

# Do Products Labeled Retailer “Exclusive” Affect Consumer Behavior?

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*Many large retailers offer “advertised as retailer exclusive products” or AREPs. Retailers work with manufacturers to produce these unique, retailer exclusive versions of otherwise common products. While not all retailer exclusive products are advertised as “exclusive,” AREPs are advertised and labeled as retailer exclusives. The retailer exclusive product attributes are often “trivial,” but still may add customer value and discourage price comparison shopping. Here, two experiments assess AREPs effects on consumers. Contrary to managerial expectations, the findings suggest that AREP exclusivity promotions are ineffective at influencing consumers, but that the choice of exclusive, seemingly “trivial” attribute can sometimes be a significant negative influence on consumers. Further, the authors suggest contexts that may encourage specific responses to retailer exclusive product promotions and trivial attributes.*

*Keywords: exclusivity, exclusivity promotions, perceived scarcity, trivial attributes, showrooming*

## **INTRODUCTION**

A current and widespread trend in the marketplace is major retailers promoting “advertised as retailer exclusive products,” also known as “AREPs” (Upshaw *et al.*, 2017). Most notably, these advertising retailer exclusivity promotions are *much more* than simply a sales-promotion or a luxury item promotion. AREPs represent a unique product offering that is both differentiated and value-added while being exclusively available only through a particular venue. A cursory look among the ads and aisles of local mass market retailers such as Best Buy, Walmart, or Target as well as online sites such as Amazon.com reveals dozens of retailer-exclusive products. Figures 1 and 5 show a variety of real-world AREPs, and as illustrated in Upshaw *et al.* (2017) these exclusive offerings may range from exclusive DVDs and Blu-rays, to exclusive clothing items, toys, glasses, cell phones, vacuum cleaners, headphones, and straightening irons, just to name a few.

Yet surprisingly, no other scholarly research identifying or studying AREPs has emerged in the literature. While AREPs continue to grow in use among practitioners, scholarly research lags behind. Even a call from the *Journal of Retailing* to investigate retailer-exclusive product assortments as a growing “innovation in retail” (Sorescu *et al.*, 2011) was not answered until 2017 (Upshaw *et al.*, 2017). Considering the interest in retailer exclusive promotions and products in both academia and practice, our work hopes to lessen this gap in the literature. In particular, we examine how consumers behave in response to exclusive promotions, how individual consumer traits and attitudes affect consumer responses to exclusive promotions, and how the number and type of product attributes, in relation to exclusivity, affect consumer behavior.

## CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Continued growth of competition and service offerings from online retailers has not only changed consumer shopping expectations and behaviors but necessitated swift adjustments and responses among brick and mortar (BandM) retailers. Because competing on price may lower profit, many BandM retailers have engaged in the AREP strategy in order to differentiate their products and entice customer “buy-in.”

AREPs offer the competitive benefit of exclusive differentiation when consumers compare one BandM retailer to another. AREPs may act primarily as a promotional tactic used to deter price competition from internet rivals such as Amazon.com. Such exclusive products potentially make price comparisons difficult and could counter the potential for “showrooming” among consumers (Upshaw *et al.*, 2017). In showrooming, a customer physically inspects or looks at a product in a BandM store and then uses a mobile device to buy the same product online at a lower price than provided by the BandM retailer (Ellsworth, 2021). While retail experts warned in the 2010’s of the menace of showrooming to physical retailing, in-store losses were eventually thought to be compensated by the opposite practice of “webrooming,” the act of a consumer shopping online then buying the product in-store (Ryan, 2021).

An example of an AREP would be a retailer offering a popular movie on DVD with exclusive features. The exclusive product might contain the normal film, which is indistinguishable from the same product at other retailers, but might also contain additional exclusive features, such as alternate endings, retailer-specific packaging, or other exclusive features. Advertisements featuring the product would include exclusivity language such as “(retailer name) exclusive” or “only at (retailer name)”. Again, Figures 1 and 5 show a variety of AREPs. Figure 1 follows and Figure 5 is in the appendix. The experimental design section, featuring Figures 2 and 3, also has AREP images based on real-world products.

Certainly, the rise of smartphones and internet enabled devices have made in-store price comparisons easier. Concern over the issue of showrooming occurred when the retailer Target sent an urgent letter to its vendors suggesting they make special products to differentiate themselves from competitors and make price-comparisons with competitive products less relevant (Zimmerman, 2012<sub>b</sub>). Thus, as an ongoing strategy for over a decade, AREPs are typically meant to counter “showrooming” behavior and specifically negate lower prices found at online retailers (Zimmerman, 2012<sub>a</sub>; Zimmerman, 2012<sub>b</sub>; Zacks Equity Research, 2013; Pamar, 2010). Instead of the lowest price, the exclusivity – the availability of a unique product perceived as “scarce” at other retailers - *is* the promotion. Simply put, AREPs provide differentiation, and their appeal is in their exclusivity and exclusive features, not price. They may also appeal as a form of scarcity promotion, but rather than traditional limited-time scarcity or limited-quality scarcity, only the number of retailers, one, is scarce (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2011). Conceptually, this aligns with scarcity promotions, where consumers have a “limited opportunity to purchase a product” (Broeder and Wentink, 2021).

**FIGURE 1**  
**EXAMPLES OF ADVERTISED AS RETAILER EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS**

Walmart Exclusive Vinyl Record Color	Target Exclusive Mixer Color	Best Buy Exclusive Movie Steelbook
		

**Advertised Exclusivity Research in Marketing Literature**

Upshaw *et al.* (2017) examined the nature of exclusivity, provided a typology of the different kinds of exclusivity, and discussed the strategies behind various kinds of exclusivity promotions. They noted the presence of “advertised as retailer exclusive products” (AREPs) in the marketplace and contrasted those to products that may be exclusive to a retail chain but are not advertised as such. Store brands, for example, may be exclusive to a chain, but their exclusivity may not be mentioned in promotional materials.

Also, as previously mentioned, AREPs came about as a BandM competitive strategy, but they may also be effective in combating “showrooming.” Overall, the allure of exclusivity is the uniqueness or inherent differentiation associated with the product having qualities that not only make it more valuable, but so unique that other similar competing products are not directly comparable based on price.

Beyond the work of Upshaw *et al.* (2017), no dedicated stream of “exclusivity” research existed and most uses of the term “exclusivity” or “exclusive” seem to have stemmed from discussions of distribution strategies (e.g., Peres and Van den Bulte, 2014; Stennek, 2014; Trivedi, 1998) or luxury goods or brands (e.g., Tynan *et al.*, 2010; Truong *et al.*, 2009). However, the nature of AREPs is that they are often lower priced products that are not luxurious in nature. Published works have examined exclusivity in terms of: prices or deals (Barone and Roy, 2010<sub>ab</sub>), limited edition products (Balachander and Stock, 2009), and luxury brands (Phau and Prendergast, 2000; Truong *et al.*, 2009; Tynan *et al.*, 2010).

