



ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: INSIGHTS FROM THE MUSLIM BANJAR COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Economic inequality significantly influences consumer behavior, especially within culturally unique communities like the Muslim Banjar community in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. This study aims to explore the psychological and cultural impacts of economic inequality on consumer preferences, particularly toward advertising appeals emphasizing personal control. Using experimental methods involving 653 participants across five studies, the research reveals that higher economic inequality evokes financial threat perceptions, reduces a sense of control, and increases preferences for empowerment-focused advertisements. The findings further indicate that cultural values, such as family solidarity and religious beliefs, moderate these effects, mitigating the adverse impacts of inequality. The implications suggest a dual approach in advertising strategies—emphasizing both personal and collective empowerment—to address consumer needs in economically unequal societies. These insights provide valuable guidance for marketers and policymakers in crafting culturally sensitive and effective interventions.

Keywords: economic inequality, consumer behavior, advertising appeals, personal control, Muslim Banjar community, cultural values.

Abstrak

Ketimpangan ekonomi secara signifikan memengaruhi perilaku konsumen, terutama di komunitas yang memiliki keunikan budaya seperti komunitas Muslim Banjar di Kalimantan Selatan, Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dampak psikologis dan budaya dari ketimpangan ekonomi terhadap preferensi konsumen, khususnya terhadap daya tarik iklan yang menekankan kendali pribadi. Dengan menggunakan metode eksperimental yang melibatkan 653 partisipan dalam lima studi, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa ketimpangan ekonomi yang tinggi memunculkan persepsi ancaman finansial, mengurangi rasa kendali, dan meningkatkan preferensi terhadap iklan yang berfokus pada pemberdayaan. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai budaya seperti solidaritas keluarga dan keyakinan agama memoderasi efek tersebut, sehingga mengurangi dampak negatif dari ketimpangan ekonomi. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan ganda dalam strategi periklanan—menggabungkan pemberdayaan pribadi dan kolektif—untuk memenuhi kebutuhan konsumen di masyarakat dengan ketimpangan ekonomi yang tinggi. Wawasan ini memberikan panduan berharga bagi pemasar dan pembuat kebijakan dalam merancang intervensi yang efektif dan sensitif terhadap budaya.

Kata Kunci: ketimpangan ekonomi, perilaku konsumen, daya tarik iklan, kendali pribadi, komunitas Muslim Banjar, nilai-nilai budaya.

INTRODUCTION

Rising economic inequality has become a pressing global issue, significantly exacerbating financial insecurity, weakening social cohesion, and diminishing trust among citizens. Reports indicate that the wealthiest 10% of the global population owns nearly 75% of the world's wealth, while the bottom half possesses very little, highlighting stark disparities in wealth distribution. For instance, the UBS Global Wealth Report 2023 reveals that approximately 40% of adults globally have assets under \$10,000, while only about 10% own over \$1 million.¹In Indonesia, the Gini coefficient has decreased to 0.379 as of March 2024, marking its lowest level in a decade and indicating a slight improvement in income distribution.²In South Kalimantan specifically, the average expenditure inequality was reported at 0.36 in March 2024, reflecting ongoing disparities in economic opportunities and living standards among its residents. Additionally, South Kalimantan's poverty rate has shown fluctuations, declining to 4.29% in March 2024 from 4.68% in 2014, which suggests some progress in poverty alleviation efforts.³ Studies also demonstrate that increased inequality correlates with heightened impulsive spending and risk-taking behaviors among individuals facing financial stress. These dynamics underscore the critical need to explore how economic inequality shapes consumer behavior and societal well-being across diverse cultural contexts.

Recent research has demonstrated the widespread effects of economic inequality across various domains. Studies show that higher economic inequality is linked to reduced interpersonal trust,⁴ increased substance abuse,⁵ and a higher mortality rate,⁶ while also influencing socio-political behavior, such as lower political engagement,⁷ increased conspiracy beliefs,⁸ and a greater desire for strong leadership.⁹ In the realm of consumer behavior, economic inequality has been shown to increase luxury consumption driven by status anxiety,¹⁰ more impulsive and myopic decision-making,¹¹ and greater risk-taking.¹² Moreover, individuals in highly unequal societies tend to seek

¹ UBS, "UBS Global Wealth Report 2023" (Österreich, 2023).

² in the framework of the Extension of the EU-AFD Research Facility on Inequalities Lembaga Penyelidikan Ekonomi dan Masyarakat (LPEM) University of Indonesia in close collaboration with Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, the Central Statistical Office for Indonesia) and AFD, "The Inequality Diagnostic Report: Indonesia," 2024.

³ BPS, "Berita Resmi Statistik" (Banjarbaru, 2024).

⁴ Shigehiro Oishi, Selin Kesebir, and Ed Diener, "Income Inequality and Happiness," *Psychological Science* 22, no. 9 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611417262>.

⁵ Frank J. Elgar et al., "Socioeconomic Inequalities in Adolescent Health 2002-2010: A Time-Series Analysis of 34 Countries Participating in the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study," *The Lancet* 385, no. 9982 (2015), [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)61460-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61460-4); Frank J. Elgar, Anna Stefaniak, and Michael J.A. Wohl, "The Trouble with Trust: Time-Series Analysis of Social Capital, Income Inequality, and COVID-19 Deaths in 84 Countries," *Social Science and Medicine* 263 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113365>.

⁶ Ichiro Kawachi et al., "Social Capital, Income Inequality, and Mortality," *American Journal of Public Health* 87, no. 9 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.87.9.1491>.

⁷ Frederick Solt, "Economic Inequality and Democratic Political Engagement," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00298.x>.

⁸ Bruno Gabriel Salvador Casara, Caterina Suitner, and Jolanda Jetten, "The Impact of Economic Inequality on Conspiracy Beliefs," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 98 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104245>.

⁹ Stefanie Sprong et al., "Our Country Needs a Strong Leader Right Now': Economic Inequality Enhances the Wish for a Strong Leader," *Psychological Science* 30, no. 11 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619875472>.

¹⁰ Lukasz Walasek and Gordon D.A. Brown, "Income Inequality and Status Seeking: Searching for Positional Goods in Unequal U.S. States," *Psychological Science* 26, no. 4 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614567511>.

¹¹ B. Keith Payne, Jazmin L. Brown-Iannuzzi, and Jason W. Hannay, "Economic Inequality Increases Risk Taking," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 114, no. 18 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1616453114>.

¹² Jason W. Hannay, B. Keith Payne, and Jazmin Brown-Iannuzzi, "Economic Inequality and the Pursuit of Pleasure," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 12, no. 7 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506211015049>.

positional goods,¹³ and are more likely to engage in status-seeking behaviors.¹⁴ While prior studies extensively examine the effects of economic inequality on health, politics, and interpersonal trust, its impact on advertising effectiveness remains understudied.

The research bridges that gap by investigating how inequality shapes consumer responses to advertising appeals, particularly in the culturally distinct Muslim Banjar community. The Banjar people, with their unique cultural identity and practices influenced by both Islamic teachings and local traditions,¹⁵ provide a rich context for exploring consumer behaviour.¹⁶ This study focuses on the impact of economic inequality, which is prevalent in many parts of Indonesia, including the Banjar community, where varying levels of wealth and access to resources may shape consumer attitudes and preferences. The current research fills this gap, demonstrating that in environments of high economic inequality, consumers show a stronger preference for personal control appeals in advertising, driven by a diminished sense of control and heightened financial threat. By integrating the economic context and the cultural dynamics of the Banjar community, this study extends the literature on consumer behavior. It reveals how broader macro-level factors—such as economic inequality—interact with cultural and religious values to shape consumer responses to advertising and influence purchasing decisions.

Despite advancements in understanding the effects of economic inequality on various life aspects, the influence of inequality on consumer behavior, particularly in advertising, remains underexplored. This study aims to investigate how economic inequality affects the persuasiveness of advertising appeals, as consumers in unequal societies may exhibit scepticism and distrust towards advertisements.¹⁷ Research indicates that economic conditions shape consumer attitudes, necessitating tailored advertising strategies that resonate with the unique values and experiences of consumers in these contexts.¹⁸ Understanding these dynamics is crucial for marketers seeking to effectively engage consumers in high-inequality economies, where traditional advertising approaches may be less effective.¹⁹

¹³ Lukasz Walasek, Sudeep Bhatia, and Gordon D.A. Brown, "Positional Goods and the Social Rank Hypothesis: Income Inequality Affects Online Chatter about High- and Low-Status Brands on Twitter," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpsy.1012>.

¹⁴ Zhechen Wang, Jolanda Jetten, and Niklas K. Steffens, "Restless in an Unequal World: Economic Inequality Fuels the Desire for Wealth and Status," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 49, no. 6 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672221083747>.

¹⁵ Ahmadi Hasan, "Economic Development Prospects of Sharia in the Banjar Society in South Kalimantan," *Abkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 14, no. 2 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v14i2.1281>; Abd. Adim, "Perilaku Ekonomi Dan Keberagamaan Komunitas Pedagang Banjar Dalam Perspektif Sufistik," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 17, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v17i1.2763>; Alfani Daud, *Islam Dan Masyarakat Banjar* (Jakarta: PT RajaGrafindo Persada, 1997).

¹⁶ Supriansyah Supriansyah, "Agresi Kultur Digital Dan Konsumerisme Pada Identitas Urang Banjar Di Era Pascamodern," *Al-Banjari: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 18, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.18592/al-banjari.v18i1.2544>.

