

Is stolen water really sweeter? The impact of unethical consumption on consumers' satisfaction and recommendations

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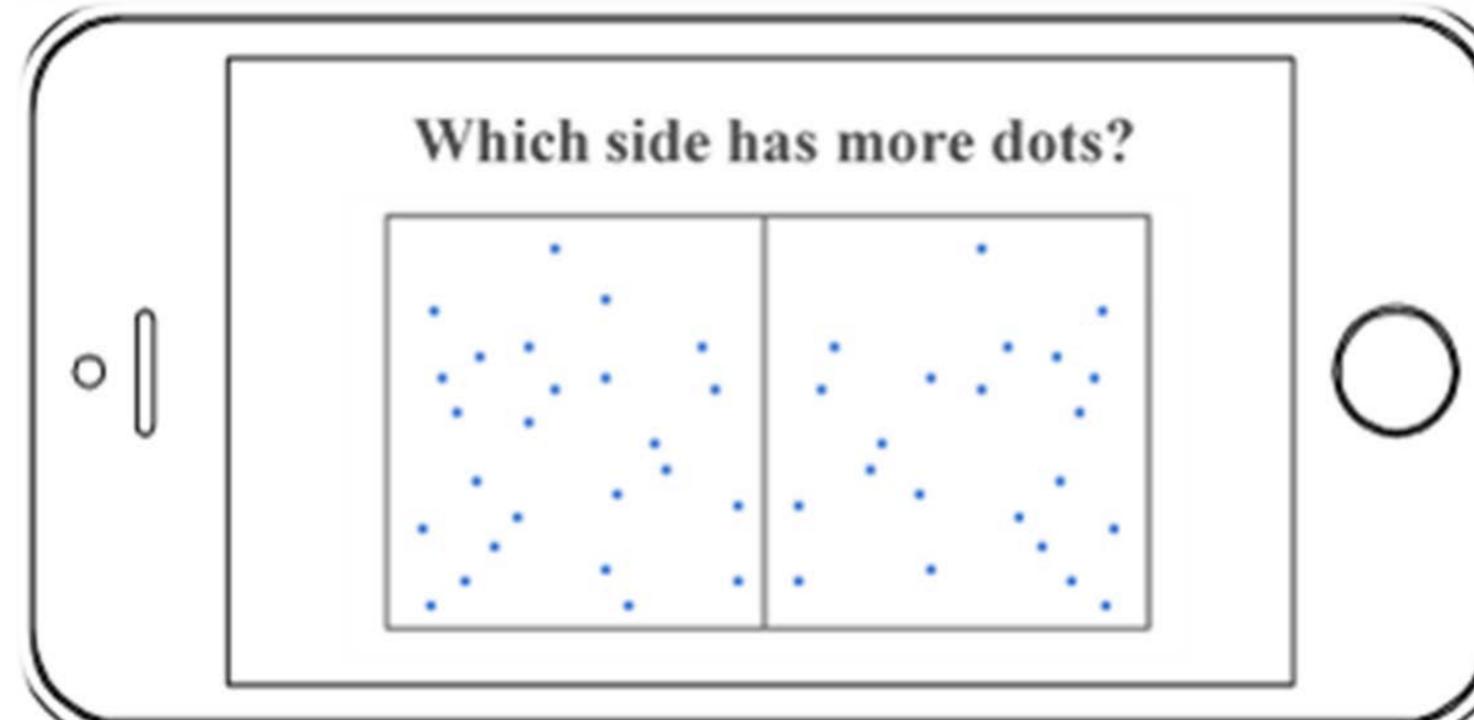
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Introduction

Unethical consumption hurts companies while favorable consumer reviews benefits them. In this research we explore the link between consumers' unethical consumption and their subsequent firm reviews. Do unethical consumers experience guilt that leads them to reparative acts such as positive firm reviews, are the two unrelated, or do unethical consumers 'blame' the firm for their ethical digression, causing them to further mistreat the firm by reporting lower satisfaction levels and less positive reviews?

Methods

In the guise of a usability study, participants used an app that required them to choose which of two briefly presented squares (2 seconds) contained more dots. One square contained 25 dots while the other contained 20/22/24 dots (according to condition).



Critically, there were two different payoff structures (control vs. cheating condition). Last, participants evaluated the app and its features and provided a review:

How would you rate the app in overall?