Regarding exclusive prices and deals, prior research indicates that consumers who view themselves as belonging to an exclusive audience (e.g., invitation only promotion) tend to consider the exclusive promotion superior to inclusive promotions (Baron and Roy, 2010<sub>b</sub>). Similarly, Söderlund (2019) demonstrated that using the language of “member” and “non-member” in loyalty programs resulted in higher satisfaction for the “member” group. Grewal *et al.* (2011<sub>a</sub>) suggest that exclusive deals “have the greatest appeal to consumers who adopt an independent rather than collectivist self-construal” (p. S47). In fact, Barone and Roy (2010<sub>b</sub>) observed that individuals who scored above average on the “need-for-uniqueness” scale experienced the most interest in exclusive promotions (p. 78). However, they suspected that a exclusive promotion’s capacity to warrant a more favorable appraisal in high need-for-uniqueness individuals was “mediated by the offer’s ability to enable the recipient to engage in self-enhancement” (p. 78).

In another publication, Barone and Roy (2010<sub>a</sub>) confirm that shoppers’ appraisals of exclusive promotions are driven by the need for self-enhancement. Exclusive deals can help consumers with an independent self-construal and high need-for-uniqueness by allowing them to “attain values related to

autonomy” (Barone and Roy, 2010<sub>a</sub>, p. 29). Exclusive “invitation only” promotions appeal to some customers, but potentially alienate others.

### **Trivial Attributes**

Considering that AREPs have unique, exclusive features, some attention should be given to the significance of the number or kinds of attributes found. In particular, labeling a product as “exclusive” gives it one more attribute than its non-exclusive counterpart. For some consumers, an increasing number of minor attributes, even seemingly insignificant attributes, may lead to an increasing interest or valuations of the product (Carpenter *et al.*, 1994, Brown and Carpenter, 2000). Depending upon the context, consumers may find irrelevant, meaningless, or “trivial” attributes “relevant and valuable under certain conditions” (Carpenter *et al.*, 1994, p. 339). Broniarczyk and Gershoff (2003) also point out that in some cases trivial attributes can have positive effects on brand evaluations.

However, the results of using trivial attributes are inconsistent. In some cases, trivial attributes can negatively affect the value of a product by distracting from features that may be more salient to a product’s central purpose (Simonson *et al.*, 1993, 1994). Evidence indicates that they may have “positive or negative effects on choice” (Sun, 2010, p. 1557). Overall, while the effect of trivial attributes on product valuations is subjective and context sensitive, the evidence indicates that trivial attributes can influence consumer behavior. In our work, the “exclusive” label in isolation, too, might be seen as an attribute that adds value to a product.

The number of attributes can also affect consumer impressions, with hedonic products being more positively affected by an increasing number of attributes than utilitarian products (Sela and Berger, 2012). Yet, other work has discovered that providing “additional positive information about a product can result in a less favorable judgment” (Troutman and Shanteau, 1976, p. 101). As with trivial attributes, the quantity of attributes or attribute information available to the consumer also appears influential, but is context sensitive.

### **ELM Theory**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty *et al.* (1983, 1984) proposes that a person tends to process information through one of two routes: a central route (high cognitive processing) or a peripheral route (low cognitive processing). In our work, the exclusivity promotion, and typically, the associated exclusive attributes, may act as a stimulus that differentiates the product from competing alternative brands. That is, the exclusivity promotion initially draws the consumer’s attention and encourages him/her to examine (elaborate highly) on the product’s exclusive feature(s).

Therefore, ELM is offered as the study’s theoretical underpinning. At the time, Petty *et al.* (1983 p. 136) did mention a limitation of ELM: “The accumulated research on persuasion clearly indicates that neither the central nor the peripheral approach alone can account for the diversity of attitude-change results observed” and point out that “involvement” may be a moderator of information processing. Therefore, we included an “attitude toward the product category” scale as a measure of involvement for the products used in our experiment. Others have discussed limitations of ELM as well (e.g. Bitner and Obermiller, 1985; Morris *et al.*, 2005), but Kithen *et al.* (2014), over 30 years after the Petty *et al.*’s original ELM paper, point out that ELM’s widespread use and “strong literature base” is justified due to “the model’s inherent descriptive and accommodating nature and strong academic precedent and investment, rather than an artefact of its generalizability based on a strong replication record” (p. 2045). Therefore, ELM is an appropriate theoretical base for our work.

### **Research Questions**

For AREPs, product traits are the major component of what makes a retail offer “exclusive.” Further, whether or not a product attribute or feature is desirable is usually contingent on individual consumer traits and preferences. However, for exclusive promotions, the interplay between the specific kinds of products, types of attributes, and individual traits on purchase decisions are not well-documented in the academic

literature or in practice. As such, this paper attempts to illuminate these areas of understanding by answering the following three research questions:

**RQ1:** *How do consumers behave in response to exclusive product promotions?*

**RQ2:** *How do individual traits and general attitudes affect how consumers respond to exclusive product promotions?*

**RQ3:** *How does the number of attributes, in relation to exclusivity, affect consumer behavior?*

## EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To help answer these three research questions, two experiments were developed along with a pre-test. The following explains the development of experimental materials to test the research questions.

### Pre-Tests

Online survey pre-tests using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) were conducted for each product image and its associated manipulations. The pre-tests used two different manipulation checks, and the results revealed that the manipulations for each experimental condition worked properly ( $\alpha < .05$ ). The same held true for the main experiment. Additionally, this experiment made use of several previously published scales and a few modified versions of such scales (Bearden *et al.*, 2001; Bruner *et al.*, 2001, 2005). Table 1 offers a list of all scales used in this study, number of items in the scale, and authors associated with the scales. All surveys used in this work included an informed consent passage on the first page of the survey.

**TABLE 1**  
**SCALES**

Scale	# of Items	Author(s)
Attitude Toward Category	5	Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann 2003
Consumer's Need for Uniqueness	8	Tian, Bearden, & Hunter 2001
Price Consciousness	5	Lichtenstein, Ridgeway, & Netemeyer 1993
Value Consciousness	7	Lichtenstein, Ridgeway, & Netemeyer 1993
Attitude Toward Ad	6	Singh 1994
Purchase Intention	3	Putrevu & Lord 1994
Attitude Toward Shopping	5	Sproles & Sproles 1990
Sugraphobia	5	Borges & Babin 2012
Intention to Seek	4	Upshaw and Amyx 2014
Attitude Toward Retailer	3	Upshaw and Amyx 2014
Perceived Item Uniqueness	3	Upshaw and Amyx 2014

### Main Experiments

Two experiments were conducted, each using a different consumer product class: either 1) the vacuum cleaner or 2) DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo pack. Each experiment was a 2 x 2 full factorial, between-subjects experiment with random assignment of subjects. The dependent variables include expected price, highest-price-would-pay, intention-to-seek and purchase intentions while the independent variables include exclusivity and the number of attributes.

