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**Political Ideology and Consumption Decisions:  
Insights of a field experiment on conservatives' and liberals' choice  
preferences**

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DISSERTATION

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By

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## Abstract

“Political Ideology And Consumption Decisions: Insights Of A Field Experiment On Conservatives’ And Liberals’ Choice Preferences“

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Despite continuous polarisation along political party lines, it remains unclear how differences in political ideology impact the choices consumers make. This dissertation presents a field experiment performed to investigate the impact of political ideology on consumers’ behaviour, by examining the influence of traits associated with a conservative or liberal ideology on choice preferences. We hereby draw on the motivated social cognition theory, which establishes conservatism as a defence system against threats and on the ideology–social comparison link. Our analysis of the choice preferences of conservatives and liberals regarding luxurious and green products shows that political ideology indeed influences conservatives’ and liberals’ product choices and that these choices can be subconsciously affected by selected priming tasks. This research therefore emphasises the importance of political ideology for consumer behaviour and its implications on choice preferences by unveiling the predictive power of political tendencies.

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*Keywords:* political ideology; consumer behaviour; priming; conspicuous consumption

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*"We are at our very best, and we are happiest, when we are fully engaged in work we enjoy on the journey toward the goal we've established for ourselves. It gives meaning to our time off and comfort to our sleep. It makes everything else in life so wonderful, so worthwhile."*

Earl Nightingale

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## 1. Introduction:

In a time, where political polarization is increasing and the gap between conservatism and liberalism is growing (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008) a new opportunity for marketers to segment their customers and to predict their behaviour has arisen. Not only did recent research show that political ideology is closely linked to an individual's personality (Carney et al., 2008; Jost, 2009) but also initial evidence was found that the political tendency of consumers influences their consumption behaviour (Fernandes and Mandel, 2014; Khan et al., 2013; Kidwell et al., 2013). The fundamental differences in the way people think and behave relative to their political ideology is suggesting that liberals and conservatives vary in the way they engage in various consumption behaviours.

In order to take advantage of the yet unutilized predictive power of consumers' political tendencies, further research is necessary to provide certainty for companies whether they can use political ideology as a reliable predictor of consumer responses to marketing efforts including positioning, segmentation and targeting.

In our study we substantiate the link between political ideology and consumer behaviour by examining the particular consumption behaviour of conservatives and liberals with regards to product choice. Further, we investigate whether conservatives are more likely than liberals to choose luxurious products based on their higher susceptibility to social comparison.

Current research has conceptualized political ideology as motivated social cognition that helps liberals and conservatives to structure their world and manage uncertainty (Jost et al., 2003). Conservatism is thereby often defined as a defence system against threats that includes psychological needs and personality traits such as: need for closure, obedience of social hierarchies, preferences for status quo and aversion against risk. Liberals on the other hand are associated with openness, cognitive flexibility and desire for social equality (Jost, 2009; Jost et al., 2003; Thorisdottir et al., 2007). The different psychological needs and personality traits result in distinct behaviour of individuals and groups. Conservatives, for example, are expected to engage more strongly in social comparison to secure their position in the social hierarchy, due to their desire to comply with social norms and their acceptance of social inequality. One suggested consequence is that conservatives are more

likely to seek status by buying luxury products than liberals (Fernandes and Ordabayeva, 2014).

As research continues to show that the gap between liberals and conservatives maintains to grow (Bishop, 2004; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008), people are expected to be found at either one of the two ends of the political ideology continuum. Consequently, we anticipated that the differences in behaviour will sharpen and that the influences of political ideology on consumers' behaviour will become even more visible.

Yet, surprisingly there has been little attention given to political ideology in marketing and more particular on how different political ideology can influence consumers' decision-making and behaviour. Only recently, studies in psychology and consumer behaviour found preliminary evidence that different political ideologies lead to differences in consumer behaviour and specifically to variation in consumer choices (Fernandes and Mandel, 2014; Khan et al. 2013 and Kidwell et al. 2013).