¹⁷ Muhammad Usman et al., "General Attitude towards Advertising: Cultural Influence in Pakistan," *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 2, no. 2 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v2n2p124>; Kenneth C. Herbst et al., "On the Dangers of Pulling a Fast One: Advertisement Disclaimer Speed, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention," *Journal of Consumer Research* 38, no. 5 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1086/660854>.

¹⁸ Shasha Wang and Dick Mizerski, "Comparing Measures of Persuasion Knowledge Adapted for Young Children," *Psychology and Marketing* 36, no. 12 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21266>; Svenja Mohr and Rainer K hl, "Exploring Persuasion Knowledge in Food Advertising: An Empirical Analysis," *SN Business & Economics* 1, no. 8 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43546-021-00108-y>.

¹⁹ Lyubomira Spasova, "Age Differences in Adaption of Persuasion Strategies in Advertising," *Economics and Sociology* 16, no. 3 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-789X.2023/16-3/3>; Junaid Ansari and Syed Irfan Hyder, "Instrument Validation of the Consumers' Religio-Spiritual Insights in Context of Advertising during Religious Festivals," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 15, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-06-2022-0162>.

This research investigates how economic inequality shapes consumer preferences for specific advertising content, particularly personal control appeals—ads designed to invite consumers to reclaim their sense of control and agency. Such appeals are frequently used in advertising campaigns for various products and services, especially those that promote personal empowerment. In Indonesia, examples of such appeals include slogans like *Astra Honda Motor's "Satu Hati"* ("One Heart") or *Tokopedia's "Mulai Aja Dulu"* ("Just Start"), which encourage consumers to feel empowered in their decisions and actions. This study shows that in environments marked by high economic inequality, consumers are more likely to prefer advertisements that emphasize personal control, as a way to address the financial threats and reduced sense of control they experience in such contexts.

We propose and empirically demonstrate that higher levels of economic inequality systematically increase the preference for personal control appeals. The psychological mechanism driving this effect is that higher inequality triggers a sense of financial threat, which diminishes consumers' sense of control over their lives. As a result, consumers living in highly unequal societies show a stronger preference for products and services that promise to restore their sense of control. Additionally, the study reveals that this effect is attenuated when consumers strongly believe in economic mobility and the possibility of improving their financial situation.

In conclusion, this research offers several key contributions. First, it expands marketing literature by introducing economic inequality as a novel factor influencing consumer responses to advertising. Previous advertising research has primarily focused on individual-level factors such as political orientation and self-construal, largely neglecting macro-level phenomena like economic inequality. To our knowledge, this study is the first to explore the impact of economic inequality on advertising effectiveness. Second, the research extends the emerging literature on economic inequality by exploring its effects beyond traditional well-being and socio-political outcomes. It shows that economic inequality also shapes people's responses to advertising, a dimension that has not been widely investigated. Third, this study identifies the psychological mechanism at play—higher inequality provokes feelings of financial threat, which in turn diminishes consumers' sense of control. Finally, we identify a boundary condition for this effect: the preference for personal control appeals in high-inequality contexts is reduced when consumers have a strong belief in upward economic mobility.

METHOD

This study utilized diverse experimental methods, including objective measurements and manipulations of economic inequality²⁰ to provide a comprehensive analysis of consumer behavior within the Banjar community. The sample size was determined using G*Power to ensure sufficient statistical power, which is critical for the validity of experimental research.²¹ The Banjar community in South Kalimantan was specifically chosen due to its distinct cultural identity, marked by strong family solidarity and unique socio-religious practices. The community is distinguished by its strong family solidarity and unique socio-religious practices, deeply rooted in Islamic heritage, which fosters social bonds and communal activities.²² The tradition of "jujuran," a form of dowry, exemplifies the community's marriage

²⁰ Michiru Nagatsu, "Experimentation in Economics," in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Economics*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315739793-30>.

²¹ Hyun Kang, "Sample Size Determination and Power Analysis Using the G*Power Software," *Journal of Educational Evaluation for Health Professions*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3352/JEEHP.2021.18.17>.

²² Rusmaniah et al., "Banjarese Cultural Values on the Floating Market as the Foundation of the Religious Character of the Community," 2023, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-096-1_64; Wardatun Nadhiroh, "Nalar Keberagaman Masyarakat Banjar: Dari Mistis-Realis Hingga Tradisionalis-Kritis," *Al-Banjari: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 18, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.18592/al-banjari.v18i2.3003>.

customs and reinforces familial ties.²³The Banjar people's reliance on social capital, particularly through rituals and cooperative practices like "gotong royong," enhances community cohesion.²⁴Additionally, the entrepreneurial spirit within Banjar families, cultivated through familial education, and their sustainable agricultural practices demonstrate resilience and adaptability in maintaining their cultural identity.²⁵Overall, the Banjar community's cultural identity is a blend of traditional values and contemporary practices, ensuring its relevance in modern society. This cultural context offers a compelling framework for examining the intersection of economic inequality and consumer behavior, as cultural and socio-religious aspects significantly impact social cohesion and consumer attitudes.²⁶

Economic Inequality and Perception of Financial Threat

In the game of *Ludo*, often played for leisure, players know that in order to win, they must dominate the board quickly, manage their strategy well, and avoid having their pieces blocked or left far behind. When one player begins to dominate the game, moving their pieces faster and successfully hindering the progress of others, those left behind begin to feel uncertainty and anxiety about their chances of winning. As the inequality increases—such as when one player reaches the end goal faster while others are stuck in earlier stages—the growing gap creates a heightened sense of fear and threat, affecting the sense of control held by the losing players.

The Ludo analogy serves as a compelling metaphor for understanding the dynamics of economic inequality and its psychological impacts on individuals. In the game of Ludo, players navigate a board with the objective of reaching the finish line, but their progress is often hindered by the positions of others, reflecting how economic inequality creates barriers for those with fewer resources. Just as players may feel left behind when others advance more quickly, individuals in unequal economies experience a diminished sense of control and heightened financial threat as they compare their resources to those at the top of the wealth hierarchy²⁷. This analogy illustrates how the widening gap between the wealthy and the less fortunate can lead to feelings of inferiority and anxiety, as well as a sense of alienation from a system that appears to favor the affluent²⁸. Ultimately, addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering a more equitable society where individuals feel empowered and secure in their financial standing.

Building on the insights regarding economic inequality, we propose that one direct consequence of living in economies with higher inequality is the experience of financial threat, defined as the degree to which consumers feel concerned, anxious, and preoccupied with their financial security. Research

²³ Fathurrahman Azhari, Hariyanto, and Muhammad Rifqi Hidayat, "Giving Jujuran in Socio-Cultural Marriage of Banjar Community," *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* 45, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2024.45.1.22>; Renny Ismaya and Maman Saputra, "Embedded Economic Behavior in Baatar Jujuran of Banjar Tradition in Banjarmasin," *West Science Islamic Studies* 1, no. 01 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.58812/wsiss.v1i01.303>.

²⁴ Syaharuddin Syaharuddin et al., "The Social Capital of Banjar Community in The Implementation of Religious Rituals: A Literature Study," *The Innovation of Social Studies Journal* 3, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.20527/iis.v3i1.3992>; Rosiady H. Sayuti et al., "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Existence of Social Solidarity: Evidence from Rural-Urban Communities in Lombok Island, Indonesia," *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1164837>.

²⁵ Deasy Arisanty et al., "Social Capital of Banjarese for Peatland Fire Mitigation: Combining of Local Wisdom and Environment," *World* 4, no. 4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/world4040047>; Luluk Tri Harinie, "Ethnographic Study on Cultural Entrepreneurship of Banjar Ethnic Family in Indonesia," *Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ss.20190801.14>.

²⁶ Andrea Velandia-Morales, Rosa Rodríguez-Bailón, and Rocío Martínez, "Economic Inequality Increases the Preference for Status Consumption," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.809101>; Ángel Sánchez-Rodríguez, Rosa Rodríguez-Bailón, and Guillermo B. Willis, "Economic Inequality Affects Perceived Normative Values," *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 25, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220968141>.

²⁷ Yan Wang et al., "The Effects of Subjective Socioeconomic Status on Conspicuous Consumption," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 52, no. 7 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12876>.

²⁸ Marina Yu Malkina, Vyacheslav N. Ovchinnikov, and Konstantin A. Kholodilin, "Changing Fortunes and Attitudes: What Determines the Political Trust in Modern Russia?," *Oeconomia Copernicana* 12, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.24136/oc.2021.004>.

indicates that perceived economic inequality significantly influences psychological states, with higher actual inequality correlating with increased financial anxiety.²⁹ This concern is further exacerbated during economic downturns, where financial threat is linked to negative mental health outcomes, particularly among vulnerable populations.³⁰ The mediating role of financial threat in the relationship between economic conditions and psychological distress has been highlighted,³¹ suggesting that financial insecurity not only affects individual well-being but also shapes broader societal attitudes towards economic stability.³² Additionally, coping mechanisms and social support can moderate the negative psychological impacts of financial threat,³³ while the emotional components associated with financial loss contribute to uncertainty and stress.³⁴ Collectively, these findings underscore the multifaceted relationship between economic inequality and financial threat, emphasizing the need for further exploration of these interconnected phenomena.