How would you rate the following aspects of the app?

The graphic design  2.5

The difficulty of the task  4

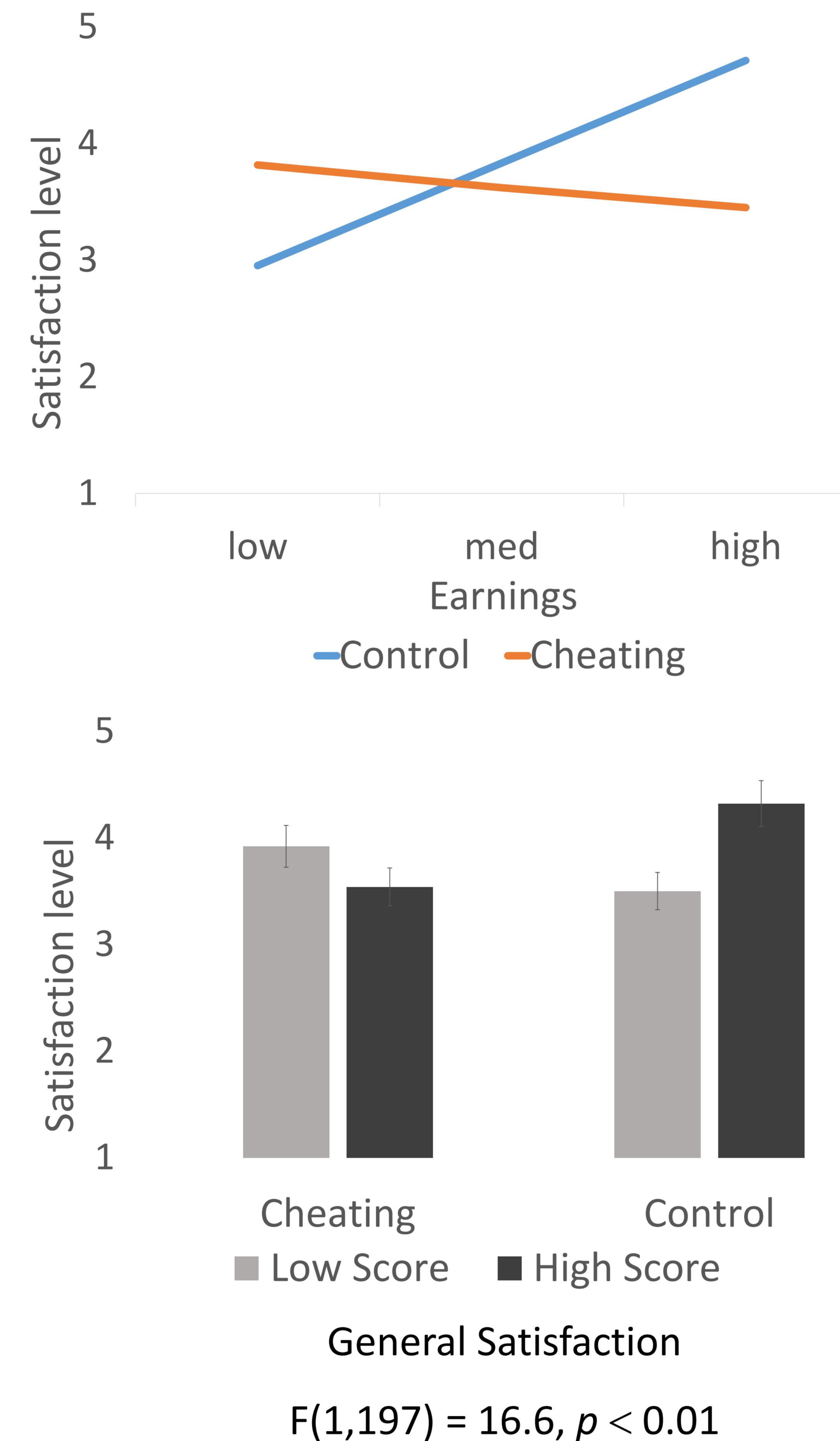
The app's ease of use  3

Study 1: Cheating is associated with lower satisfaction

Control payoff condition: higher pay for choosing the side with more dots (incentive-for-accuracy)