Conditions with multiple attributes listed are the "high" attributes conditions, and conditions with no attributes listed are the "low" attributes condition. In the low attributes condition, only the basic product information and name of the retailer are listed. No product attributes other than the name and basic contents of the product and its availability are listed in the "low" attributes conditions. For the vacuum cleaner, the

“high” attributes listed condition contains three additional attributes: “ultra lightweight,” “works on all floor types,” and “red coloring.” Similarly, outside of the retailer’s name and basic product description, the “high” attributes DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo condition contains two listed attributes, additional deleted and extended scenes (30 minutes), and a behind-the-scenes featurette (45 minutes). To test the idea of exclusivity in isolation, a low-attributes x exclusive condition is included in addition to the low-attributes x non-exclusive control condition.

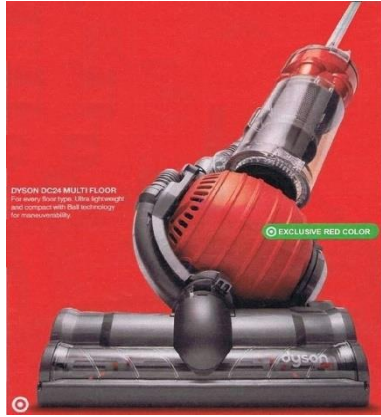
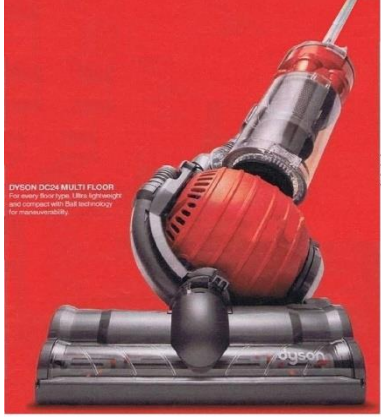
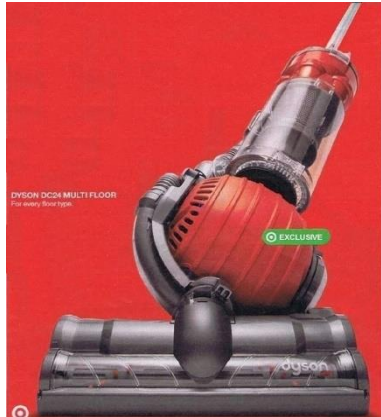
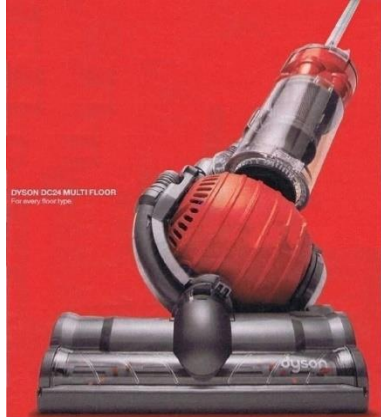
### Manipulation Checks

As encouragement for subjects to spend time looking at the experimental manipulation (ad image), a fifteen second timer had to expire before subjects could move to the next page of the survey. Following the ad image, a series of manipulation checks were included in the experiment. One manipulation check asked if the ad-image contained an “exclusive” label and gave, “Yes,” “No,” and “I don’t know” as possible answers. Subjects with incorrect or “I don’t know” answers were removed from the data. Another manipulation check question asked subjects “What product was featured in the product image?” and gave five potential answers in a multiple-choice format. If a subject did not pick the description of the correct product in the ad image (e.g., “A Dyson vacuum cleaner” or “A Captain American: The Winter Soldier DVD/Blu-ray set) that she had been exposed to, then the subject was removed from consideration. A final manipulation check question asked if the product was “only sold at Target.” The ad image stated that the product was sold at Target and other retailers or was a Target exclusive product. If the subject incorrectly identified the level of retailer exclusivity, the subject was removed from the data. The images used in both experiments can be seen in Figures 2 and 3.

**FIGURE 2**  
**CAPTAIN AMERICA BLU-RAY COMBO EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN**

Attributes	Exclusivity Labeling	
	Exclusive	Non- Exclusive
Many	 <p>Product Information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captain America: The Winter Soldier Blu-ray, DVD, Digital HD combo pack</li> <li>• Over 30 minutes of exclusive deleted and extended scenes</li> <li>• An exclusive behind-the-scenes featurette with the cast and crew (45 minutes)</li> <li>• Exclusive features are only available at Target stores</li> </ul> <p>Additional features include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes over 30 minutes of deleted and extended scenes as well as a 45 minute behind-the-scenes featurette with the cast</li> </ul>	 <p>Product Information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captain America: The Winter Soldier Blu-ray, DVD, Digital HD combo pack</li> <li>• Over 30 minutes of deleted and extended scenes</li> <li>• A behind-the-scenes featurette with the cast and crew (45 minutes)</li> <li>• Available at Target and other retailers</li> </ul>
Few	 <p>Product Information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captain America: The Winter Soldier Blu-ray, DVD, Digital HD combo pack</li> <li>• Exclusively at Target stores</li> </ul>	 <p>Product Information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captain America: The Winter Soldier Blu-ray, DVD, Digital HD combo pack</li> <li>• Available at Target and other retailers</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 3**  
**DYSON VACUUM CLEANER EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN**

	Exclusivity Labeling	
Attributes	Exclusive	Non-Exclusive
Many	 <p>           DYSON DC24 Vacuum            Ultra lightweight            Works on all floor types;            Red coloring exclusively            available at Target            stores.         </p> <p>EXCLUSIVE RED COLOR</p>	 <p>           DYSON DC24 Vacuum            Ultra lightweight            Works on all floor types            Red coloring available            at Target and other            retailers         </p>
Few	 <p>           DYSON DC24 Vacuum            Exclusively available at            Target Stores         </p> <p>EXCLUSIVE</p>	 <p>           DYSON DC24 Vacuum            Available at Target and            other retailers         </p>

**In the Streaming Era, Why Use a DVD/Blu-Ray Pack?**

DVD/Blu-Ray media are used as one of the experimental product categories, and even though overall sales of this product class has declined, they still remain relevant. DVD sales fell over 67% from 2011 to 2018 and now comprise under 10% of the total movie market (Whitten, 2019). However, as a product category, DVDs still remain a viable product among domestic consumers because of their advantages over streaming media. Some common advantages/reasons for buying DVD/Blu-ray media include: (1) better movie quality, (2) *special features* (a main element of retailer exclusive promotions), (3) more nostalgic movie-watching experiences, and (4) giving the buyer confidence of always having access to his recorded media (Canales, 2021).