Most of the existing research however has been focusing on correlational relationships rather than on causal associations. Further, the attention has yet been less on individual decision and non-political laden products but rather on cognitive and motivational correlates of political ideology.

Based on the foundational premise that political ideology matters in consumer behaviour, this study sets out to confirm the existing preliminary evidence and to further explore the impact of political ideology on product choices. More specifically, we look deeper into the link between ideology and social comparison through status seeking based on conspicuous consumption.

In the following first chapter, we present the existing literature in this research field, thereby discussing the concept of political ideology, its role in consumer behaviour and introduce the link between ideology and social comparison.

The second chapter introduces the reader to the research design and process of our experiment and explains the underlying methodology. Subsequently, in the third chapter we report the results of our study that tested our hypotheses in the field. The fourth chapter provides a detailed discussion of our findings under consideration of the literature presented. Finally, the fifth chapter offers a summary of our whole study and suggests important theoretical and managerial implications as well as lists potential limitations of our study.

## 2. Literature Review:

Recent research has made several contributions to the field of political ideology in the context of consumer behaviour (Fernandes and Mandel, 2014; Khan et al., 2013; Morris et al., 2008). The following section provides a critical overview of the existing literature and research in the field and discusses relevant concepts for understanding and answering the research questions. Firstly, section 2.1 illustrates the concept of political ideology and provides definitions of conservatism and liberalism. Secondly, section 2.2 explains the impact of political ideology on consumer behaviour and introduces the link between ideology and social comparison. Thirdly, section 2.3 looks at political ideology as a subconscious element of behaviour and the existing insights on how to subconsciously induce typical political ideology connected behaviour. Finally in section 2.4, the relevancy of this research study is pointed out by clearly defining the research gaps this dissertation aims to fill.

### *2.1 The Concept of Political Ideology:*

Over the last two decades the concept of political ideology gained back the attention and devotion it actually deserves. Amongst others, Jost (2003 and 2006) in a way reintroduced the concept of ideology and in particular the importance of the interface of political ideology and personality psychology back to the academic world.

After the Second World War, many scientists (e.g. Edward Shils, 1955/1968b; Raymond Aron 1957/1968; Daniel Bell, 1960; Seymour Lipset, 1960; and Philip Converse, 1964) declared that ideological constructs such as liberalism and conservatism lack motivational potency and behavioural significance, claiming that there are no considerable differences between the viewpoints of liberalism and conservatism. Jost (2006) questioned this viewpoint in his studies and demonstrated the relevancy, validity and usefulness of political constructs like conservatism and liberalism, further stressing their importance to understand human behaviour. Also Abramowitz and Saunders, (2008, p.542) strengthened the view that a ideological polarization is meaningful and presented evidence indicating “that political polarization energizes the electorate and stimulates political participation”. Contrarily to the belief of some researchers claiming that the mass public does not hold very strong political beliefs (Fiorina et al., 2008), several other studies have discounted that claim by showing that political and cultural differences have in fact deepened since the 1970s and political segregation has been growing rapidly (Abramowitz and Saunders,

2008; Jost, 2009).

Hence, ever since, political ideology is a research field of increasing interest and relevancy.

