

# Unexpectedly Ethical: Price Shapes the Effect of Ethical Attributes as a Quality Signal

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Cite as:

Guo Yuqi, Winterich Karen (2025), Unexpectedly Ethical: Price Shapes the Effect of Ethical Attributes as a Quality Signal. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 54th, (125965)

Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025



# Unexpectedly Ethical: Price Shapes the Effect of Ethical Attributes as a Quality Signal

## **Abstract:**

Products with ethical attributes are increasingly common across a wide range of prices. This research shows that ethical attributes are a stronger quality signal for lower-priced than higher-priced products. This effect holds for both objective price differences and subjective differences in price perceptions, influencing sales ranks and product choices. The asymmetry occurs because consumers have lower expectations of ethicality for lower-priced products, making positive expectation disconfirmation more likely. For higher-priced products, the strength of ethical attributes as a quality signal is enhanced when a) the price feels subjectively lower, b) all products disclose ethicality, and c) ethical attributes are less common and expected. These findings highlight the role of price in ethical product evaluation, advance understanding of consumer expectations around marketplace morality, and provide strategies for marketers and policymakers to promote ethical consumption.

*Keywords: Ethical attributes, Price, Quality perception*

*Track: Consumer Behavior*