

Research Report

# Political conservatism and variety-seeking

Daniel Fernandes<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Naomi Mandel<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> Católica–Lisbon School of Business and Economics, Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal

<sup>c</sup> W. P. Carey School of Business, Arizona State University, USA

7 November 2011; 12 May 2013; 23 May 2013

Available online 31 May 2013

## Abstract

In this research, we document and explain a counterintuitive effect of political ideology on variety-seeking. Although political conservatives have a higher desire for control, which exerts a negative effect on variety-seeking, they also have a stronger motivation to follow social norms, which exerts a positive effect on variety-seeking. Three studies demonstrate that conservatism is positively related to variety-seeking due to social normative concerns and rule out an alternative explanation of heightened self-expressive motives among conservatives. This research provides preliminary evidence of how political ideology may explain differences in product choices.

© 2014 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Political ideology; Competitive mediation; Conservatism; Variety-seeking

## 1. Introduction

Political ideology has been a popular and controversial topic in the social sciences. Since Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Nevitt (1950), researchers have studied the different psychological motives and tendencies underlying political ideologies (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost et al., 2007). Differences between liberals and conservatives are rooted in basic personality dispositions that reflect and reinforce differences in fundamental psychological needs and motives. In this paper, we examine whether, how and why a consumer's political ideology can affect his or her consumption choices. In particular, we investigate the impact of political ideology on variety-seeking.

We are interested in variety-seeking due to competing predictions about how it might be influenced by political ideology. Psychological accounts of differences between the left and the right have focused largely on open-mindedness. Liberals score higher on measures of openness, cognitive flexibility, and integrative complexity (Altemeyer, 1998; Tetlock, 1983), whereas

conservatives possess stronger needs for order, structure, closure, and decisiveness than liberals (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Kruglanski, 2004; McCrae, 1996). According to the uncertainty-threat model of ideology, sensitivity to uncertainty and fear is tied to a core dimension of political conservatism: resistance to change (Jost et al., 2007). Conservatives have a stronger desire to keep things under their control. Therefore, it seems intuitive that conservatism would be *negatively* related to variety-seeking in product choices.

On the other hand, because variety-seeking may be considered as a social norm (Kim & Drolet, 2003; Ratner & Kahn, 2002) and conservatives are motivated to adhere to social norms, they might actually seek more variety than liberals. In this paper, we investigate whether conservatism leads to more variety-seeking (due to normative concerns), less variety-seeking (due to desire for control), or exerts no effect (the two mechanisms have similar magnitudes and cancel each other out). We demonstrate that conservatives' motivation to follow social norms outweighs their desire for control, thereby causing consumers high in conservatism to seek *more* variety than those low in conservatism.

Despite the strong polarization of political ideology in the U.S. and in Europe (Bobbio, 1996; Jost, 2006), thus far, research has seldom examined how political ideology impacts decisions in

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [daniel.fernandes@ucp.pt](mailto:daniel.fernandes@ucp.pt) (D. Fernandes), [Naomi.Mandel@asu.edu](mailto:Naomi.Mandel@asu.edu) (N. Mandel).

people's daily lives. We know from qualitative research that political ideology can be a powerful driver of consumers' choices of products that have political implications (Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Zhao & Belk, 2008). But how might political ideology bias our choices of products or brands that are not politically laden? To our knowledge, we are the first to test the causal relationship between political ideology and choice for non-political products. We also contribute to the literature on political ideology by demonstrating that conservatism increases variety-seeking, which seemingly contradicts previous research showing that conservatism is linked to needs for order, structure, and closure (Altemeyer, 1998) and lower openness to experience, novelty and change (McCrae, 1996). Finally, this paper may spur future research on political ideology by showing how the underlying motivations of conservatives explain their behavior.

## 2. The motivations underlying political conservatism

Rossiter (1968) defines political conservatism as an "opposition to disruptive change in the social, economic, legal, religious, political, or cultural order" (p. 291). Similarly, Wilson (1973) refers to conservatism as "the tendency to prefer safe, traditional and conventional forms of institutions and behaviour" (p. 4). Common to these definitions is the tendency to 1) avoid uncertainty and 2) accept and defend social norms. Supporting this notion, a meta-analysis by Jost et al. (2003) identified the core and peripheral characteristics of political conservatism, including resistance to change, avoidance of uncertainty, and desire for order, structure, and control. Conservatives prefer things that are stable, familiar and predictable (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; McCrae, 1996) due to psychological needs to manage uncertainty (Jost et al., 2007).

