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Key Finding

Conservative and liberal political ideologies lead consumers to pursue different strategies to distinguish themselves through purchases in the marketplace.

Business Application

Taking into account consumers' political affiliations when designing product offerings and marketing strategies can boost sales and business performance.

As conservative and liberal opinions have become more divided, political ideology has become a more important part of consumers' identities. According to recent polls, upwards of 65% of adults identify themselves as either conservative or liberal. Yet little is known about how political ideology shapes consumers' everyday behaviours that have little to do with politics. My research takes a step towards understanding how political ideology can influence consumer preferences in the marketplace. I show that while all consumers like to differentiate themselves from others, conservative and liberal ideologies lead consumers to differentiate through products in different ways.

Conservatives differentiate from others vertically by buying products that show they are *better* than others – for example, products from high-status brands. Meanwhile, liberals differentiate horizontally by buying products that show they are *unique* from others – for example, products with unconventional designs or colours. These differences emerge because conservatism and liberalism hold opposing beliefs about the legitimacy of the hierarchical structure that exists in society. Conservatism assumes that the hierarchical structure is legitimate because it reflects actual differences in individuals' hard work and effort. As a result, conservatives differentiate themselves in a hierarchical manner to highlight their superior position and qualities. Meanwhile, liberalism assumes that the hierarchical structure is illegitimate because everyone works hard but some attain high positions because of luck or connections. As a result, liberals differentiate themselves in a non-hierarchical manner to highlight their unique traits.

I find evidence of conservatives' and liberals' distinct differentiation strategies in the lab and in the field, using measures, the manipulation of political ideology, and examining consumers' real and hypothetical product choices, as well as 130 million Google searches across conservative and liberal US states. My findings confirm that political ideology is a unique driver of consumers' differentiation strategies and that it drives preferences independently from consumers' income and socioeconomic status.

Read more: Ordabayeva, N., Fernandes, D. (2018), "Better or Different? How Political Ideology Shapes Preferences for Differentiation in the Social Hierarchy" *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Nailya Ordabayeva is Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Carroll School of Management, Boston College. She studies how inequality and status concerns influence consumer behavior and how

consumers' perceptions of packaging and portion size influence their size perceptions and purchase decisions. Before joining Boston College, Nailya was a faculty member at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, The Netherlands, where she received a highly competitive €250,000 VENI grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. To learn more, visit her [webpage](#).

Research interests: social hierarchy, social status, inequality, social influence, visual perception, size estimation, food, health, public policy.