Purchases of DVDs and Blu-rays seem to be driven by a mixture of causal, “impulse buy,” consumers and “super fan” collectors of DVD’s and Blu-rays who seek out high-quality, unique, or limited version of film (Arnold 2022; Gruenwedel, 2018). In fact, despite the decline in sales, most mass retailers still carry robust in-store selections of DVDs/Blu-rays, often featuring them as “impulse buys” items near registers, endcaps, or store entryways (Arnold, 2022). Despite their decreasing market share, DVDs and Blu-Rays still sales in the United States were estimated at \$1.97 billion by the Digital Entertainment Group, an industry group meant to “promote entertain platforms, products, and distribution channels” that support the entertainment and information technology industries (Arnold, 2022; Digital Entertainment Group, 2023).

DVD/Blu-Ray displays seen in stores such as Target, Best Buy, or Walmart, are still common. Figure 4 shows an example of one such display from Walmart in October of 2022.

**FIGURE 4**  
**WALMART DVD ENDCAP DISPLAY, OCTOBER 2022**



“The DVD/Blu-ray Disc section in an Oceanside, Calif. Walmart store in October 2022. (Media Play News staff photo)” from <https://www.mediaplaynews.com/walmart-reduces-dvd-blu-ray-disc-footprint-by-20-percent/> This photo is used under “fair use” law for educational purposes.

To investigate RQ1, consumer opinions on the highest price they would pay, fair price for the product, expected price, purchase intention, and intention-to-see the product were dependent variables. The experimental factors included exclusivity and attributes.

Regarding RQ2 and RQ3, individual attribute scales, including attitude toward the category, need-for-uniqueness, value consciousness and sugraphobia (fear of being cheated) were considered as covariates. Attitude toward shopping and attitude toward the retailer were also gathered but not included in the model due to significant multicollinearity with other covariates. Instead, these were used as bias checks (e.g., Did the use of Target as the retailer influence the results?). Demographic information such as age, household income, and gender, were also used as covariates. In regard to dependent variables, fair price was significantly correlated with expected price (Pearson = .671) and high price (Pearson = .746) and was removed from the model. Testing revealed that no covariates were significantly correlated with the experimental variables.

### *Sample*

Data for Experiment 1 (the DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo) and Experiment 2 (the vacuum cleaner) were collected concurrently through an online survey. The survey website was programmed to randomly select subjects and equally distribute them among the eight experimental conditions (four conditions for each experiment).



This methodology resulted in a sample of 371 responses with a roughly equivalent number of subjects in each condition. After cleaning the data of failed manipulation checks (14), incomplete surveys (13), and repeat subjects (23) who erroneously started the survey twice but were automatically opt-out on the second attempt, the amount of suitable survey responses was reduced to n=321. The overall demographics for the sample skewed young (75.1% of subjects being between 18 and 24 years old), single (60.4% single), and Caucasian (72.3%) with 13.4% identifying as Black/African-American and other races comprising the remainder of the subjects' ethnicities. Additionally, 51.7% of subjects were male and 46.1% were female. Full demographic details can be found in Table 2.

**TABLE 2  
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Household Income		Age		Marital Status	
Under \$25,000	35.5%	18 to 24	75.1%	Single	60.4%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	12.5%	25 to 34	17.1%	In a relationship	25.2%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	9.0%	35 to 44	3.1%	Married	11.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	7.2%	45 to 54	1.9%	Divorced	0.3%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	9.0%	55 to 64	0.6%	Widowed	0.0%
\$150,000 or more	6.5%	65 or older	0%	No response	2.2%
I decline to answer.	18.1%	No response	2.2%	Total	100%
No response	2.2%	Total	100%		
Total	100%				

Race/Ethnicity		Education Level		Gender	
Caucasian	72.3%	Some High School	0.6%	Male	51.7%
Hispanic or Latino	2.2%	High School Grad	1.9%	Female	46.1%
Black or African-American	13.4%	Some College	65.8%	No response	2.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.4%	Technical Training	0.6%	Total	100%
Native American	9.0%	Associate degree	3.4%		
Other	3.4%	Bachelor's degree	17.4%		
I decline to answer.	1.2%	Master's or higher	9.3%		
No response	2.2%	No response	2.5%		
Total	100%	Total	100%		

The data were gathered from a student sample of business students at a mid-sized public university in the southern United States. Some of the characteristics for this sample are typical of student samples, but in this work, the apparent “weaknesses” of a student sample likely work in favor of the research. For sample, individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 comprise 38% of all “frequent” moviegoers and Caucasians (55%) and African Americans (12%) comprise 67% of all moviegoers, the demographic make-up of the sample is somewhat reflective of national trends regarding moviegoing (Who Goes To The Movies?, 2018). Likewise, 90% of individuals move out of their parents’ homes by age 27 (Dey and Pierret, 2014). And, the group most likely to move out are Caucasians between ages 18 and 26 (Lei and South, 2016).

Overall, the study’s statistics tend to resemble the demographics of the population of interest. The primary age and racial groups in the sample are representative of groups who have a likely have a high interest or familiarity with the product categories used in this research (an entertainment product – a DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo pack, and a household cleaning appliance – a vacuum cleaner). Young

people are interested in entertainment, and on occasion, they are likely interested in necessities, such as cleaning equipment or appliances, used in establishing their own homes.

## ANALYSIS RESULTS

Data were analyzed using MANOVA and ANOVA. Refer to Table 3 for multivariate and univariate results of the experiments. Both Experiments 1 and 2 examine consumers' opinions regarding the highest price they would pay, expected price, purchase intention, and intention-to-see. Exclusivity and product attributes are the independent variables. Surprisingly, no significant influence of any experimental factors on consumer opinions are found in Experiment 1 (DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo). Experiment 2, which features the vacuum cleaner, contains two variables that are statistically significant at the multivariate level: attributes ( $F=3.024$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.02$ ) and the covariate, need-for-uniqueness ( $F<2.443$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In Experiment 2, the number of attributes is significant at the univariate level for intention-to-see ( $F=8.81$ ,  $p<.004$ ,  $\beta= .321$ ) and purchase intention ( $F=8.09$ ,  $p<.005$ ,  $\beta= .271$ ).

In Experiment 2, the covariate need-for-uniqueness is also statistically significant with the same two prior consumer attitudes: intention-to-see ( $F= 7.219$ ,  $p<.008$ ,  $\beta=.218$ ) and purchase intentions ( $F=3.781$ ,  $p<.054$ ,  $\beta=.149$ ). Refer to Table 3 for results.