Our theorizing about the link between higher economic inequality and perceptions of financial threat aligns with research indicating that consumers in unequal economies are more inclined to accumulate resources to avoid dire financial circumstances. Specifically, higher economic inequality has been associated with a preference for smaller, immediate monetary rewards, increased financial risk-taking, and a greater tendency to work longer hours to achieve wealth.³⁵ Additionally, higher levels of economic inequality intensify financial hardship among the poor, leading to negative psychological outcomes such as increased stress;³⁶ this is compounded by the lack of strong social support systems in unequal economies.³⁷ In contrast, lower inequality economies tend to provide better employment protections and social safety nets, which mitigate perceptions of financial threat. The interplay of these factors creates an environment where individuals feel more at risk of dire financial circumstances, as evidenced by the correlation between financial threat perception and negative psychological outcomes.³⁸ Based on these findings, we propose that higher (vs. lower) economic inequality increases consumers' perception of financial threat.

Sense of Control, Compensatory Consumption, and the Functional Theory of Attitudes

Sense of control is crucial for consumers, particularly in the context of financial threats, which can significantly diminish their perceived ability to manage financial circumstances effectively. Research

²⁹ Hongfei Du and Ronnel B. King, "What Predicts Perceived Economic Inequality? The Roles of Actual Inequality, System Justification, and Fairness Considerations," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 61, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12468>.

³⁰ Mohammed A. Mamun et al., "Financial Threat, Hardship and Distress Predict Depression, Anxiety and Stress among the Unemployed Youths: A Bangladeshi Multi-City Study," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 276 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.06.075>.

³¹ Dr. Rizwan Qaisar Danish, Rabia Shahid, and Hafiz Fawad Ali, "Factors Affecting Life Satisfaction of Employees under Financial Threat," *SEISENSE Journal of Management* 2, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.33215/sjom.v2i1.82>.

³² Matthias S. Gobel and Héctor Carvacho, "The Dynamic Socioecological Model of Economic Inequality and Psychological Tendencies: A Cycle of Mutual Constitution," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12875>.

³³ João Nuno Ribeiro Viseu et al., "Coping and Social Support as Moderators: Relationship between Financial Threat and Negative Psychological Outcomes," *Current Psychology* 40, no. 5 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-0157-z>.

³⁴ Corliss Thornton, Lenita Davis, and Bruce Weinberg, "Differential Effects of Physical and Financial Threats in Weight Loss Advertising: A Case of Uncertainty," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 40, no. 7 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-04-2022-5302>.

³⁵ Payne, Brown-Iannuzzi, and Hannay, "Economic Inequality Increases Risk Taking."

³⁶ Jon M Jachimowicz et al., "Higher Economic Inequality Intensifies the Financial Hardship of People Living in Poverty by Fraying the Community Buffer," *Nature Human Behaviour* 4, no. 7 (July 2020): 702–12, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0849-2>.

³⁷ Efraín García-Sánchez et al., "Perceptions of Economic Inequality in Colombian Daily Life: More than Unequal Distribution of Economic Resources," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, no. SEP (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01660>.

³⁸ Viseu et al., "Coping and Social Support as Moderators: Relationship between Financial Threat and Negative Psychological Outcomes."

indicates that individuals facing financial threats report lower levels of perceived control, leading to increased financial anxiety and stress.³⁹This reduction in sense of control correlates with poorer psychological characteristics, such as self-efficacy, which negatively impacts financial outcomes.⁴⁰During the COVID-19 pandemic, financial threats exacerbated feelings of insecurity and helplessness, further linking financial vulnerability to adverse mental health outcomes.⁴¹Additionally, a lack of financial control has been associated with detrimental financial behaviors and overall dissatisfaction with life.⁴²The interplay between financial threats and sense of control highlights the need for enhanced financial literacy and support systems to mitigate these adverse effects.⁴³

Building on these findings, we propose that higher economic inequality undermines consumers' sense of control through perceptions of financial threat, which can lead to behaviors aimed at restoring structure and autonomy. Research indicates that when consumers feel their control is compromised, they are more likely to reject poorly fitting brand extensions and prefer products with clear boundaries, as these provide a sense of familiarity and reliability.⁴⁴Additionally, a diminished sense of control increases the preference for high-effort products and services, as exerting effort enhances individuals' sense of agency in achieving their goals.⁴⁵This understanding is crucial for marketers aiming to connect with consumers in complex economic environments, as it highlights the importance of perceived control and effort in shaping consumer preferences.

However, compensatory responses in consumer behavior significantly influence reactions to advertising content, as highlighted by the functional theory of attitudes, which posits that positive attitudes emerge when advertising appeals align with consumers' psychological needs, thereby addressing self-deficits and reinforcing identities.⁴⁶Emotional and rational appeals in advertising can elicit varying consumer responses depending on the product context, with emotional appeals often proving more effective in competitive markets.⁴⁷Cultural factors also play a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes, as evidenced by research indicating that cultural values influence the perception of advertising messages.⁴⁸

³⁹ Zdravko Marjanovic et al., "Evaluation of the Financial Threat Scale (FTS) in Four European, Non-Student Samples," *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics* 55 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2014.12.001>.

⁴⁰ Arvid O.I. Hoffmann and Simon J. McNair, "How Does Consumers' Financial Vulnerability Relate to Positive and Negative Financial Outcomes? The Mediating Role of Individual Psychological Characteristics," *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 53, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1111/joca.12233>.

⁴¹ Magdalena Adamus and Matúš Grežo, "Individual Differences in Behavioural Responses to the Financial Threat Posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Personality and Individual Differences* 179 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110916>.

⁴² Jing Jian Xiao and Nilton Porto, "Financial Capability and Wellbeing of Vulnerable Consumers," *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 56, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/joca.12418>.

⁴³ Brianna L. Middlewood et al., "Exploring the Relationships between Impatience, Savings Automation, and Financial Welfare," *Financial Planning Review* 1, no. 3–4 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1002/cfp2.1020>; Kirti Goyal et al., "The Psychological Antecedents of Personal Financial Management Behavior: A Meta-Analysis," *International Journal of Bank Marketing* 40, no. 7 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJBM-02-2022-0088>.

⁴⁴ Rom Y. Schrift, Oded Netzer, and Ran Kivetz, "Complicating Choice," *Journal of Marketing Research* 48, no. 2 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.48.2.308>; Tom Meyvis, Kelly Goldsmith, and Ravi Dhar, "The Importance of the Context in Brand Extension: How Pictures and Comparisons Shift Consumers' Focus from Fit to Quality," *Journal of Marketing Research* 49, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.08.0060>.

⁴⁵ Narayan Janakiraman and Lisa Ordóñez, "Effect of Effort and Deadlines on Consumer Product Returns," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 22, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2011.05.002>; Xianfang Zeng and Mehdi Mourali, "Consumers as Creative Agents: How Required Effort Influences Willingness to Engage," *Psychology and Marketing* 38, no. 8 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21492>.

⁴⁶ Shaizatulaqma Kamalul Ariffin, Khairul Anuar Mohammad Shah, and Ishak Ismail, "Muslim Consumers' Attitudes toward the Advertisement of Non-Certified Coffee Shops," *Jurnal Pengurusan* 48 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.17576/pengurusan-2016-48-09>.

⁴⁷ Mahsa Akbari, "Different Impacts of Advertising Appeals on Advertising Attitude for High and Low Involvement Products," *Global Business Review* 16, no. 3 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150915569936>.

⁴⁸ Barbara Czarnecka and Bruno Schivinski, "Do Consumers Acculturated to Global Consumer Culture Buy More Impulsively? The Moderating Role of Attitudes towards and Beliefs about Advertising," *Journal of Global Marketing* 32, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/08911762.2019.1600094>.

Moreover, the effectiveness of two-sided advertising messages varies across cultural contexts, necessitating a nuanced understanding of consumer behavior in global marketing strategies.⁴⁹Overall, aligning advertising strategies with the psychological and cultural profiles of target consumers can foster more positive attitudes and behaviors.⁵⁰Based on these insights, we propose:

H1: Higher (vs. lower) economic inequality increases preference for personal control appeals.

H2: Increased preference for personal control appeals under higher economic inequality is serially mediated by heightened perceptions of financial threat and lack of control.

Belief in Upward Mobility as a Buffer Against the Negative Effects of Economic Inequality

A recent data in Indonesia indicate a significant level of dissatisfaction among respondents regarding wealth distribution and the growing gap between the rich and the poor. However, approximately 63% of those surveyed maintain optimism about their potential for economic mobility through education and hard work.⁵¹This sentiment reflects a belief that personal effort and educational attainment can lead to improved economic circumstances, despite the prevailing inequality in wealth distribution.⁵²Emerging literature indicates that stronger beliefs in upward mobility can lead to increased tolerance for economic inequality, as individuals may support the status quo when they feel hopeful about their prospects.⁵³Research shows that when facing economic hardships, those with stronger beliefs in upward mobility are more likely to pursue educational and career aspirations, leading to reduced distress and higher well-being. Conversely, weaker beliefs in mobility can result in negative psychological outcomes, such as increased status anxiety.⁵⁴ Thus, fostering beliefs in upward mobility may mitigate the psychological threats posed by economic inequality, suggesting that policies promoting educational opportunities and equitable access to resources could enhance resilience among individuals facing economic disparities.⁵⁵Based on these findings, we propose:

H3: Higher economic inequality leads to a more (less) pronounced preference for personal control appeals among consumers with weaker (stronger) dispositional beliefs in upward mobility.

⁴⁹ Myriam Ertz et al., "Message Sidedness Effects in Advertising: The Role of Yin-Yang Balancing Theory," *Social Sciences* 10, no. 6 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10060229>; Bang Nguyen-Viet et al., "Factors Driving Consumers' Attitudes towards Facebook Advertisements in an Emerging Market: A Case Study of Vietnam," *Asian Journal of Business and Accounting* 15, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.22452/ajba.vol15no1.8>.