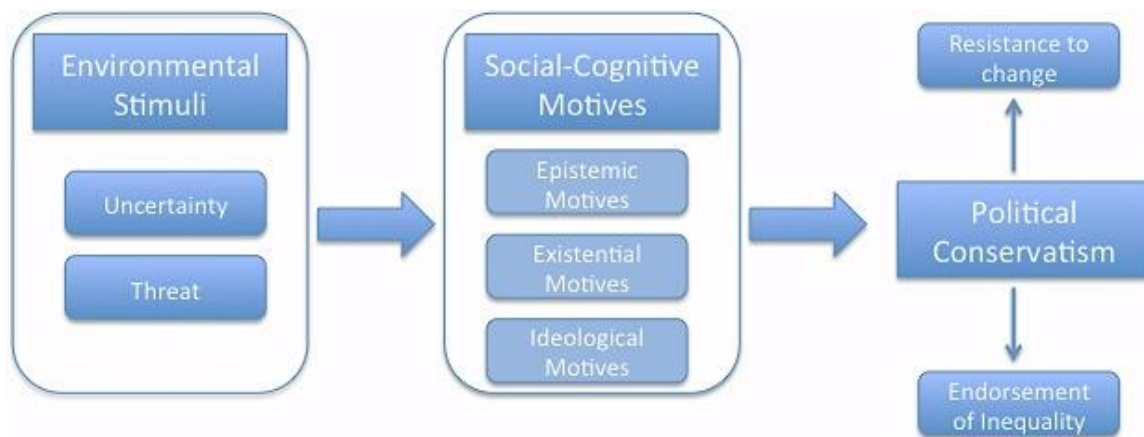
In this study we define political ideology as a set of attitudes, which contain cognitive, affective, and motivational components that explains how society should function in order to achieve social justice and social order (Jost, 2006, Tedin, 1987).

Hereby, Liberalism and conservatism are viewed as generalized personality orientation, meaning that political ideology is a motivated social cognition used by liberals and conservatives to structure and make sense of their world (Freeden, 2003; Jost et al., 2003). Research has indicated that political ideology is best illustrated as a one-dimensional concept, implicating that a differentiation between right and left winged or liberal and conservative has proven to be most useful (Jost, 2009). This classification is possible due to the significant dissimilarities in values and beliefs between the two political orientations (e.g. Altmeyer, 1998; Jost, 2006). These differences are so substantial that they can already be predicted by looking at childhood personality characteristics. Pre-school children embodying conservative related characteristics such as being fearful and relatively over-controlled were found 20 years later to be relatively conservative. The same case was observed for pre-school children showing liberal characteristics (Block and Block, 2006). As Adorno et al. (1950, p.176) so accurately noted long ago, “an individual’s belief system “reflects his [or her] personality and is not merely an aggregate of opinions picked up helter-skelter from ideological environment”.

The possible relationship between an individual’s personality and his or her political ideology draws the interest of many researchers (e.g. Block and Block, 2006; Carney et al., 2008; Van Hiel et al., 2004; Jost, 2009). Their findings suggest that employing the continuum of liberalism and conservatism is also applicable for predicting individuals’ behaviour (Graham et al., 2009). Conservative individuals, relative to liberal individuals, tend to be more respectful of authority, less open to experience, and less tolerant of ambiguity (Jost et al., 2003). This was further confirmed by Altmeyer (1996) and Jost et al. (2003) who showed that compared with liberals, individuals who gravitate toward conservative ideology tend to score lower on measures of integrative complexity, openness to new experiences, and tolerance for uncertainty, and score higher on measures of conscientiousness, dogmatism, and need for order, structure, and closure.

On the other hand, liberals score higher on measures of openness, tolerance for uncertainty and cognitive flexibility, which increases their desire for social equality and new experiences (Carney et al., 2008; Jost, 2009).

The uncertainty-threat model effectively summarizes the intrinsic needs and motivations underlying the conservative ideology. The model states conservatism as a protection mechanism against threats, uncertainty and fear of loss and sees political conservatism as motivated social cognition which is guided by epistemic, existential and ideological values (Jost et al., 2003).



**Figure 1 Motivated social-cognitive perspective (adopted from Jost et al., 2003)**

Other studies showed that the appearance or existence of threat increases people’s affinity for political conservatism ideology (e.g. Cohen et al. 2005; and Jost and Thoridottir, 2005), which for example became apparent after the terror attack of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The underlying differences of several identified dispositional and situational factors like system threat, mortality salience, openness and conscientiousness lead to different psychological needs and motives. These psychological needs and motives are reflected in the consumer behaviour of individuals and groups (Fernandes and Mandel, 2014).