**TABLE 3**  
**MULTIVARIATE AND UNIVARIATE SUMMARY**

Multivariate and Univariate Summary Table				
Variable(s)	Wilks' Lambda Sig.			
	Exp. 1 DVD/Blu- ray/DigitalHD combo		Exp. 2 Vacuum	
	F	p-value	F	p-value
<i>Main Effects</i>				
Exclusivity	1.027	.396	.076	.989
Attributes	1.124	.349	3.024	.020 <sup>ab</sup>
<i>Interactions</i>				
Exclusivity*Attributes	.768	.548	.405	.805
Exclusivity* Need-for-Uniq.	.491	.743	1.482	.212
Exclusivity*Value Consciousn.	.827	.511	.430	.786
<i>Covariates</i>				
Need-for-Uniqueness	2.181	.075	2.443	.050 <sup>cd</sup>
Value Consciousness	2.265	.066	.640	.635

<sup>a</sup>Univariate significance for DV Intention-to-Seek ( $F=8.81$ ,  $p<.004$ ,  $\beta= .321$ )

<sup>b</sup>Univariate significance for DV Purchase Intention ( $F=8.09$ ,  $p<.005$ ,  $\beta= .271$ )

<sup>c</sup>Univariate significance for DV Intention-to-Seek ( $F= 7.219$ ,  $p<.008$ ,  $\beta=.218$ )

<sup>d</sup>Univariate significance for DV Purchase Intention ( $F=3.781$ ,  $p<.054$ ,  $\beta=.149$ ).

DV = Expected Price, Highest-Price-Would-Pay, Intention-to-Seek, and Purchase Intention

### Research Question 1 Summary

RQ1) How do consumers behave in response to exclusive product promotions? Exclusivity has no statistically significant effect on the subjects' decision-making processes at the multivariate level. This result is surprising in light of the commonplace presence of exclusivity promotions. Exclusivity functions the same in both product categories in that it does not affect the subjects' responses at all.

### Research Question 2 Summary

RQ2) How do individual traits and general attitudes affect how consumers respond to exclusive product promotions? Research Question 2 considers how various individual traits and general attitudes are related to how consumers perceive an exclusive offer. In summary, out of all the covariates, only need-for-uniqueness is significant at the multivariate level ( $F=2.443$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and then, only for Experiment 2. Need-for-uniqueness is significant ( $F=2.443$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.05$ ) at the multivariate level in Experiment 2. At the univariate level in Experiment 2, need-for-uniqueness is significant for purchase intention ( $F= 7.219$ ,  $p<.008$ ,  $\beta=.218$ ) and intention-to-seek ( $F=3.781$ ,  $p<.054$ ,  $\beta=.149$ ). In both situations, increasing levels of need-for-uniqueness are associated with increases in the dependent variables. Overall, no covariates are significant at the multivariate level for the DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo (Experiment 1) and need-for-uniqueness is the only significant covariate at the multivariate level for the vacuum (Experiment 2).

### Research Question 3 Summary

RQ3) How does the number of attributes, in relation to exclusivity, affect consumer behavior? Research Question 3 deals with the relationship between attributes and the dependent variables discussed in Research Question 1. The attributes' main effect is non-significant ( $F=1.124$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.349$ ) at the multivariate level in Experiment 1. Therefore, univariate p-values for Experiment 1 are not given. However, as also shown in Table 3, the number of attributes is statistically significant at the multivariate level ( $F=3.024$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.02$ ). An inspection of the univariate results reveals that the number of attributes is significant for purchase intention ( $F=8.81$   $p<.004$ ,  $\beta= .321$ ) and intention-to-seek out the product ( $F=8.09$ ,  $p<.005$ ,  $\beta= .271$ ). Refer to Table 3, above, for a detailed review of the results, or Table 4 for a summarized review of the results related to RQ3.

**TABLE 4**  
**RESEARCH QUESTION 3 SUMMARY**

Research Question 3 Did the number of attributes presented...		Experiment 1	Experiment 2
		DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo <sup>a</sup>	Vacuum <sup>a</sup>
1a.	increase price expectations?	No	No
1b.	increase fair price beliefs? <sup>c</sup>	N/A	N/A
1c.	increase willingness to pay a higher price?	No	No
1d.	increase purchase intention?	No	No, decreases ( $F=8.81$ $p<.004$ , $\beta=$ .321)
1e.	increase intention-to-seek out a product?	No	No, decreases ( $F=8.09$ , $p<.005$ , $\beta=$ .271)
1f.	have differing levels of effectiveness among different product categories?	Yes	
<sup>a</sup> Univariate F values, p-values and parameter estimates given only if multivariate significance is achieved. <sup>b</sup> Fair price was removed as a dependent variable due to a high number of significant correlations and high Pearson correlations with other dependent pricing variables.			

--Note: If the reviewers and editor prefer it, Table 4 can be deleted, and we can simply refer back to Table 3 again, which has the detailed results. Table 4 is somewhat nonstandard for a journal, but presents the results in a more clearly summarized format.

## Key Findings

Perhaps one of the most important take-away from this study relates to the ability of AREPs to deliver the desired benefits for retailers. Specifically, AREPs may not be as effective as originally thought in combating showrooming, increasing in-store traffic, or at stifling price competition. That is, there was no empirical support for the use of an AREPs promotional strategy for either of the two products in the experiment. In the case of the vacuum cleaner, the exclusivity treatment even harmed intentions-to-see and purchase the product. And, there was caution that focusing on too many product attributes may be detrimental to the promotion rather than beneficial, but as discussed later, the attributes themselves, rather than the number of attributes, may have played a larger role in this outcome. These results seem not only unexpected, but may be something of a warning or caution to retailers who rely heavily on the use of exclusive product offers.

## DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Based on the continued use of AREP promotions in the marketplace over the last decade, the authors initially suspected that the exclusivity treatment in the experiments would yield significant results. But, after examining the findings, it became clear that instead of the AREP promotions, the number or type of attributes were likely much more influential. Applying ELM to AREPs, the subjects (consumers) were not taking a central route to process the information. Rather, the AREP was not deemed important or motivating to the consumers in any way. This result is surprising given that AREPs are used extensively among retailers. Exclusive promotions among retailers may not generate as much motivation among consumers as originally thought. Conversely, product attributes impacted consumer attitudes and appear to be the route to influence consumers, even if those attributes appear “trivial” and thus follow a more peripheral route to persuasion.

