

Treating Employees like Robots: The Effect of Political Ideology on Consumer Response to Employee Agency Control

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Abstract

Strict employee agency control—referring to the extensive use of formalized control structures (e.g., service scripts)—is getting media attention and raising polarizing consumer discussions on social media. We propose that strict agency control practices are seen as dehumanizing but these practices also signalize a prototypical capitalist firm (i.e., capitalism associations). Therefore, we argue that political ideology shapes the consumer responses to agency control such that liberals react more negatively to strict agency control because they oppose dehumanization and enjoy the heuristic benefits of capitalism associations less. Five studies including a large-scale text mining study, in which more than 10-million online comments were analyzed, and four controlled studies support these predictions. The findings also show that the effect of agency control on consumers is more prominent for firms that are less associated with capitalism and that service standardization cannot account for these proposed effects.

Keywords: *Agency Control; Political Ideology; Dehumanization*

Track: Consumer Behaviour