

Research Statement

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My research broadly looks at the effects of social hierarchies on consumers' preference formation and consumption decisions. Specifically, I investigate perceptions of social class and social inequality, and interpretations of the legitimacy of hierarchy and inequality as a result of political ideology as antecedents to consumer behaviors. Relevant consumer outcomes that I study include food choices, new product adoption, claiming government benefits, reliance on predatory lending services, hedonic/utilitarian consumption, and data privacy decisions, among others.

In a recent paper published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, titled "Bringing Our Values to the Table: Political Ideology, Food Waste, and Overconsumption," my colleagues and I establish that political ideology influences how consumers manage the tradeoff between food waste and overconsumption when served large portions at restaurants. Liberals, who typically focus on social equity, become concerned with avoiding the broad negative environmental consequences of food waste and overconsume to prevent waste. In contrast, conservatives focus more on taking personal responsibility to avoid the negative consequences of overconsumption and eat less than normal, but ultimately produce more food waste. This research has important implications for environmental sustainability and consumer wellbeing.

In a paper currently under review at the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, titled "Does Liberals' Greater Tolerance for Ambiguity lead to Greater Adoption of Radically New Products?" my colleagues and I demonstrate the effect of political ideology as a predictor of innovation adoption. Despite extensive research showing that political liberalism is broadly linked to openness to new experiences and conservatism to aversion to uncertainty, in this multi-method research we find that conservatives are more interested in radical innovation despite the uncertainty associated with these products. We further demonstrate that this effect is explained by conservatives' desire to signal status and is attenuated when innovative products are consumed inconspicuously because they cease to serve as a status signal. Inconspicuous consumption also increases product adoption among liberal consumers who view social hierarchies as illegitimate and generally avoid overt status signaling. These findings are relevant to understanding how hierarchies underlie consumption motives and how marketers can shift product positioning contingent on the political ideology of their target consumers.

A second paper currently under review at *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* is titled "Increasing Interest in Claiming a Tax Credit: Evidence from Two Large-Scale Field Experiments Among Lower-Income People." In this research my colleagues and I test 22 unique marketing messaging interventions based on prior research to increase the rate of eligible lower-income people claiming government benefits like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

We use a large-scale field experiment with a sample of 143,751 lower-income people (and a follow up replication study; N = 28,641) to test our interventions. We found that four of 22 messages were effective in encouraging people to claim their EITC. These include interventions emphasizing budget frames, loss aversion, psychological ownership, and trust. These findings identify simple messages that policymakers and researchers can consider (or avoid) to boost eligible peoples' interest in claiming government benefits.

Additionally, I have multiple working papers that contribute to my broad theme of the effects of social hierarchies. "Payday Mayday: SES-Class Misalignment and Predatory Lender Use" is in preparation for submission to the *Journal of Consumer Research*. In this research, my colleague and I demonstrate that consumers' objective socioeconomic status (SES) and subjective perceptions of social class are often misaligned. When a negative mismatch occurs (i.e., when consumers subjectively feel higher in class than they are objectively relative to others) it represents objective economic needs paired with an increased sense of confidence in one's ability to pay off debt from predatory lenders, such as payday loans. Thus, negatively misaligned consumers are more likely to rely on predatory lending services. We demonstrate a practical marketing intervention to reduce objective-subjective misalignment and reliance on predatory lenders. In a different research project, "Expensive or Refined? How Subjective Cultural Competence Induces Hedonic-Utilitarian Choice Tradeoffs," currently in preparation for submission to the *Journal of Consumer Research*, we investigate how consumers' sense of their cultural competence (i.e., knowledge, tastes, and behaviors) is central to their identity. Rather than making choices to compensate for a lack of competence, consumers who feel they lack cultural competence make identity-congruent utilitarian choices that are generally perceived as simpler and less sophisticated relative to hedonic products. Finally, "The Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence: How Differences in Empathy Underlie Selling (vs. Customer) Orientation" is currently in preparation for submission to the *Journal of Marketing*. In this research, we demonstrate that, while people high in emotional Intelligence (EI) are often more effective as salespeople, those who lack empathy (a similar, yet distinct construct) are likely to disregard customer needs and wellbeing and engage in more deceptive selling tactics for personal gain. We discuss how this selling orientation can have a short-term negative impact on consumers and long-term negative impact on the firm.

In sum, the overarching aim of my research is to develop customer-based strategies that address managerially important questions for marketers and policymakers with the ultimate goal of improving consumer and societal wellbeing. The research summarized in this statement converge on the theme of individual and social-level constructs that influence how consumers develop preferences and make consequential decisions. My long-term goal is to continue to pursue a deeper understanding each construct individually and ultimately study how they interact with each other.