⁵⁰ Mengran Xu and Richard E. Petty, "Two-Sided Messages Promote Openness for Morally Based Attitudes," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 48, no. 8 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167220988371>; Rui Sun et al., "Falling into the Trap: A Study of the Cognitive Neural Mechanisms of Immediate Rewards Impact on Consumer Attitudes toward Forwarding Perk Advertisements.," *PLoS One* 19, no. 6 (2024): e0302023, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0302023>; Ali Abdallah Alalwan et al., "Social Media in Marketing: A Review and Analysis of the Existing Literature," *Telematics and Informatics*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.05.008>.

⁵¹ Statista, "Estimated Share of Consumers in Indonesia Ranked as Global Middle Income Earners and above in 2024, by Social Class," 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1488457/indonesia-consumer-share-by-social-class/>.

⁵² World Bank, "Indonesia's Rising Divide" (Jakarta, 2016), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1596/24765>.

⁵³ Alexander S. Browman, Mesmin Destin, and David B. Miele, "Perception of Economic Inequality Weakens Americans' Beliefs in Both Upward and Downward Socioeconomic Mobility," in *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 25, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12481>.

⁵⁴ Alexander S. Browman et al., "How Economic Inequality Shapes Mobility Expectations and Behaviour in Disadvantaged Youth," *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0523-0>; Davide Melita, Rosa Rodríguez-Bailón, and Guillermo B. Willis, "Does Income Inequality Increase Status Anxiety? Not Directly, the Role of Perceived Upward and Downward Mobility," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 62, no. 3 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12641>.

⁵⁵ Andreas Kuhn, "The Subversive Nature of Inequality: Subjective Inequality Perceptions and Attitudes to Social Inequality," *European Journal of Political Economy* 59 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2019.04.004>; Browman et al., "How Economic Inequality Shapes Mobility Expectations and Behaviour in Disadvantaged Youth."

H4: In contexts like the Banjar community, where beliefs in upward mobility and collective effort are culturally ingrained, these beliefs may mitigate the psychological threats posed by higher economic inequality, reducing the preference for personal control appeals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In five studies ($N = 653$), we provide robust and converging evidence that higher economic inequality increases preference for personal control appeals. Study 1, with 200 participants, establishes this effect using national-level Gini coefficients as objective measures of economic inequality. Study 2, with 130 participants, provides causal evidence for this effect by manipulating perceptions of economic inequality. Study 3, with 152 participants, replicates and extends these findings by highlighting the mediating role of financial threat and sense of control. Study 4, with 141 participants, further supports the underlying mechanism using a process-by-moderation approach. Specifically, using an incentive-compatible design, we show that boosting consumers' sense of control reduces their preference for personal control appeals under conditions of higher economic inequality. Finally, Study 5, with 30 participants, tests our theoretically informed boundary condition and demonstrates that stronger beliefs in economic mobility reduce preference for personal control appeals by buffering against the threats posed by higher economic inequality.

All measures and exclusions in our studies have been disclosed. Except for Study 1, which used a geographically stratified sample, sample sizes for all studies were determined a priori using G*Power to achieve a power of 0.80 and an alpha error probability of 0.05 to detect a small-sized interaction effect ($f = 0.11$).

Study 1

The Gini coefficient is one of the most commonly used objective measures of economic inequality. This coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating perfect equality (i.e., everyone has the same wealth) and 1 indicating maximum inequality in wealth distribution (i.e., one person holds all the wealth while others have none). In this study, we test the hypothesis that consumers living in regions with higher Gini coefficients show a greater preference for advertisements emphasizing personal control.

Participants and Design

We recruited a representative sample of 200 Muslim Banjar participants from South Kalimantan, Indonesia. This sample was geographically stratified to ensure balanced representation across different regions of South Kalimantan, accounting for varying levels of economic inequality (measured by Gini coefficients). After excluding a small number of participants who did not meet the criteria or failed attention checks, data from 200 participants were included in the analysis (Mean age = 36.52, $SD = 11.62$; 102 females).

Advertisement Selection

After providing informed consent, participants completed the 'Product and Advertisement Evaluation' task. They viewed three print advertisements featuring different products (a watch, a pen, and a mobile phone) with no brand information. The advertisements were presented randomly, one at a time. For each advertisement, participants were asked to choose the ad they preferred from two options provided to complement the ad. The pen and mobile phone ads served as filler items, each featuring two neutral and equally engaging options. For example, in the mobile phone ad, participants chose between 'Invisible Aid. Eyes for Detail' and 'Invisible Aid. Precision Every Time.' In contrast, for the target ad (the watch), participants chose between an advertisement emphasizing personal control, 'Life Is Now. Control Every Moment,' and a neutral ad, 'Life Is Now. Enjoy Every Moment.' Our dependent variable was the participant's choice between the personal control ad and the neutral ad for the watch.

Demographic and Economic Inequality Variables

Participants provided demographic information including age, gender, annual income, education level, employment status, ethnicity, political orientation, and religiosity. These demographic characteristics were included as control variables to verify the reliability of our findings. "Participants reported their regions of residence, enabling us to integrate Gini coefficient data as an objective measure of regional economic inequality. To ensure participants understood the concept, a brief explanation of the Gini coefficient's relevance to wealth distribution was provided during the survey. The regional Gini coefficients varied, with an average value ranging from 0.42 to 0.49. Additionally, we collected data on median income, population size, and crime rates for each region as regional-level control variables to verify the robustness of our findings. Participants also assessed their emotional states using three 7-point bipolar scales (sad/happy, stressed/relaxed, angry/calm, $\alpha = 0.89$) and completed an attention check before receiving a debriefing, thanking, and compensation.

Results

We analyzed participants' choices for the target advertisement by coding "1" for the personal control ad and "0" for the neutral ad. Using a hierarchical linear model (HLM), we modeled participants' choices based on the Gini coefficient of their region of residence. As predicted, the results showed a significant positive association ($\gamma = 0.13$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(2075) = 4.29$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.19], OR = 1.14), indicating that higher economic inequality increased the likelihood of participants choosing the personal control ad by 14%. This effect was not observed for the filler ads ($ps > 0.59$).

Next, we controlled for all individual-level and regional-level variables in the model (Model 2, Table 2). The Gini coefficient remained a significant predictor of ad choice, confirming the reliability of our findings.

Table 1: Verification Results for Study 1

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Intercept</i>	-6.14 (1.44)	-3.76 (1.92)
<i>Economic Inequality (Gini)</i>	0.13 (0.03)	0.08 (0.04)
<i>Age</i>	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)
<i>Gender</i>	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.09)
<i>Income</i>	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
<i>Ethnicity</i>	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.10)
<i>Education</i>	0.12 (0.04)	0.12 (0.04)
<i>Employment Status</i>	-0.10 (0.14)	-0.10 (0.14)
<i>Political Orientation</i>	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
<i>Religiosity</i>	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
<i>Emotional Influence</i>	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
<i>Median Regional Income</i>	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)
<i>Regional Population Size</i>	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
<i>Regional Crime Rate</i>	0.001 (0.04)	0.001 (0.04)

Note: The dependent variable was coded as 1 for choosing the personal control ad and 0 for the neutral ad. Gender was coded as 1 = female, 0 = male. Ethnicity was coded as 1 = Banjar, 0 = other ethnicities. Income and Median Regional Income were divided by 10,000. Regional Population Size was divided by 1,000,000. Crime Rate was calculated per 10 million people. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

Using a representative sample of the Banjar community in South Kalimantan, we provide evidence of a robust relationship between economic inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient) and preference for advertisements emphasizing personal control. Residents of regions with higher economic inequality were more likely to choose advertisements that promote personal control. This relationship held even after

controlling for various individual and regional factors that could influence preferences. However, there are limitations to Study 1, as the observed relationship is correlational, and we cannot conclude causality. To address this limitation, in Study 2, we will manipulate perceptions of economic inequality.

Study 2

Participants and Design

Participants ($N = 130$ Muslim Banjar citizens from South Kalimantan) took part in an experimental study with a **2 (economic inequality: high vs. low) \times 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral)** between-subjects design, with a compensation of IDR 25,000. Ten participants were excluded before analysis for meeting at least one of the following exclusion criteria: (1) failure to follow the writing instructions, (2) failure to answer comprehension check questions, or (3) failure on the attention check. The final sample consisted of 120 participants ($M_{age} = 35.21$, $SD = 8.45$; 60 female).

Economic Inequality Manipulation

Using a well-established procedure, we manipulated participants' perceptions of economic inequality in South Kalimantan by providing information on the wealth distribution in the province. Participants were randomly assigned to perceive either high or low economic inequality through pie charts displaying manipulated wealth distribution data. To maintain ethical transparency, participants were debriefed at the end of the study about the fictitious nature of these charts. To enhance the perceived credibility of the manipulation, participants were informed that the data were based on the most recent national survey conducted by Statistics Indonesia (BPS).

After viewing the chart, participants answered three comprehension check questions and were asked to write about the implications of living in a province with high or low economic inequality. Subsequently, they rated the perceived equality of wealth distribution in their province (0 = extremely equal, 10 = extremely unequal) and reported their affective state on three 7-point bipolar scales (sad/cheerful, stressed/relaxed, angry/calm; $\alpha = 0.91$).