Fortunately, prior research provides some guidance for potential explanations for these results. For example, Brown and Carpenter (2000) discuss the idea of “trivial” attributes, or attributes that initially may be seen as having an “irrelevant, unneeded, or merely trivial” effect on consumer choice (p. 372). Conversely, rather than being viewed as meaningless or truly trivial, Brown and Carpenter (2000) found that “consumers use them [trivial attributes] in a somewhat sophisticated manner” depending upon the situation (p. 373). They found that such attributes may be seen as “critically important” in some situations and able to produce both “positive and negative valuation[s]” depending on context, which may include the setting, attributes, brands, the situation and a variety of other variables (Brown and Carpenter, 2000, p. 372).

In Experiment 1 (DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo), the subjects may have viewed the product attributes as unnecessary, or trivial. Or, the subjects may have perceived the very notion of exclusivity itself as a “trivial” attribute, or the exclusive product attributes may have been viewed as trivial. Either way, no significant effect was found with the dependent variables. Rather than a positive or negative effect, the exclusivity promotion simply had no effect – the treatment seemed to truly be “trivial” or “irrelevant” in the most literal sense. Since the experimental stimuli, the product image and features, were based on commonly found real-world retailer exclusive products of a similar nature, the subjects may have been somewhat desensitized to this stimulus. Retailer exclusive versions of movies can be found at Amazon, Walmart, Best Buy, and Target.

However, in Experiment 2 (the vacuum), there was a statistically significant *decrease* in the subjects’ intentions-to-see out and purchase the vacuum with the exclusive treatment, particularly the exclusive “red color” treatment. In Experiment 2, the “high attributes” condition indicated that the product “works on all floor types,” was “ultra lightweight”, and that the color, red, was exclusive to Target stores.

Before furthering the discussion of the detrimental promotional effects found in Experiment 2, the reader should note that the DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo in Experiment 1 is a product with hedonic (sensory/experiential) connotations. Movies are meant to be enjoyed, and the extra attributes on the product simply provide more entertainment (e.g., behind the scenes features, deleted scenes, etc.). But, a vacuum is primarily a utilitarian product because it cleans floors. For the sake of consistency, the researchers included

hedonic features on both products – the additional entertainment content on the DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo and the exclusive “red color” on the vacuum cleaner. However, unlike the DVD/Blu-ray/DigitalHD combo, where the product with hedonic connotations has additional features that complement the hedonic nature of the product, the vacuum has an additional feature, the “red color,” which has no bearing or relevance with the utility of the utilitarian product. That is, in Experiment 2, there is a mismatch between the type of product and the type of exclusive attribute. Clearly, the color of the vacuum has no impact on the effective operation of the vacuum cleaner.

This mismatch may have played a role in the significantly negative results for the exclusive vacuum promotion. Support for this result comes from Brown and Carpenter (2000), who in their summary of Simonson *et al* (1993, 1994), state that trivial attributes “are sometimes indicators that the product is inferior on other dimensions” (p. 373) In other words, if the vacuum in Experiment 1 has great suction on all surfaces, then why would a retailer draw attention to the exclusive color? Why not emphasize the feature most important to the purpose of the product, such as suction power? Indeed, this idea may explain why the exclusive “red” vacuum resulted in a lower intention-to-see and lower purchase intention. Several articles lend support to this theory.

For example, Meyvis and Janiszewski (2002), show that potential customers look for information that reaffirms the desired benefit that they hope to gain from the product, and when encountering “irrelevant information,” whether “irrelevant or disconfirming” it tends to lessen their faith in the product’s ability to provide the benefit by creating a “dilution effect” (p. 618).

Similarly, Bastardi and Shafir (1998) demonstrate that if individuals have to seek out *noninstrumental information* (information that is not directly available or has to be sought out) about a product, then it may be treated as *instrumental* (relevant to decision making) information. For example, a consumer might like the fit and style of an article of clothing, but then, view the garment label to see where the clothing was made. If the clothing was made in a country known for human rights and worker abuses, then the consumer may decide not to buy the product. In this case, the noninstrumental information, the country of origin, became instrumental information.

Thus, the information search process can transform noninstrumental information into instrumental information. In Brown and Carpenter (2000), Meyvis and Janiszewski (2002), and Bastardi and Shafir (1998), the inclusion of potentially trivial or extraneous information, depending on the context, can potentially harm consumer evaluations of a product. However, to be clear, they may also have no effect or even positive effects, depending on context (Brown and Carpenter, 2000). One key contribution of this article is further exploration of the contexts that result in negligible, negative, or positive responses of trivial attributes.

As mentioned in the theory section, and further supported by this analysis, the researchers posit that retailer exclusivity labeling may attract consumer interest toward a product, prompting a closer inspection (high elaboration) of the retailer exclusive features. The retailer exclusive label or advertising language begs the question “What is exclusive about this product?” and increases the energy and cognitive processing that consumers put into the information search. This scenario is consistent with two well-known information processing models: the central route processing in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty *et al.*, 1983) of persuasion and the systematic view of information processing in the systematic Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) of Information Processing (Chaiken, 1980).

As the consumer evaluates the exclusive features, the nature of the exclusive features may or may not become instrumental (Bastardi and Shafir, 1998) in the purchase decision. Generally, in the work here and in Meyvis and Janiszewski (2002), trivial or irrelevant attributes tend to have no effect on the consumer, such as in Experiment 1, or a detrimental effect, such as in Experiment 2, when the exclusive feature (i.e., the color “red”) is noninstrumental to the central purpose of the product (Bastardi and Shafir, 1998). However, Brown and Carpenter (2000) do point out that such attributes can have positive effects, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion implies that “strong” information is viewed positively, while “weak” information tends to lead to “negative cognitive responses” (Petty *et al.*, 1983; Johnson, *et al.*, 2005). So, while not well-documented in the literature or demonstrated in our experiments, theoretical support for a positive reception to AREPs and more broadly to trivial attributes in general, is possible.

While no “exclusivity x number-of-attributes” interaction was found in Experiment 2, this result could be because the additional features, which were likely seen as “trivial” negatively affected the subjects’ views and resulted in a negative reaction regardless of the presence of the exclusivity promotion. In a retail environment, the exclusivity promotion may succeed in getting a consumer’s attention, but the data shows that the nature of the attributes likely determines overall consumer reaction. At best, exclusivity promotions may do a better job of getting consumers’ attention and/or potentially amplifying any effects that would already occur after an inspection of the attributes. After all, the managerial thought behind an AREP strategy is to create interest or attention about a product due to the retailer exclusive features. The strategy revolves around emphasizing “exclusive” attributes.

