

Department of Marketing



Research Seminars Series

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The Belief in the Social Contract Predicts Consumer Preferences and System-Level Policy Support

Abstract: Philosophers and political theorists have long embraced the notion of the social contract – that is, the idea that there are unwritten rules and norms that social actors need to follow for society to function harmoniously. Yet it is unclear whether laypeople believe in this social contract, and if those beliefs matter for their decision-making. The present research explores this possibility. Specifically, we (1) introduce the construct of the belief in the social contract and distinguish it from other individual difference variables; (2) develop an easy-to-implement scale to measure belief in the social contract, demonstrating the validity and reliability of the scale across five countries in four continents (Australia, Canada, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States); and (3) show that the belief in the social contract, as measured by the scale, can predict important consumer decision making (zero-sum thinking; temporal discounting) and support for system-level policy support to make progress on desirable outcomes (e.g., carbon tax policy support). Thus, individual differences in the belief in the social contract influence decisions, especially in cases where progress toward desired states requires collective action.