## ***2.2 The Impact of Political Ideology on Consumer Behaviour***

So far, research showed that there are certain psychological traits, which are associated with broader political ideologies. Further, a first link has been established between an individual’s political ideology and consumer behaviour e.g. (Crockett and Wallendorf, 2004; Morris et al., 2008). However, little has been written in how far these traits are also reflected in consumption decisions, which are devoid of political content. Results of a study by Khan et al., 2013 suggest that aspects of ideology are indeed reflected in daily behaviour at an unconscious level or in an implicit manner. The study specifically

examined the indirect influence of the political ideology underlying psychological traits on inconsequential choices and showed that participants with a more conservative ideology rely heavier on national brands (opposed to their generic substitutes). This is consistent with traits like aversion to risk, scepticism about new experiences and a general preference for status quo, which are highly associated with the conservative ideology. These results imply that values and beliefs of conservative ideology are actually established in routine purchase decisions of consumers.

Political ideology has also been shown to influence reactions to recycling appeals either focused on obligation or fairness to others (Kidwell et al., 2013), choice of financial options labelled with words consistent with one's own political ideology (e.g. conservative) (Morris et al., 2008), and movie preferences (Roos and Sachar 2013). Fernandes and Mandel (2014) further substantiated the claim that political ideology also has an impact on choices of non-political laden products, by demonstrating that conservatism indirectly influences variety seeking due to the conservatives' motivation to follow social norms. In this context, the urge to comply with social norms overrules the conservatives' need for status quo and the desire to control. This is consistent with findings showing that for conservatives the affiliation to their in-group is more important than for liberals (Jost, 2009; Thorisdottir et al., 2007), making them more susceptible to status seeking.

This stream of research indicates that political ideology is a powerful driver of many consumer behaviours. However, it is not entirely known how and why political ideology exerts such effects.

#### *Ideology - Social Comparison Link:*

Fernandes and Mandel (2014) made a first attempt to investigate the how and why behind the effect of ideology on consumer behaviour and provided preliminary evidence of a systematic link between ideology and social comparison orientation. They showed that conservatives are more likely than liberals to seek status through consumption due to their higher susceptibility to social comparison. The assumed rationale behind this link, are the differences in the underlying social – cognitive motives of conservatives and liberals.