In addition, conservatives are more likely than liberals to adhere to widely accepted social norms (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost et al., 2003). A social norm is a belief about what the majority of people are doing (known as a descriptive norm) or about what the majority of people are likely to approve of (known as an injunctive norm) (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). These social norms are likely to guide people's behavior when they are focal or salient (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Cialdini et al., 1990). Previous research suggests that social norms are a more focal determinant of behavior for conservatives than for liberals. For example, conservatives score higher on conformity and obedience, whereas liberals score higher on rebelliousness and reactance (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1988; Jost et al., 2008; Sidanius, 1993; Wilson, 1973). That is, conservatives are more likely than liberals to follow conventional forms of behavior (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Jost et al., 2008). In the next section, we explore how these motivations might predict differences in variety-seeking.

## 3. The relationship between conservatism and variety-seeking

As noted above, conservatives have a stronger desire to keep things under their control (Adorno et al., 1950; Jost et al., 2003, 2007; Nail, McGregor, Drinkwater, Steele, & Thompson, 2009).

This desire motivates them to prefer things that are stable, orderly and predictable (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). For example, conservatives prefer to maintain the societal status quo by rationalizing existing social and economic inequality (Jost et al., 2004) and thinking favorably about their nation and its institutions (e.g., marriage, the nuclear family, government, industry, and capitalism; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Conservatives' heightened motivation to feel in control drives them to actively seek control in the environment. Because relying on the same habitual products that one has always purchased is a means to decrease uncertainty and restore a sense of order and structure, conservatives' enhanced desire for control should lead consumers high in conservatism to consume *less* variety than those low in conservatism.

On the other hand, conservatives' desire to follow social norms might increase their variety-seeking. Previous research suggests that variety-seeking represents a social norm in individualistic cultures such as the U.S. and Europe (Drolet, 2002; Ratner & Kahn, 2002; Ratner, Kahn, & Kahneman, 1999). Consumers incorporate more variety into their repeated food consumption choices in public than in private, because they expect others to evaluate them more favorably when they follow this "consumption norm" (Ratner & Kahn, 2002). Accordingly, many individuals exhibit variety-seeking as a means of conforming to dominant social norms (Kim & Drolet, 2003; Ratner & Kahn, 2002). Thus, variety seeking can be viewed as both a descriptive norm of what is commonly done and an injunctive norm of what is commonly approved. Conservatives place high value on social norms (Altemeyer, 1998; Jost et al., 2003). They rationalize existing norms of conduct (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost et al., 2003) and subscribe to the view that those norms are inevitable and necessary to reduce intergroup conflict (Sidanius, 1993). This reasoning suggests that conservatives will follow the norm of variety seeking by endorsing both what is commonly done and what is socially accepted.

In this research, we conceptualize a competitive mediation model. Based on Zhao, Lynch, and Chen's (2010) notion of competitive mediation, we propose that political conservatism affects variety-seeking via two simultaneous but opposing mechanisms. Specifically, we expect political conservatism to positively affect variety-seeking via the motivation to follow social norms, and to negatively affect variety-seeking via the desire for control. Which one of the two mechanisms is stronger is largely an empirical question. However, there are reasons to suspect that the motivation to follow social norms will exert a stronger effect than the desire for control on determining conservatives' choice patterns. Prior research shows that, while normative concerns are stable in conservatives, controllability concerns tend to be activated by situational factors (Jost et al., 2003; Jost et al., 2007). This phenomenon occurs because conservatives already hold system-justifying beliefs that provide them a way to handle uncertainty. For example, although in general conservatives are more likely than liberals to prefer things that are safe and familiar given the conservatives' stronger need to handle uncertainty, this difference is more pronounced following threats to the system (e.g., instability threats) or to the individual (e.g., existential threats) (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Nail

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882109>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882109>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)