Appeal Type

Following the manipulation of economic inequality, participants were asked to evaluate an advertisement for a mobile phone as part of a purported independent study on 'Product and Advertisement Evaluation.' In the personal control appeal condition, the ad read, 'For those who want to control their communication. Expression in Motion.' In the neutral appeal condition, the ad read, 'For those who want to experience smoothness in communication. Expression in Motion.' Participants rated their attitudes toward the advertised product using 7-point bipolar scales (unfavorable/favorable, unattractive/attractive, bad/good, not likeable/likeable; Crites et al., 1994). These items were averaged to create an overall attitude score ($\alpha = 0.96$). Behavioral intentions were assessed using two questions regarding the likelihood of purchasing the mobile phone and recommending it to others, each measured on 7-point scales (1 = not at all likely, 7 = extremely likely), and the scores were averaged to form a composite score ($\alpha = 0.90$). Finally, participants completed an attention check, followed by a debriefing, a thank-you message, and compensation.

Results

Manipulation Check

Participants in the high economic inequality condition perceived significantly higher economic inequality in their province ($M = 8.62$, $SD = 2.07$) than participants in the low economic

inequality condition ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 2.28$; $F(1, 118) = 347.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = 0.33$), indicating that the manipulation was successful.

Attitudes Toward the Advertised Product

A 2 (economic inequality: high vs. low) \times 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral) between-subjects ANOVA on attitudes revealed a significant interaction between the two factors ($F(1, 118) = 7.66$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2p = 0.01$). No other effects were significant ($F_s < 1.01$, $p_s > 0.32$).

As expected, in the personal control appeal condition, high economic inequality led to more favorable attitudes ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.25$) compared to low economic inequality ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.47$; $F(1, 118) = 5.57$, $p = .019$, $\eta^2p = 0.01$). However, in the neutral appeal condition, attitudes did not differ significantly between high ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.32$) and low economic inequality ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.26$; $F(1, 118) = 2.42$, $p = .121$).

Table 2: Attitudes Toward the Advertised Product

Economic Inequality	Appeal Type	M (Mean)	SD (Standard Deviation)
High	Personal Control	5.23	1.25
High	Neutral	5.02	1.32
Low	Personal Control	4.86	1.47
Low	Neutral	5.10	1.26

Behavioral Intentions

A 2 (economic inequality: high vs. low) \times 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral) between-subjects ANOVA on behavioral intentions revealed a main effect of economic inequality ($F(1, 118) = 8.37$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2p = 0.01$), a main effect of appeal type ($F(1, 118) = 16.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = 0.02$), and a significant interaction between the two factors ($F(1, 118) = 18.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = 0.02$).

In the personal control appeal condition, high economic inequality resulted in higher behavioral intentions ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.47$) compared to low economic inequality ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.56$; $F(1, 118) = 25.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = 0.03$). However, in the neutral appeal condition, behavioral intentions did not differ significantly between high ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.63$) and low economic inequality ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.72$; $F < 1$, $p = .339$).

Table 3: Behavioral Intentions (Likelihood of Buying and Recommending the Product)

Economic Inequality	Appeal Type	M (Mean)	SD (Standard Deviation)
High	Personal Control	4.92	1.47
High	Neutral	3.82	1.63
Low	Personal Control	3.72	1.56
Low	Neutral	3.95	1.72

Affect (Reported Positive or Negative Emotions)

A 2 (economic inequality: low vs. high) \times 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral) between-subjects ANOVA on affect revealed a significant main effect of economic inequality, with participants in the low economic inequality condition reporting more positive affect ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.34$) than those in the high economic inequality condition ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.46$; $F(1, 118) = 11.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = 0.02$). No other effects were significant ($F_s < 1.54$, $p_s > 0.21$).

Table 4: Affect (Reported Positive or Negative Emotions)

Economic Inequality	Appeal Type	M (Mean)	SD (Standard Deviation)
High	Personal Control	4.89	1.46
High	Neutral	4.88	1.49
Low	Personal Control	5.24	1.34
Low	Neutral	5.10	1.36

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that economic inequality and appeal type influence attitudes toward products, behavioral intentions, and affective states. Specifically, the personal control appeal in the high economic inequality condition led to more favorable attitudes and higher behavioral intentions. In contrast, similar effects were not observed in the neutral appeal condition, suggesting that appeals featuring personal control are more effective in influencing consumers in contexts with high perceived economic inequality.

These findings underscore the symbolic and compensatory nature of responses to personal control appeals, particularly in contexts where economic inequality is perceived to be high. Furthermore, these results remained robust even after controlling for participants' affective states, suggesting that the effect of economic inequality on appeal preference was not explained by changes in emotional responses.

Study 3

In Study 3, we aimed to replicate the findings from Study 2 using a different product category, specifically a fitness app, and to expand on our previous results by testing the mediating role of financial threat and sense of control as underlying mechanisms for the observed effect.

Participants and Design

A total of 152 Muslim Banjar participants from South Kalimantan, Indonesia, took part in the experiment, which employed a 2 (economic inequality: high vs. low) × 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral) between-subjects design. Participants were compensated with IDR 25,000 for their involvement. Seven participants were excluded from the analysis based on the preregistered exclusion criteria, resulting in a final sample of 145 participants (Mage = 35.21, SD = 8.45; 72 female).

Economic Inequality Manipulation and Process Measures

We measured participants' demographic characteristics and manipulated their perceptions of economic inequality in South Kalimantan using the same procedure outlined in Study 2. Using well-established scales, participants then rated their perceived financial threat and sense of control. Specifically, we assessed perceptions of financial threat with a 5-item scale ($\alpha = 0.93$) from Marjanovic et al.⁵⁶ on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all; 7 = very much). Sample items included, "How uncertain do you feel about your financial situation?" and "How worried are you about your financial situation?" These items were averaged to form an overall score, with higher scores indicating a greater perceived financial threat. Sense of control was assessed using the 12-item scale ($\alpha = 0.94$) from Lachman and Weaver⁵⁷ on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Sample items included, "I can do just about anything I really set my mind to" and "I have

⁵⁶ Marjanovic et al., "Evaluation of the Financial Threat Scale (FTS) in Four European, Non-Student Samples."

⁵⁷ Margie E. Lachman and Suzanne L. Weaver, "The Sense of Control as a Moderator of Social Class Differences in Health and Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 3 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.3.763>.

little control over the things that happen to me" (reverse-coded). These items were averaged to form an overall score, with higher scores indicating a greater sense of control.

In line with our preregistered plan and as a stringent test of our proposed mediation mechanism, we counterbalanced the order of presentation for the financial threat and sense of control scales to minimize order-related biases in the mediation design⁵⁸. Finally, participants' affective states were measured using six 7-point bipolar scales (negative/positive, sad/happy, stressed/relaxed, anxious/calm, aroused/still, and bad/good; $\alpha = 0.94$). We chose to measure the mediators before the dependent variable, as endorsement of control-related advertisements could potentially satiate the proposed compensatory process in our studies.

Appeal Type

In a "Market Research Task," participants evaluated a print advertisement featuring the Samsung Health App, a popular health management platform that offers a wide variety of fitness and wellness tools. To enhance data quality and participant engagement with the task, we provided an additional incentive tied to the advertised product. Along with their standard compensation, participants were informed that 25 individuals would be randomly selected at the end of the study to receive a Shopee voucher worth IDR 50,000. Participants were randomly assigned to either a personal control or neutral appeal condition. In the personal control appeal condition, the advertisement emphasized individuals' complete control over their health journey, highlighting the Samsung Health App's ability to offer flexibility and personalized choices.

To reinforce the "Market Research Task" cover story, we asked participants to respond to filler questions about the advertisement's background color and its suitability for health and wellness platforms or lifestyle websites. Our main dependent variable was assessed by asking participants to indicate the percentage of free time they would be willing to allocate to using the Samsung Health App if they won the raffle, on a scale ranging from 0% to 100%. Participants were explicitly informed that their answers would not affect their chances of winning the raffle. Finally, participants rated how important health and wellness management is to them on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much), a measure used to control for the robustness of our findings.

Results

Manipulation Check

Participants in the high economic inequality condition believed that economic inequality was higher in their region ($M = 8.79$, $SD = 2.11$) compared to participants in the low economic inequality condition ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 2.40$; $F(1, 143) = 483.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = 0.37$), indicating that our manipulation was successful.

Free Time Allocation for Exercise

A 2 (economic inequality: high vs. low) \times 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral) between-subjects ANOVA on the percentage of free time allocated for exercise revealed a significant main effect of appeal type ($F(1, 143) = 3.99$, $p = .046$, $\eta^2p = .01$), while the main effect of economic inequality was not significant ($F < 1$, $p = .32$). Importantly, the expected interaction effect between these factors was significant ($F(1, 143) = 9.32$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2p = .01$). As predicted, in the personal control appeal condition, high economic inequality led to a higher percentage of free time allocated for exercise ($M = 29.14$, $SD = 28.00$) compared to low economic inequality (M

⁵⁸ Steven J. Spencer, Mark P. Zanna, and Geoffrey T. Fong, "Establishing a Causal Chain: Why Experiments Are Often More Effective than Mediational Analyses in Examining Psychological Processes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89, no. 6 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.845>.

= 21.94, SD = 24.60; $F(1, 143) = 8.26, p = .004, \eta^2_p = 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI } [2.28, 12.10]$). However, in the neutral appeal condition, there was no significant difference in the percentage of free time allocated for exercise between the high ($M = 20.16, SD = 21.32$) and low inequality conditions ($M = 23.82, SD = 26.92; F(1, 143) = 2.10, p = .147$).