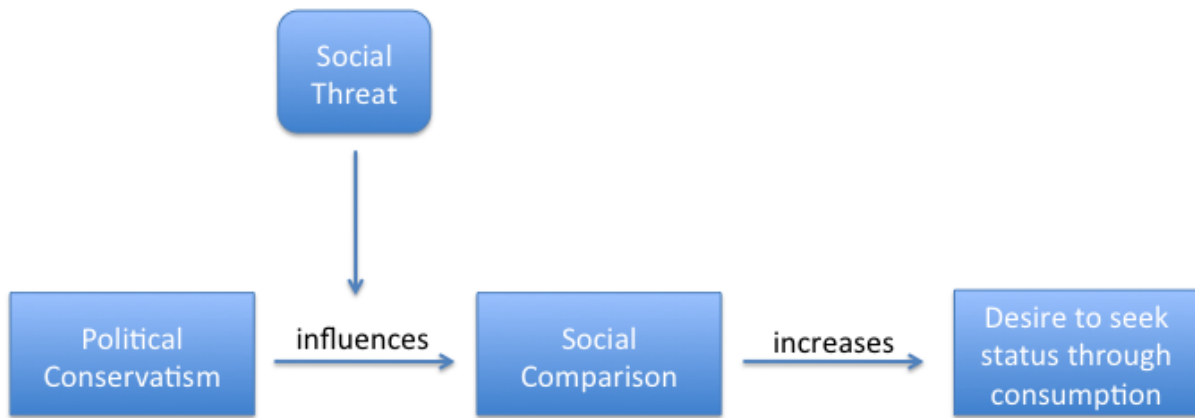


Figure 2 Ideology - social comparison link

As mentioned, one of the core values of conservatism is the belief in a natural hierarchy and consequently the acceptance of inequality. They typically reinforce status of dominant groups (Pratto and Cathey, 2002) and support politics that uphold traditional power structures (Adorno et al., 1950). Therefore, conservatives are motivated to advocate a stable structure in society, because it gives them a sense of order and security (Jost et al., 2003). To protect their social environment conservatives invest substantially more in the preservation of a social hierarchy than liberals. As a result, they are usually aligned to social dynamics and rank in interactions with their in- and out-groups. The positive association between conservatism and social dominance orientation further expresses that conservatives have a stronger tendency to seek relative superiority for their social group and imply stricter criteria for admitting individuals into their in-group (Van Hiel et al., 2004). This investment increases the likelihood that conservatives engage stronger into social comparison to secure a strong relative position within their hierarchy (Fernandes and Ordabayeva, 2014).

This is further supported by Graham et al. (2009) and Haidt and Graham (2007), who deliver an additional explanation for conservatives' need for social structure by drawing on the concept of the differences in the moral foundation of liberals and conservatives. According to the moral foundation theory, liberals only lean on two of the five moral foundations (harm/care and fairness/reciprocity), whereas conservatives use all five foundations to structure their world (harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity). This leads to differences in behaviours between the two political orientations as conservatives respond to threats that are related to the last three moral foundations, which however are unknown to liberals. Graham et al. (2009) refer to last three foundations (in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity) as

binding foundations, because they strengthen groups and institutions by binding individuals into roles and duties, thereby focusing on the group as the locus of moral value. As a result, conservatives embrace the ethic of community, whose key virtues are duty, respect and interdependence, which explains their strong valuation for hierarchies and in-group loyalty (Graham et al., 2009).

Taken together, these findings suggest that status and comparison orientation can be interfered from the underlying personal goals that conservatives form based on their psychological needs and motives as well as from their moral foundation.

Consequently, conservatives are more likely to strive for the fulfilment of extrinsic positional goals as they are motivated by the valuation and judgement of other people, and seek to be superior to others by being recognized and respected. This behaviour leads to the evaluation of others people's lifestyle and own social comparison, which is why displaying a conspicuous lifestyle is an effective method to signal or enhance social position within the social hierarchy (Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996). Drawing on Veblen's (1899:2007) view of conspicuous consumption as the dominance of a need for status, consumers acquire, own and display certain goods to enhance their self, to present a certain image of them or to establish the types of social relationships they wish to have (Eastman and Goldsmith, 1999). Hereby, products can serve as a signal of social status or are purchased to make a statement about individual personality (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Individuals therefore tend to use products to engage in social comparison, with the aim to establish their position within the social hierarchy. Consequently, certain products resemble a certain lifestyle, which in return also reflects the beliefs and values of that particular person.

The desire to fulfil positional aspiration in the area of consumption might explain conservatives' greater interest to engage in conspicuous consumption in comparison to liberals (Fernandes and Ordabayeva, 2014). It would be interesting to see whether securing or protecting the personal status can be categorized as a social threat and therefore as an environmental stimuli influencing people's tendency to conservatism.

Drawing on the research above we believe that conservatives are more likely to engage in social comparison and as a result seek status in interaction with other people. We hope to confirm this claim by examining whether conservatives are more likely to buy luxurious products than liberals, consequently supporting the ideological social comparison link.

Another interesting aspect of political ideology in consumer behaviour that has gained an increasing attention, is whether it is possible to subconsciously activate the above discussed political ideology concepts in consumers' mind and to find evidence whether this activation influences consumers' product choices.

