

The Big Dishonesty: Consumers are more Dishonest Toward Large Businesses than Small Businesses

Jareef Martuza

Norwegian School of Economics

Hallgeir Sjøstad

Norwegian School of Economics & SNF (Center for Applied Research at NHH)

Helge Thorbjørnsen

Norwegian School of Economics & SNF (Center for Applied Research at NHH)

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Abstract

Although marketers would prefer that consumers behave honestly toward all businesses, the victim business' characteristics can affect consumer (dis)honesty. For example, consumers may find it more morally acceptable to cheat a big business than a small business. This, if true, would be suboptimal for the marketplace because big businesses create substantial economic output, jobs, and innovation. In that vein, we present robust evidence from three studies (N = 2147) of a business size bias in consumer dishonesty. First, we experimentally demonstrate that consumers are more likely to behave dishonestly toward a large business than a small business (Study 1). Second, we present behavioral evidence from an incentive-aligned experiment where people actually behaved more dishonestly toward a large-signaling business to increase payoffs (Study 2). Third, we show that low vulnerability and moral perceptions seem to drive this effect (Study 3). Our findings contribute to understanding the psychological drivers of consumer dishonesty and inform practice on what characteristics of businesses may invite consumer dishonesty.

Subject Areas: *Consumer Behaviour, Decision-Making*

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