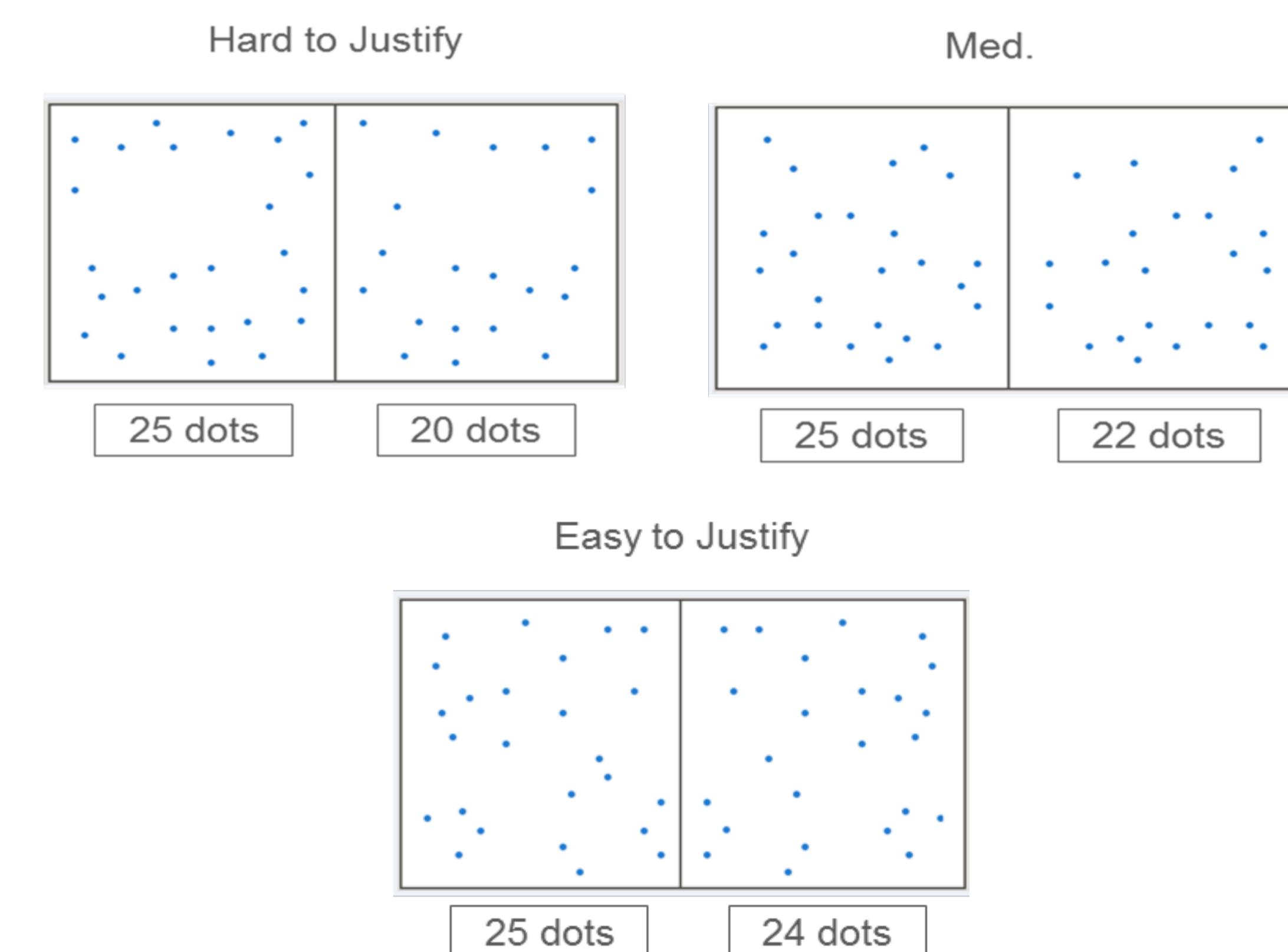
Cheating payoff condition: higher pay for choosing the right hand side (incentive-for-right).

