

How Consumers Form Perceptions of Unethical Consumer Behavior by Omission (vs. Commission) – The Role of Inflicted Costs, Point of View & Perspective Taking

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Abstract

The omission bias refers to consumers perceiving inaction (act of omission, e.g., not saying anything) more positively than action (act of commission, e.g., lying) in an unethical consumer behavior context. As previous research scarcely looked at how consumers form perceptions of unethical consumer behavior by omission (vs. commission), this study investigates the impact of the inflicted costs, the point of view (e.g., first-person) and perspective taking (e.g., salesperson). Over three experimental studies ($n_1 = 1,596$, $n_2 = 1,143$, $n_3 = 2,172$), we confirm the omission bias. Contrary to previous research we find a more nuanced inflicted cost-effect. While consumers form perceptions independent of the inflicted cost from the point of view of a third person and instead rely on consumer characteristics, when consumers are asked about perceptions from their own perspective and that of others, they use inflicted costs to form perceptions of unethical behaviors by omission (vs. commission).

Keywords: *Unethical consumer behavior; perception; decision making*

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics