people may be initially drawn to the flavour or the ingredients, but then, when they hear others' experiences, they may want to be a part of it. The results in the study by Dinh and Lee also suggest that FOMO positively affected conspicuous consumption and social media sharing behaviour [5]. It can become an issue when social factors outweigh personal tastes. The company can sell the product even when the consumer is not aware of their need or desire. So there can be a vicious circle with people buying because others are, and thinking that if they don't buy, they will miss out.

3.2.3. Authenticity, confusion and cross-cultural trust erosion

Another big issue is herding behaviour, where individuals are influenced by what others do, instead of making a decision themselves. This can be more effective on social media, where consumers are exposed to what others are purchasing and sharing all the time. In the Dubai Chocolate trend, viral videos, high views and positive reactions made the product seem like something everyone wanted to

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try. This effect may be exacerbated by FOMO. Dinh et al. reported that the influence of being exposed to influencers was stronger on the purchase intention of consumers who experienced higher FOMO [4]. Likewise, Dinh and Lee discovered that FOMO led to conspicuous consumption and social media sharing [5]. This illustrates how Dubai Chocolate became more than just a food product; it became a trend people wanted to be associated with. This can cause consumers to go with the herd, purchasing simply because other people are purchasing. Scarcity and social media can then trigger a cycle whereby people purchase because they know others are purchasing and don't want to miss out.

4. Strategic interventions and managerial implications

4.1. Institutionalizing price transparency to curb speculative overpayment

FIX should increase transparency and retain a certain level of exclusivity to tackle the problem of overpayment and cognitive biases due to scarcity. One solution is for the brand to come up with an official waitlist or restock, for consumers who are disappointed with the initial release, to buy the product at the official price later. Such a system directly addresses the switching intentions that Biraglia calls the downside of unattainable scarcity appeal [9]. So, FIX could continue to release limited versions, but make clear that there is a better option for those who aren't. Secondly, the official platforms of FIX shall prominently show its suggested retail price and alert people to the unofficial resale price. This would bring consumer information closer to reality, as it would help to differentiate the actual price of the product from the price premium that is generated by its scarcity. Scarcity can be a factor to influence purchase intention, but the effects of scarcity depend on the consumers' interpretation of the situation [1, 2]. If consumers had better price clarity, FIX could take advantage of the scarcity without incentivizing unnecessary and impulsive consumption.

4.2. Reorienting social-media narratives from scarcity theatre to product storytelling

FIX should shift its focus from primarily highlighting how hard the chocolate is to get to more authentic product experiences to help curb herding behaviour and FOMO. However, Dinh et al. discovered that for consumers with higher FOMO, exposure to influencers may be more influential in their purchase intention. Hence, influencers could target the flavour, the content and the process of making chocolate and its relation to Dubai and Knafeh. As for the products themselves, FIX states that it is a fusion of Middle Eastern flavours with chocolate-making traditions [10]. The brand could also motivate user-generated content where people focus on experiences instead of just queues or sold-out or high-demand items. Online tasting events and educational content about where the product comes from might help to further take the focus off "everyone is buying this" and toward "here's why people like this product". In the long run, it may contribute to increasing brand loyalty and not just for FOMO [4, 5].

4.3. Deploying verifiable signals to restore authenticity and cross-border trust

FIX should make it easier to identify genuine products in order to clear the confusion over products in the market and the authenticity of "Dubai Chocolate." The company could improve trademark protection and explicitly inform customers about the products it makes; that is, the ones that are made under the FIX brand. This is especially applicable in light of the legal challenge faced using "Dubai Chocolate" as a product description [7, 9]. A QR code verification system could also enable

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consumers to verify the authenticity of a product and basic information on how it was produced and what is in it. The results of academic studies indicate that QR code-based food traceability systems are acceptable to consumers and that traceability information can enhance consumer confidence [11, 12]. Traceability is also a well-defined regulatory framework in the EU, and generally, food businesses have to be able to trace forward and backward to their immediate supplier and consumer. Lastly, there's an urgent need to establish the fact that FIX is Dubai-based and inspired by Dubai culture when it tries to enter international markets. The brand does not just emphasize scarcity but describes its value by its recipe and ingredients, production and cultural identity. This would lessen the confusion between the original product and imitations and would help to build consumer confidence in the longer term.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key findings

The findings of this study were that the scarcity and social media were intertwined with Dubai Chocolate's swift expansion. The scarcity added to the perception of importance, value, and consumer interest, and social media contributed to the spreading of awareness and making a local product an international trend. These measures, however, also brought some issues into the picture. The scarcity might cause customers to pay a higher price or rush to buy because of FOMO. Meanwhile, people might come to engage in "herding" because they feel compelled to purchase something just because everyone else is doing it. Imitation products also led to confusion as to authenticity and may reduce consumer confidence. To sum up, rarity can be a great marketing tactic, and its effects are contingent on the fairness and transparency in implementation.

5.2. Research significance

This study is valuable for companies in the burgeoning viral food and social media marketing industry. As the Dubai Chocolate case demonstrates, building demand on the premise of the scarcity of the product can create a lot of hype for a brand, but overdependence on the scarcity and FOMO can pose challenges for the consumer and brand in the future. Businesses ought to be able to utilize scarcity in combination with clear valuation, real social media interaction and product verification. The study's findings have implications for consumers regarding the need to consider their own preferences and the actual value of the product, as opposed to buying because the product is hard to find or a hot trend online. More generally, this can lead to a healthier viral marketing, consumer behaviour and brand relationships.

5.3. Limitations and future study

This study is primarily secondary and based on one particular case, thus individual differences in consumer behaviour and the range of viral food products are not fully reflected. It also can't measure the extent to which the scarcity or FOMO influenced everyone's decision. Future research can be conducted where surveys, interviews or experiments can be performed to gather primary data and compare consumers with varying levels of FOMO. Another area of cross-cultural study could be whether consumers are different in how they are affected by scarcity and social media trends across countries. This would give a wider perception of the impact of scarcity-based marketing on consumer behaviour in the digital economy.

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