N = 201 (65% male, Mean age = 33.4)

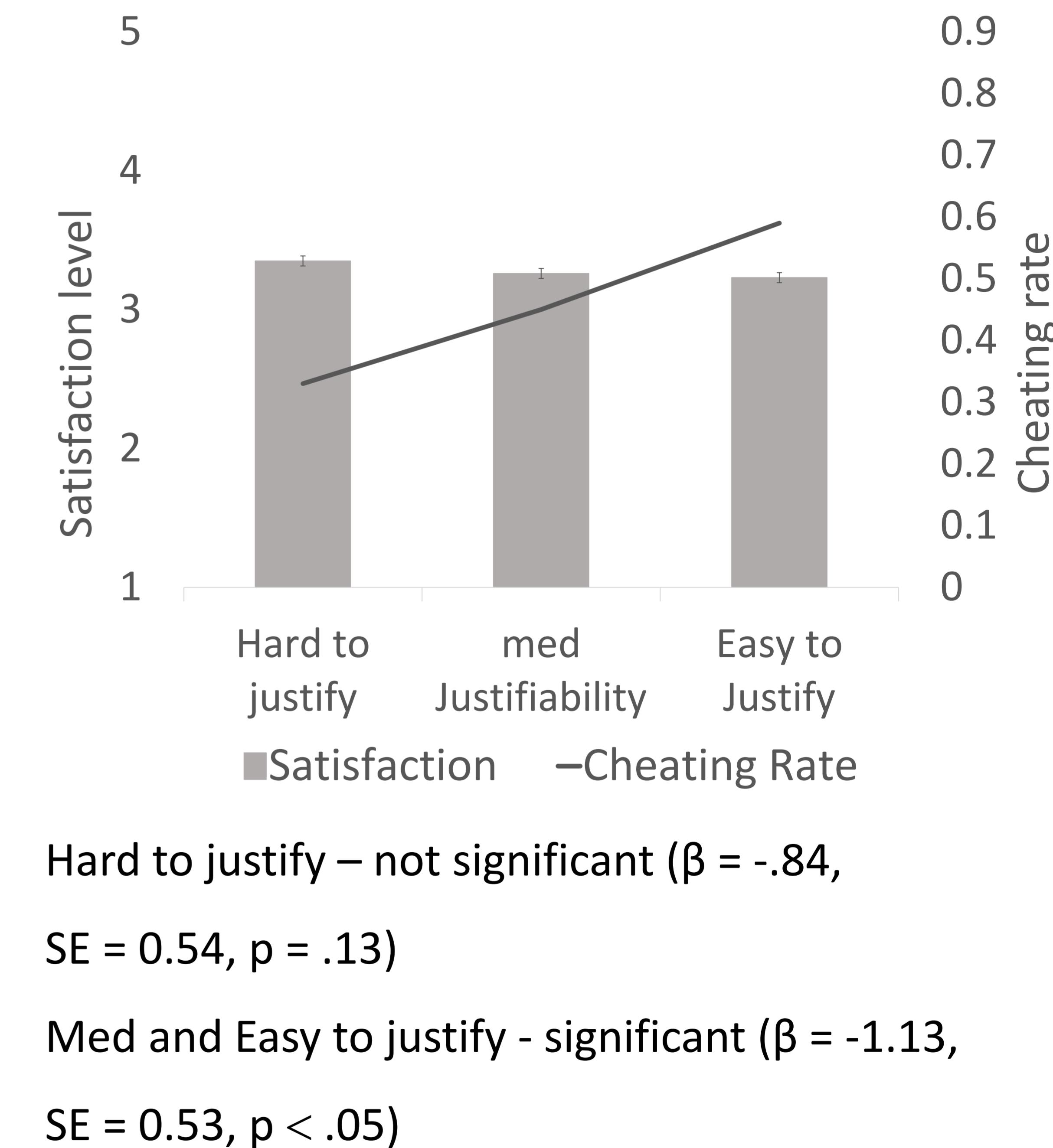


Study 2: Cheating leads to lower satisfaction only when cheating is relatively easy to justify

Three cheating conditions according to justification difficultness.



N = 462 (72% female, Mean age = 39)



Summary

We find that those that cheat more (and earn more) report lower levels of satisfaction. However, justification moderates the effect. In the med and easy to justify conditions increased cheating was associated with lower satisfaction level. By contrast, in the hard to justify condition (i.e. easiest task), cheating rate was not associated with satisfaction level.

Implications

This research considers unethical behavior as a cause, rather than an effect. In addition, it explores for the first time the relation between consumers' unethical consumption and their eWOM. Finally, it provides evidence for a distancing account.

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