Testing the Underlying Mechanism

Using Hayes Process Macro (2018; Model 90, v 4.1), we tested a moderated serial mediation model in which economic inequality (low = 0, high = 1) served as the independent variable, with financial threat (first mediator) and sense of control (second mediator) as serial mediators, and the percentage of free time allocated for exercise as the dependent variable. Appeal type (neutral = 0, personal control = 1) served as the moderator on the relationship between sense of control and the dependent variable.

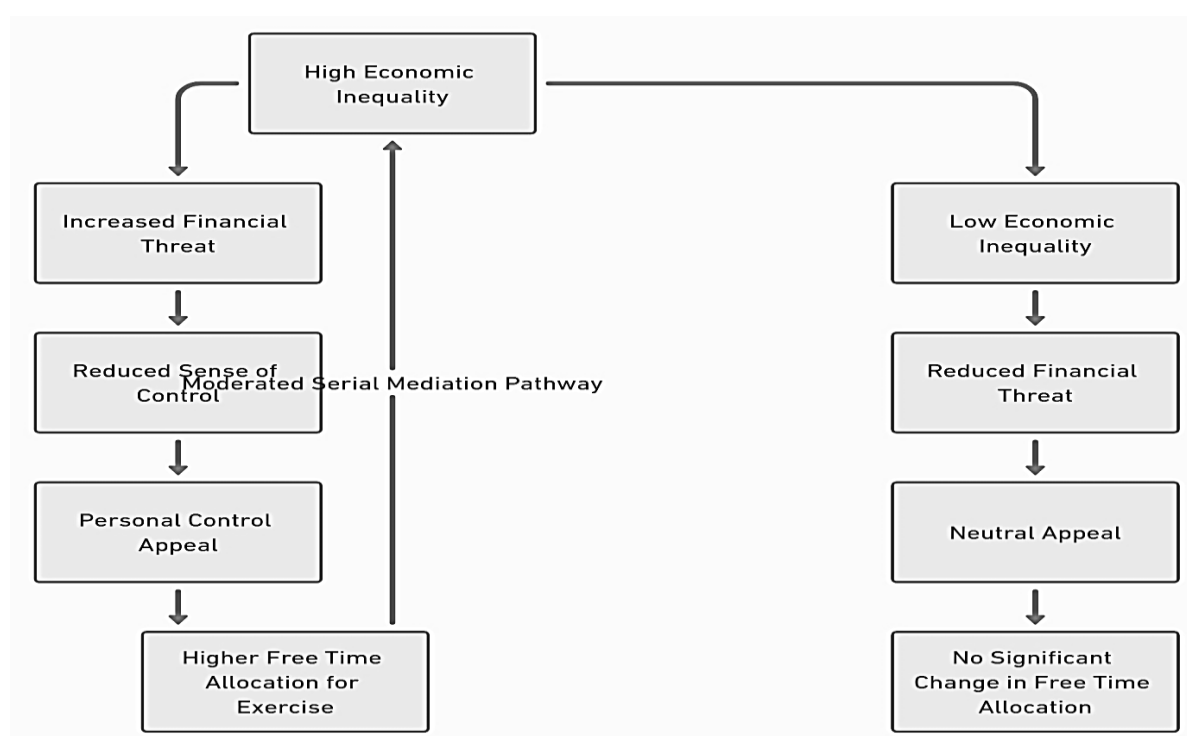


Figure 1: The Mediating Effect of Financial Threat and Sense of Control (Study 3)

Bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 resamples showed that the effect of high economic inequality on the dependent variable was serially mediated by perceived financial threat and sense of control in the personal control appeal condition (indirect effect = 0.35, SE = 0.22, 95% CI [0.02, 0.88]), but not in the neutral appeal condition (indirect effect = -0.09, SE = 0.16, 95% CI [-0.46, 0.20]).

Discussion

Study 3 further supports our hypothesis regarding the impact of higher economic inequality on preference for personal control appeals. It also provides insights into the mechanism underlying this effect. Consistent with our theoretical framework, higher economic inequality led to increased perceptions of financial threat, which in turn reduced individuals' sense of control. Consequently, a diminished sense of control amplified responses to a personal control appeal,

whereas no such effect was observed for a neutral appeal. These findings once again emphasize the compensatory nature of consumers' preference for personal control appeals in the context of high economic inequality.

Similar to our previous studies, the main findings remained significant even after controlling for participants' affective states and demographic characteristics. Additionally, affect did not mediate the effect of inequality on the dependent variable.

Study 4

The aim of this study was twofold. First, we sought to understand the underlying process by manipulating one of the mediating variables: the sense of control. We chose to manipulate this variable because of its fundamental role in motivating human behavior and its potential to provide a unifying explanation for various findings in the economic inequality literature, which we will discuss in more detail in the general discussion. Based on our theoretical framework, we hypothesized that providing (vs. not providing) an opportunity for individuals to restore their sense of control would reduce the impact of economic inequality on the preference for personal control appeals.

The second goal of this study was to use a more consequential dependent variable that extends beyond attitudinal and intention measures, thereby enhancing the implications and generalizability of our findings. Accordingly, we utilized an incentive-compatible behavioral task, where participants indicated their willingness to pay (WTP) for a target product, knowing their selection would influence the allocation of a potential shopping voucher prize. To ensure ethical compliance, participants were informed that the task posed no risk of actual monetary loss. Furthermore, because previous studies had shown no significant effect of economic inequality on participants' preference for neutral ad appeals, we exclusively exposed all participants to an ad featuring a personal control appeal in this study.

Participants and Design

Participants (N = 141 Indonesian citizens, all from the Banjar Muslim community in South Kalimantan) completed an experimental study with a 2 (economic inequality: low vs. high) × 2 (control restoration opportunity: present vs. absent) between-subjects design for a participation fee of IDR 50,000. Prior to data analysis, we excluded 5 participants who did not meet our pre-registered exclusion criteria. The final analysis included data from 136 participants (M_{age} = 36.52, SD = 11.62; 72 female participants).

Manipulation of Economic Inequality and Financial Threat

Upon consent, participants were informed that, in addition to the standard participation fee of IDR 50,000, 10 participants would be randomly selected after the study to receive a shopping voucher worth IDR 50,000. Participants then proceeded to the main study, which they were told consisted of several independent parts. In the first part, under the guise of an economic opinion survey, we manipulated participants' perceptions of economic inequality using the same procedure outlined in Study 3. We then measured perceptions of financial threat using the same 5-item financial threat scale ($\alpha = 0.94$) and affect ($\alpha = 0.92$) as in Study 3.

Sense of Control Manipulation

Next, we manipulated participants' sense of control using a well-established recall task. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions, where an opportunity to restore their sense of control was either present or absent. In the opportunity-present condition, participants were asked to recall and write about an instance where they felt they had strong control

over an important situation in their life. In the opportunity-absent condition, participants were asked to write about their most recent grocery shopping trip, thus not providing an opportunity to restore their sense of control. After the recall task, all participants responded to a 1-item manipulation check by indicating how much control they felt they had at that moment using a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

Behavioral Dependent Variable

In the "Market Research Task," all participants were presented with a print advertisement from a fictional brand called BacaSeru, a company that specializes in creating bookmarks and reading accessories designed for book lovers in Indonesia. This advertisement, in line with the objectives of our study, featured a personal control appeal: "Start Your Reading Journey with BacaSeru and Take Control of Your Literary Adventure." We informed participants that we were collaborating with BacaSeru to gather opinions about this print ad, which would be featured in book-related and lifestyle magazines, as well as on popular e-commerce platforms and websites.

To reinforce the cover story, we asked participants to respond to questions about the ad's background color and its suitability for bookshops, online book communities, and lifestyle websites, which are common outlets in Indonesia for such advertisements.

We measured our target variable by asking participants to indicate the amount of money they were willing to spend using a Shopee voucher (or any local voucher system commonly used in Indonesia) to purchase a bookmark from BacaSeru if they were selected in the random draw. Participants were informed that the amount they selected would be deducted from their voucher balance and transferred to a special online voucher that could only be used to buy bookmarks from BacaSeru, with a promotional code provided to winners. It was emphasized that every participant had an equal chance of being selected in the random draw, regardless of the amount they chose.

Participants then indicated their preferred amount using a slider scale from IDR 0 (none of my money) to IDR 375,000 (all of my money). This incentive-compatible procedure helped capture participants' willingness to pay (WTP) for a product advertised with a personal control appeal.

Results

Economic Inequality Manipulation Check

Participants in the high economic inequality condition perceived economic inequality to be higher ($M = 8.80$, $SD = 1.94$) than did participants in the low economic inequality condition ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 2.36$; $F(1, 134) = 540.45$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.40$), indicating that our manipulation of economic inequality was successful.

Sense of Control Manipulation Check

Participants who recalled an experience in which they felt in control of their lives reported feeling more in control ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.51$) than did participants who wrote about a recent visit to a local market ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.45$; $F(1, 134) = 4.78$, $p = 0.029$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$), indicating that our manipulation of control was effective.

Main Hypothesis Testing

A 2 (economic inequality: low vs. high) \times 2 (control restoration opportunity: present vs. absent) between-subjects ANOVA on WTP revealed a significant two-way interaction between these factors ($F(1, 134) = 6.37$, $p = 0.012$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$). No other effects were significant ($F_s < 2.14$, $p_s > 0.14$). We then examined the conditional effects according to our pre-registered plan. As expected, in the baseline condition where the opportunity to restore control was absent, high economic inequality led to higher WTP ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 6.15$) compared to low economic

inequality ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 5.25$; $F(1, 134) = 5.89$, $p = 0.015$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$, 95% CI_{diff} [0.25, 2.36]), replicating our previous findings. Importantly, however, when the opportunity to restore control was present, there was no significant difference in WTP between the high economic inequality ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 5.13$) and low economic inequality ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 5.38$) conditions ($F(1, 134) = 1.33$, $p = 0.249$).

Testing the Mediating Role of Financial Threat

Following our pre-registered plan, we examined the full process chain using a moderated mediation model.⁵⁹ In this model, financial threat served as the mediator between economic inequality (high = 1, low = 0) and WTP, and the control restoration opportunity (present = 1, absent = 0) served as the moderator of the relationship between financial threat and WTP.

As predicted, high (vs. low) economic inequality increased perceived financial threat ($b = 0.30$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(134) = 2.57$, $p = 0.010$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.52]). Importantly, perceived financial threat interacted with the control restoration opportunity in shaping WTP ($b = -1.04$, $SE = 0.23$, $t(134) = 4.56$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.49, -0.59]). Consistent with our prediction, in the absence of an opportunity to restore control, higher financial threat led to higher WTP for the advertised product ($b = 0.80$, $SE = 0.16$, $t(134) = 4.99$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.49, 1.12]). However, when the opportunity to restore control was present, no significant association between perceived financial threat and WTP was observed ($b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.16$, $t(134) = 1.46$, $p = 0.145$, 95% CI [-0.55, 0.08]).

A 5,000-resample bootstrap analysis revealed that the effect of high (vs. low) economic inequality on WTP was mediated through perceived financial threat when the opportunity to restore control was absent (indirect effect = 0.24, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.48]). However, no mediation occurred when the opportunity was present (indirect effect = -0.07, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [-0.22, 0.03]). The overall index of moderated mediation was also significant (index = -0.31, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI [-0.63, -0.07]), further supporting our theory about the psychological basis of the effects of economic inequality on preferences for ads emphasizing personal control.

Discussion

The findings from Study 4 provide several key insights. First, by using an incentive-compatible behavioral task with consequential outcomes, we confirmed our primary hypothesis that high economic inequality increases preferences for ads that emphasize personal control. Second, using a process-oriented approach through moderation, we found that this effect was attenuated when participants were given the opportunity to restore their sense of control. Finally, we tested and confirmed the full process chain by including perceived financial threat as a mediator in a moderated mediation model. Overall, the findings of Study 4 reinforce the idea that enhancing one's sense of control can reduce the compensatory reactions that arise from high economic inequality. Importantly, these results remain significant even after controlling for participants' affective states and demographic characteristics.

Study 5

In this study, we examined the role of dispositional beliefs in upward mobility as a buffer against the psychological threats posed by economic inequality, further illustrating when and how economic inequality shapes preferences for personal control appeals. We hypothesized that the effect of high economic inequality on preference for personal control appeals would be more (less)

⁵⁹ Andrew F. Hayes, "An Index and Test of Linear Moderated Mediation," *Multivariate Behavioral Research* 50, no. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00273171.2014.962683>.

pronounced when consumers have weaker (stronger) dispositional beliefs in upward mobility. This is because consumers who feel economically "stuck" (i.e., weaker mobility beliefs) should be more threatened by higher economic inequality and, therefore, engage more in compensatory consumption.

Participants and Procedure

We conducted this study in two phases, ten days apart. Specifically, we measured participants' dispositional beliefs about upward mobility in the first phase, while the main experiment was conducted in the second phase (details below). By adopting this approach, we ensured that our economic inequality manipulation did not affect participants' responses to the focal moderator (i.e., upward mobility scale) and vice versa, minimizing the potential for common method bias.⁶⁰

Phase One

In phase one (with a compensation fee of IDR 40,000), we recruited 30 participants from the Banjar Muslim community in South Kalimantan to complete the Perceived Economic Mobility (PEM) scale (Yoon & Wong, 2017). This scale has eight items that measure consumers' dispositional beliefs about upward economic mobility. Sample items included: "There are plenty of opportunities for anyone to go as far as they want" and "Everyone has a fair chance of moving up the economic ladder." Items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) and averaged to form an overall score ($\alpha = 0.91$), with higher scores indicating stronger beliefs in economic mobility.

Phase Two

Ten days after completing the first phase, all 30 participants were invited to take part in a "Market Research Survey." This phase employed a 2 (economic inequality: low vs. high) \times 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral) between-subjects experimental design to examine the interaction between inequality perception and advertising appeal on behavioral intentions.

Procedure

Initial Measures:

Participants completed the same financial threat scale ($\alpha = 0.94$) and sense of control scale ($\alpha = 0.95$) as in Study 3, along with a three-item bipolar affect scale ($\alpha = 0.88$) to assess their current emotional state.

Advertising and Product Evaluation Task:

Participants were randomly assigned to evaluate an advertisement for the NU Online Application, a platform that provides religious, educational, and community-based resources, under one of two conditions:

Personal Control Appeal Condition:

The ad emphasized personal empowerment and agency, with the tagline:

"Empower your faith, schedule your goals, and lead a productive, fulfilling life with NU Online."

Neutral Appeal Condition:

⁶⁰ Philip M. Podsakoff et al., "Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879>.

The ad offered a neutral message, stating:

“Access religious guidance, community news, and educational tools with NU Online.”

Dependent Variable:

Participants rated their behavioral intentions toward the NU Online App using a 7-item scale ($\alpha = 0.93$), scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Sample items included:

“I am willing to use this app to manage my religious and daily activities.”

“I would consider downloading and using this app regularly.”

Attention Check and Debriefing:

After completing the survey, participants answered an attention check question to ensure data validity. They were then debriefed, thanked, and compensated for their participation.

Results

Economic Inequality Manipulation Check

Participants in the high economic inequality condition perceived economic inequality in their home province to be higher ($M = 8.44$, $SD = 2.35$) than those in the low economic inequality condition ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 2.29$; $F(1, 28) = 387.95$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2p = 0.33$), indicating that our manipulation was successful.

Effect of Economic Inequality and Appeal Type on Behavioral Intentions

We conducted a 2 (economic inequality: low vs. high) \times 2 (appeal type: personal control vs. neutral) between-subjects ANOVA on behavioral intentions to replicate the basic hypothesized effect. Results yielded a main effect of inequality ($F(1, 28) = 8.23$, $p = 0.004$, $\eta^2p = 0.01$) and a main effect of appeal type ($F(1, 28) = 7.69$, $p = 0.006$, $\eta^2p = 0.01$). Importantly, the critical interaction between these factors was significant ($F(1, 28) = 6.05$, $p = 0.014$, $\eta^2p = 0.01$).

As expected, in the personal control appeal condition, high economic inequality led to greater behavioral intentions ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.30$) than did the low economic inequality condition ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.37$; $F(1, 28) = 14.25$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2p = 0.02$, 95% CI_{diff} [0.25, 0.79]). However, in the neutral appeal condition, there was no significant difference in behavioral intentions between the high ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.44$) and low economic inequality conditions ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.34$; $F < 1$, $p = 0.773$).

Role of Dispositional Beliefs in Upward Economic Mobility

We regressed participants' behavioral intentions on economic inequality (0 = low, 1 = high), appeal type (0 = neutral, 1 = personal control), and perceived upward mobility (centered), and their respective two- and three-way interaction terms. Results revealed a significant two-way interaction between economic inequality and appeal type ($b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.19$, $t(28) = 2.60$, $p = 0.010$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.88]), and the critical three-way interaction between economic inequality, appeal type, and perceived upward mobility ($b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(28) = 2.22$, $p = 0.027$, 95% CI [-0.58, -0.03]).

To illustrate this three-way interaction, we examined participants' behavioral intentions at different levels of appeal type, as shown in the table below:

Table 5: Different levels of appeal type

Appeal Type	Economic Inequality	M-1SD (Weak Mobility Beliefs)	M+1SD (Strong Mobility Beliefs)
Personal Control	High	5.75 (p < 0.001)	4.99 (p = 0.81)
	Low	4.47 (p = 0.82)	4.44 (p = 0.80)
Neutral	High	4.48 (p = 0.77)	4.44 (p = 0.70)
	Low	4.47 (p = 0.80)	4.44 (p = 0.78)

Discussion

Results from Study 5 highlight the crucial role of dispositional beliefs in upward economic mobility in buffering the psychological threats posed by economic inequality. Specifically, when participants had weaker dispositional beliefs in upward mobility (i.e., felt economically "stuck"), high economic inequality heightened perceptions of financial threat and lack of control, which in turn increased preference for personal control appeals. Conversely, stronger dispositional beliefs in upward mobility attenuated this effect by neutralizing the threats posed by economic inequality. These findings were robust even after controlling for various demographic characteristics of participants and were not attributable to their affective state.

In five studies using various product categories and multiple operationalizations of preference, such as choice, attitudinal measures, and behavioral outcomes with real consequences, we provided robust and converging evidence that higher economic inequality increases the preference for personal control appeals. This effect emerged both when we used Gini coefficients as the objective measure of economic inequality and when we manipulated perceptions of economic inequality. We also identified the underlying psychological mechanisms of this effect by showing that high (vs. low) economic inequality provokes feelings of financial threat and a lack of control, which subsequently increase consumers' preference for personal control appeals. Finally, we demonstrated that a momentary boost in the sense of control or a stronger dispositional belief in economic mobility effectively buffers the psychological threats posed by higher economic inequality and reduces the preference for personal control appeals.

However, in the context of the Banjar community in South Kalimantan, these findings must be understood within the cultural and social dynamics that distinguish this group from others in Indonesia. In the Banjar community, which places a strong emphasis on solidarity, religious values, and collective cooperation, individuals' responses to economic inequality and personal control appeals in advertising may differ. While economic inequality remains a challenge, social solidarity and beliefs in economic mobility play a significant role in mitigating the negative effects of inequality in this context.

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to marketing literature by establishing economic inequality as a novel macro-level determinant of consumer responses to advertising. Furthermore, it underscores the role of cultural values, such as religiosity and social solidarity, in moderating these effects, particularly within the Banjar community. Previous advertising research has primarily focused on individual-level factors, with limited attention given to how macro-level phenomena, such as economic inequality, shape consumers' responses to marketing communications. Our study is the first to address this gap by showing that living in environments characterized by high economic inequality leads to a stronger preference for advertising appeals that convey a sense of personal control. In the context of the Banjar community, where social solidarity and collectivist values are prevalent, even though economic inequality may impact individuals, their response to advertising may be more influenced by these collective values.

We also contribute to the emerging literature on economic inequality by moving beyond well-being and socio-political outcomes—typical focal points in this literature—and demonstrating its systematic impact on how consumers navigate the advertising world. Beliefs in economic mobility, which hold significant relevance in Banjar society, serve as an important psychological mechanism that reduces the threat from economic inequality and can moderate its effects on consumer preferences for personal control appeals. In the Banjar community, which has a strong belief in the potential for economic improvement through hard work and social support, this belief functions as a psychological buffer against the threats posed by high economic inequality.

CONCLUSION

Practical Implications

This research highlights the significant challenges posed by economic inequality, including its impact on trust in institutions and the prevalence of conspiracy beliefs. These findings are critical for marketers and policymakers aiming to promote positive behaviors in contexts like South Kalimantan, where economic inequality exacerbates health issues such as obesity.⁶¹ Marketing campaigns can be more effective by leveraging appeals to personal control, as demonstrated by Study 3, where individuals in high-inequality contexts showed a preference for health apps emphasizing personal autonomy in promoting exercise.

Economic inequality also influences short-term financial decision-making and increases personal debt due to a focus on immediate needs. Financial institutions can mitigate these effects by designing campaigns that promote long-term financial behaviors, such as retirement savings, through personal control appeals and enhanced financial literacy programs.⁶² Employing behavioral economics strategies, like framing future benefits of saving, can help individuals prioritize long-term planning, addressing impulsive financial behaviors caused by inequality.⁶³ These insights underline the need for targeted, culturally sensitive interventions in regions like South Kalimantan to address the adverse outcomes of economic disparity.⁶⁴

Applications for Local Policymakers

Integrating the cultural values of the Banjar community into public health and financial literacy campaigns in South Kalimantan can significantly enhance their effectiveness. The Banjar people's way of life, deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, local customs, and environmental considerations, provides a framework for developing culturally relevant initiatives that resonate with community members.⁶⁵ By leveraging existing social structures and emphasizing collective responsibility, policymakers can mobilize community support for health and financial literacy

⁶¹ Kate E. Pickett and Richard G. Wilkinson, "Income Inequality and Health: A Causal Review," *Social Science and Medicine*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.12.031>; Toshiaki Aizawa, "Inequality in Health Opportunities in Indonesia: Long-Term Influence of Early-Life Circumstances on Health," *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (December 1, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13714-8>.

⁶² Annamaria Lusardi and Olivia S. Mitchell, "The Economic Importance of Financial Literacy: Theory and Evidence," *Journal of Economic Literature* 52, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.52.1.5>.

⁶³ David Blake and Tom Boardman, "Spend More Today Safely: Using Behavioral Economics to Improve Retirement Expenditure Decisions with SPEEDOMETER Plans," *Risk Management and Insurance Review* 17, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1111/rmir.12007>.

⁶⁴ Colleen Tokar Asaad, "Investor Confidence: Are You Your Own Worst Enemy?," *Financial Planning Review* 3, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1002/cfp2.1092>; Ellie Suh, "Can't Save or Won't Save: Financial Resilience and Discretionary Retirement Saving among British Adults in Their Thirties and Forties," *Ageing and Society* 42, no. 12 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X21000337>.

⁶⁵ Ismaya and Saputra, "Embedded Economic Behavior in Baatar Jujuran of Banjar Tradition in Banjarmasin."

programs, as evidenced by successful strategies in similar contexts.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the promotion of these initiatives through community gatherings and local leaders aligns with the cultural emphasis on respect for elders and social solidarity, thereby fostering a deeper engagement with the campaigns.⁶⁷ Ultimately, this culturally responsive approach not only addresses immediate health and financial challenges but also empowers the Banjar community to take ownership of their well-being and economic futures, creating a sustainable model for future interventions.

Research Limitations

This study has certain limitations, including a focus on specific cultural and socio-economic contexts. The sample was predominantly drawn from the Banjar community, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cultural groups. Additionally, while this research emphasizes personal control appeals, other psychological mechanisms influencing consumer behavior under economic inequality warrant further exploration.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should explore additional factors that moderate the effects of economic inequality, such as cultural values, religious beliefs, and power distance. Cultural values play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in communities like the Banjar, where social cooperation and religious tenets related to equality may influence responses to marketing strategies. Research indicates that religious beliefs can significantly impact socioeconomic standing and consumer attitudes, suggesting that these cultural elements could alter the effectiveness of personal control appeals in advertising.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the interplay between ideology and economic inequality has been shown to shape perceptions of what is acceptable in terms of inequality, highlighting the importance of understanding local cultural contexts.⁶⁹

Investigating how these cultural elements influence consumer behavior in high-inequality settings would provide more nuanced insights for local interventions. The Banjar community's unique cultural framework could lead to distinct consumer responses compared to other populations. For example, the moderating role of system-justifying beliefs has been documented, indicating that individuals' perceptions of inequality are often influenced by their ideological beliefs.⁷⁰ This suggests that understanding local cultural dynamics is essential for developing effective marketing strategies that resonate with community values.

Additionally, research should consider power distance beliefs, which may affect perceptions of inequality and consumer responses differently across cultural contexts. Power distance, defined as the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect power inequalities, can significantly influence consumer behavior and attitudes towards economic

⁶⁶ A. Maleimakuni, A. V., Fatah, L., Yunani, A., & Adriani, "Willingness To Pay (WTP) To Measure The Existing and The Heritage Values of Agriculture Wetland (Case Study of Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan)," *Technium Sustainability* 6 (2024): 1–13, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.47577/sustainability.v6i.11136>.

⁶⁷ Kamariah Kamariah et al., "Manifestation Culture of Banjar Ethnic In The Lyrics Of The Song Uma Abah (Anthropolinguistic Approach)," 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.4-11-2020.2314184>.

⁶⁸ Daniel Auguste, "Unpacking Nuances in Mechanisms Linking Religion and Socioeconomic Standing: An Empirical, Mixed-Effects, and Cross-National Analysis," *Sociological Forum* 37, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12858>.

⁶⁹ Efraín García-Sánchez et al., "The Vicious Cycle of Economic Inequality: The Role of Ideology in Shaping the Relationship Between 'What Is' and 'What Ought to Be' in 41 Countries," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 10, no. 8 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618811500>.

⁷⁰ García-Sánchez et al.

inequality.⁷¹In cultures with high power distance, individuals may be more accepting of inequality, which could shape their responses to marketing messages and policy interventions. Exploring these dynamics in the Banjar community can reveal unique strategies for mitigating the psychological and behavioral impacts of inequality, as individuals with high power distance beliefs may respond differently to appeals for social equity compared to those with lower power distance beliefs.

While this study did not find significant moderating effects of income, future research could delve deeper into how income brackets interact with economic inequality, particularly in relation to psychological outcomes like stress and status anxiety. The relationship between economic inequality and psychological well-being is complex, with evidence suggesting that rising inequality can exacerbate feelings of relative deprivation and anxiety among lower-income individuals.⁷²Understanding how different income levels interact with perceptions of inequality could provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and mental health outcomes.

Lastly, our findings underscore the importance of adapting marketing and policy strategies to the local socio-economic and cultural landscape. Future studies should examine cross-cultural differences, urban-rural dynamics, and the role of religious and community values in shaping consumer preferences. For instance, the relationship between economic inequality and belief in meritocracy suggests that individuals in unequal societies may rationalize their circumstances through a belief in meritocratic principles, which can influence their attitudes towards redistribution and social policies.⁷³By addressing these gaps, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of economic inequality's multifaceted impacts on consumer behavior, ultimately leading to more effective interventions tailored to specific cultural contexts.

This research demonstrates that higher economic inequality increases the preference for advertising appeals that emphasize personal control. However, in the Banjar community context, cultural factors such as social solidarity, religiosity, and beliefs in economic mobility can moderate the impact of inequality. Marketing campaigns and public policies that emphasize personal control are likely to be more effective when tailored to these cultural values and local beliefs. To design more effective interventions, it is crucial to understand the local cultural and socio-economic context in which these campaigns are deployed.

⁷¹ Yue He, Zan Mo, and Huijian Fu, "Effect of Downward Line Extension on Consumers' Purchase Intentions: Power Distance Belief as a Moderator," *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 33, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-04-2023-4445>.

⁷² Thuy Vy Nguyen, Jonathon McPhetres, and Edward L. Deci, "Beyond God and Government: The Role of Personal Control in Supporting Citizens' Well-Being in the Face of Changing Economy and Rising Inequality," *Social Psychological Bulletin* 15, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.2663>.

⁷³ Jonathan J.B. Mijs, "The Paradox of Inequality: Income Inequality and Belief in Meritocracy Go Hand in Hand," *Socio-Economic Review* 19, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwy051>.

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