## SUMMARY AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Both experiments suggest that an “advertised as retailer exclusive products” (AREPs) promotional strategy has no effect on consumers, at least for the product categories explored in this work. Instead, the product quantity or type of attributes was significant, with multi-attribute conditions in Experiment 2 diminishing purchase intentions and intentions-to-seek. In line with prior research (Meyvis and Janiszewski, 2002; Simonson *et al.* 1993, 1994; Bastardi and Shafir, 1998), features unimportant to the product’s central purpose harmed subjects’ attitudes toward the vacuum in Experiment 2.

While the study found that retailer exclusive products as an advertising promotion may be ineffective, the unexpected finding is that AREPs may augment or amplify the significance of the “exclusive” attributes highlighted by the exclusive labeling. Furthermore, this augmentation, or additional attention placed on certain features, may even *harm* consumer impressions in some situations (e.g., negative assessment of vacuum’s exclusive attributes in experiment). This finding potentially leads to reassessing how product attributes are weighed or evaluated when highlighted by AREPs or similar promotions. Indeed, while managers and practitioners may use AREPs to counter “showrooming,” the results reveal that these strategies may be largely ineffective, or in some cases, even detrimental to sales. That is, in practice, such retailer exclusive promotions may actually have the opposite of their intended positive effect.

Still, AREPs still may be beneficial in certain contexts, where the target consumers, products, and exclusive product attributes are properly aligned. For example, in Experiment 2 individuals high in need-for-uniqueness had higher intention-to-seek the product and ranked higher in purchase intentions. Barone and Roy (2010<sub>ab</sub>) found that younger consumers tend to be higher in need-for-uniqueness and that individuals high in need-for-uniqueness view exclusive offers more favorably. One notable difference is that Barone and Roy’s exclusive offer was only given to certain respondents, creating an “exclusive group” of members who were compared against a group of non-members. Similar to Söderlund’s (2019) work, group membership tended to elicit more favorable responses from consumers. One problem that managers may face with AREPs is that they do not elicit the appeal of “in-group” exclusivity offered by other exclusive promotions. Most AREPs are available to the public at large, so long as they are willing to visit the exclusive retailer, and this may partially undermine their “exclusive” nature. Consumers may not see them as truly exclusive. To address this problem, managers might consider ways to initially offer AREPs to an exclusive group of customers via targeted promotional materials, such as emails or mailers or consider other in-store perks or benefits that arise from purchasing an AREP.

Overall, while it may be possible for certain exclusivity and attribute combinations to increase consumers’ perceptions of a product, Experiment 2 indicated that additional (trivial) attributes may also harm consumers’ valuations of a product. Exclusivity may amplify the importance of these attributes, converting them from non-essential to instrumental pieces of decision-making information (Bastardi and Shafir, 1998). For example, in Experiment 2, potentially converting a hedonic attribute (color) into a seemingly “instrumental” piece of information about a primarily utilitarian product (a vacuum), seems to have decreased customer interest in the product. The consumer may have perceived a disconnect between the feature highlighted by the exclusive label and the central purpose of the product, which resulted in negative consumer impressions. If this insight is accurate, then managers and marketing personnel should take care to ensure that the exclusive attributes offered are truly worthwhile to the consumer.

In fact, another possibility for managers is to gradually build a collection of carefully curated AREPs, where the exclusive product attributes always align with a product's central purpose. Over time, "retailer exclusive" offerings could bring enhanced retailer prestige, customer loyalty, or any number of positive benefits. AREPs already represent a subsection of many retailers promotional and product assortment, but seem to be managed on an individual product basis, rather than viewed as a collection of products that, together, represent the retail brand. There may be benefits to taking this approach, and it may offer advantages that the individual product exclusivity strategy, which in our work yielded insignificant or harmful results, does not.

### **Limitations**

These experiments used a student sample from a regional university in the southern United States. As expected, it has many of the same limitations as other student samples, such as the demographics and local environment not being typical of a nationwide sample. However, as discussed previously, the sample is also a relevant consumer for both products used in the experiment, thus mitigating some concerns over generalizability of the study's findings.

The number of attributes, the kind of attributes, and products used in the experiments are also limitations. Clearly, it was not possible to test all possible scenarios, but using products from two different categories (a household cleaning product vs. an entertainment product) should make the results more robust. In addition to the product categories differing, Experiment 1 used a product with hedonic connotations, and Experiment 2 used a product with utilitarian connotations. The researchers felt this would even further the usefulness of the experiment, but the exclusive attributes for both products were hedonic in nature as this would make the results from each one more directly comparable. Still, the product types may not be representative of all products in their category, and this is a limitation.

In support of the realism of experimental stimulus materials used, the ad images used in Experiments 1 and 2 were based on actual retailer ads and real products. The vacuum ad in Experiment 2, for example, was based on a retailer ad for an exclusive vacuum in a Target "Black Friday" mailer. While the authors discussed using fictitious brand names instead of non-fictitious brand names in order to eliminate potential bias, the consensus was that this approach would not make sense in the context of using AREPs. That is, an exclusive offer would work only if value is being added to a known brand rather than an unknown brand. In their everyday lives, the subjects likely only see AREPs at big box retailers and large online retailers, and the AREPs strategy is typically used with popular brands or products.

Buying an unknown movie with retailer exclusive features, at an unknown retailer, would violate the conditions under which they normally experience encountering such products. Therefore, a real-world retailer and brands were used, but any potential biases resulting from the design decision were tested for through survey construction. For example, in addition to controlling for the retailer and impressions about the brands in the ads, the survey controlled for the subjects' favorite colors to ensure that the experiment featuring the "red" vacuum was not biased by subjects whose favorite color was red.

### **Future Research**

Our findings may give the reader pause. If the AREPs are not positively shifting consumer attitudes or intentions, then why do they remain so popular and widely used in retail? The stated reason from some managers is that retailer exclusive products deter showrooming (Zimmerman, 2012<sub>b</sub>). While our work did examine intention-to-seek and purchase intention for the exclusive and non-exclusive products, other researchers might consider experiments that specifically test the showrooming deterrent prowess of AREPs by offering multiple purchase scenarios for an AREP when against comparable products at various retailers with similar price points.

Additional research into other product categories might be a fertile research path. Exclusivity promotions, and AREPs in particular, cover a wide-spectrum of products, from entertainment products, to luxury goods, to cooking and cleaning appliances, to electronics, and other categories (in Upshaw *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, researchers should consider circumstances where exclusive features are instrumental or non-instrumental to the primary purpose of the product (Bastardi and Shafir, 1998). For example, a

product with predominantly utilitarian functions may become more attractive if the exclusive features increase the product's utility (e.g., a vacuum with increased suction power). While this work has discussed instrumental and non-instrumental attributes in terms of hedonic and utilitarian products and features, there may be other bases of comparison instead of the hedonic/utilitarian continuum.

Next, minimal research has been directed toward the possibility of adverse consequences arising from exclusivity promotions, and AREPs in particular. While this research suggests that such promotions may be ineffective or even harm consumer impressions in some circumstances, Forbes magazine points out that numerous exclusive editions of a single product can sometimes frustrate consumers (Mendelson 2013). In Mendelson's article (2013), he states that the 2013 film *Star Trek Into Darkness* "punished" fans by requiring the purchase of numerous retailer exclusive versions to get all the additional footage, documentaries, and extra content for the film (Mendelson, 2013). True Star Trek fans, or Trekkies, would see retailer exclusive versions of the film at Target, Best Buy, Tesco, and iTunes with even more exclusive video content available via Microsoft's Xbox SmartGlass app (Star Trek). Eventually, after fan outcry, a "compendium" edition was released which featured all the extra video content. To be clear, numerous other special and limited editions featuring non-video content such as toy phasers, or steelbook covers, etc., were also on the market.

AREPs also touch upon a promotional strategy that involves advertising as well as working closely with manufacturers to develop a quasi-unique inventory or product assortment, typically through the use of seemingly unimportant, likely inexpensive to implement, product attributes. The cost/benefit of requesting a retailer exclusive version of a product from a manufacturer might also be a fruitful area of research.

While a well-established stream of "trivial attributes" literature research exists, further research into that area could also be beneficial. More research might yield generalizations about how to achieve or avoid specific sales results when using trivial attributes. Examples that use trivial attributes in conjunction with a promotional technique, such as the exclusivity promotion in this work, and demonstrate a *positive* effect on the consumer decision-making process are particularly rare in the literature.

Last, research dealing with group membership (in group / out group) indicates that consumers react positively to being members (vs non-members) of loyalty programs (Söderlund, 2019) or receiving offers meant for an exclusive audience (Baron and Roy, 2010<sub>ab</sub>). However, that appeal does not seem to spread to AREPs. AREPs exclusivity appeal seems to have neither the implied appeal of luxury goods nor the explicit appeal of an offer made exclusively to certain customers. Thus, the question that arises is, when does "exclusivity" cease to be perceived as exclusive in the consumers eyes? This is another avenue for research.

In summary, exclusive products, especially those products advertised as exclusive or as having exclusive features, have received little attention in the literature outside of the "exclusive" nature of luxury goods. Yet, the difference between common retailer exclusives, which are often inexpensive and have attributes that may qualify as "trivial" to many shoppers, and traditional "exclusive" luxury goods is vast. Therefore, the opportunity for additional research in this area is great.

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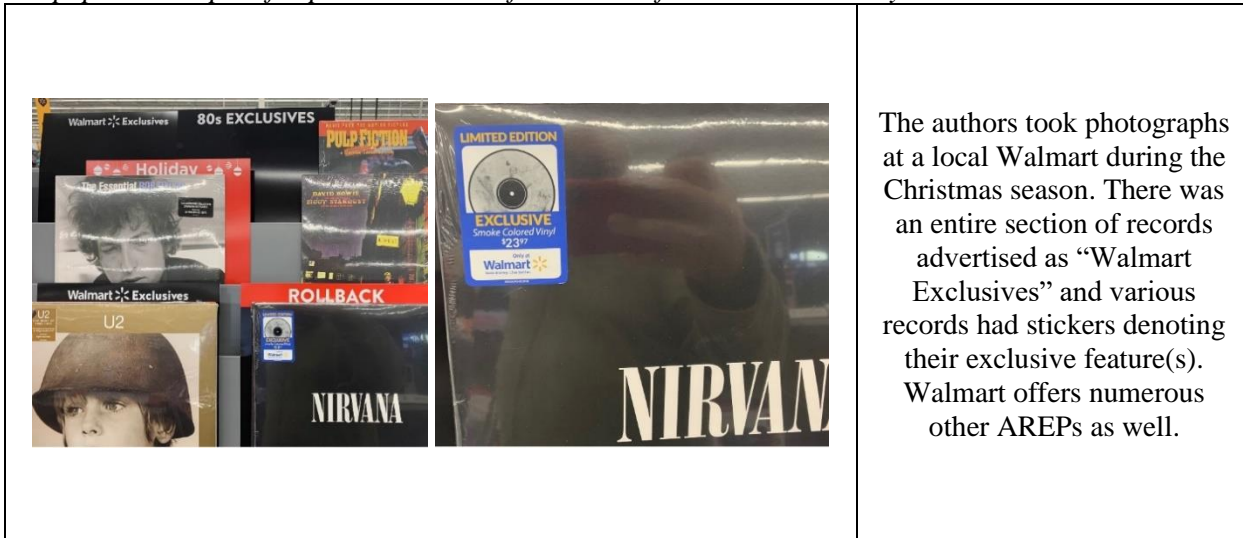
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**APPENDIX**

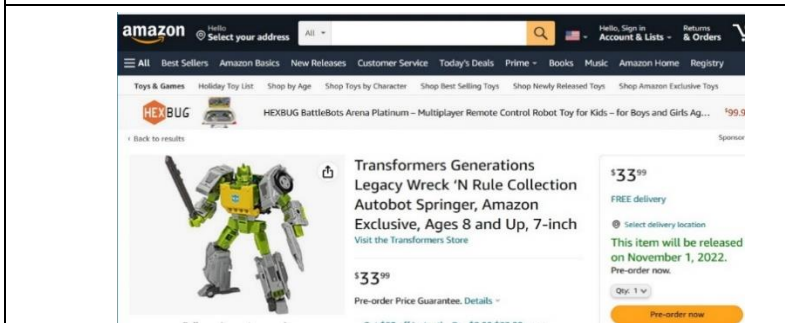
**FIGURE 5  
REAL WORLD EXAMPLES OF AREPS**

These products are labeled as exclusive in-store, on websites, and in advertising promotions. This figure is here for the reviewers to see additional examples and explanations of AREPs. *Figure 5 may be deleted if this paper is accepted for publication and if the editors feel it is unnecessary.*





Best Buy’s website shows a “The Batman” Blu-ray with an exclusive steelbook cover. The product uses exclusivity language “only @ Best Buy” on the website and in store, the product is labeled “Only @ Best Buy” and “Exclusive 4K Blu-ray Steelbook”.



Amazon offers a variety of “Amazon Exclusive” products. Here, an upcoming Transformers toy is an Amazon Exclusive.



The Target 2021 “Black Friday” online ad book featured a “Target Exclusive Color” for a KitchenAid mixer. It is pictured in the lower right-hand side of the ad. A similar image from a previous Target Black Friday ad was used as the basis for the vacuum image in Experiment 2.

This is only a small selection of AREPs. Products across a wide range of categories can use the AREP strategy. A more robust discussion of the various kinds of AREPs can be found in Upshaw *et al.* (2017)