### *2.3 Political Ideology as Sub-Conscious Element on Behaviour*

Over the last years, several studies documented the possibility of non-conscious goal pursuit (e.g. Bargh et al., 2001; Chartrand et al., 2008), which challenged the traditional view that consumers are fully aware of the underlying goals of their decisions. Extensive evidence suggests that human judgement and behaviours are often guided by implicit cognition that is spontaneous, effortless and unconscious (Bargh, 1994; Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). By using supraliminal priming techniques, like the scrambled sentence task, Chartrand and Bargh (1996) were among the first to demonstrate that non-conscious goals activated by environmental cues operate in a similar way to those consciously initiated and pursued. Research showed that goal pursuit leads to the same outcomes no matter if the goals are consciously or non-consciously activated (Aarts and Dijksterhuis, 2000; Bargh et al., 2001; Fishbach et al., 2003; Fitzsimons and Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003). Even trivial choices such as the choice of which brand of toothpaste to buy or whether to try a new brand of breakfast cereals can reflect aspects of deep-rooted ideology, values and personality traits (Khan et al., 2013, p.327).

These findings, combined with the previous research of political ideology, suggest that it is possible to activate certain ideological values and personality traits, which are associated with either conservative or liberal ideology, ultimately leading to the pursuit of positional goals. Morris et al. (2008) for example found that priming an identity induces attraction to choice options that resonate with the language of that identity. In particular, they showed that evoking political identities increased preference for financial options labelled "conservative" among Republicans, but not among Democrats. Because priming effects are instigated relatively automatically on the basis of activated associations, they provide a potentially powerful tool for marketers (Bargh 2002; Dijksterhuis et al. 2005). It is therefore highly interesting to investigate if it is possible to subconsciously activate certain political concepts in a consumer's mind, which will lead to a predicted product choice.

#### ***2.4 Research gaps and Research Objectives***

As shown, political ideology provides an informative and revealing view into the thoughts, feelings, motivations, and actions of consumers and, as previous research suggest these fundamental differences between liberals and conservatives are likely to have a substantial impact on their consumption decisions. However, most of this research focused on correlational rather than on causal relationships between ideology and consumer behaviour. Next to that, the previous research merely looked at choices made in a political context and not at more trivial non-political laden decisions. We believe it will be of added value to investigate in how far it is possible to prime a consumer's political ideology and if this has any effect on product choices.

In this research study we therefore aim to further substantiate the link between political ideology and consumer behaviour by focusing on political ideology as an incorporating predictor of choice regarding non-political laden products. Furthermore, the study is built on the preliminary findings that conservatives are more likely to engage in social comparison due to their desire to seek status (Fernandes and Ordabayeva, 2014) and therefore sets out to confirm the systematic link between ideology to social comparison orientation and status seeking. We will test this prediction by conducting an experiment, which is looking for a causal effect between political ideology and the choice of luxurious and green products. We predict that conservatives are more likely to choose luxurious products due to their desire to display and secure their status whereas liberals are more likely to pick green products to show their care for society.

Moreover, we will include a priming task in the experiment to see whether it is possible to effectively influence consumers inherently held political ideology and ultimately their product choice.

### **3. Methodology**

In this chapter we will present the research objectives of this study, the philosophical stance underlying the methodology and further will give a detailed description on how the data collection was conducted and which analysing methods were used. Moreover, we will discuss relevant ethical considerations and considerations about validity and reliability.

### *3.1 Research Objectives*

This research study was originated through a former study of Fernandes and Mandel (2014), who found preliminary evidence of how political ideology may explain differences in product choices among consumers.

The main two research objectives are

- 1) To confirm that political ideology has an influence on consumers' behaviour with regard to product choice. Specifically, to test whether conservatives are more likely than liberals to seek status by choosing luxury products whereas liberals are more likely to choose green products
- 2) To test whether the priming task of political ideology causes changes in self-reported ideology.

### *3.2 Philosophical Stance:*

The nature of the study is influenced by the preceding study of Fernandes and Mandel (2014), who tested their hypotheses in three different experimental studies amongst undergraduate and postgraduate students. To ensure the comparability and the generalisability of this research study a similar approach was undertaken.

This being given, the underlying research paradigm was partly predestined. As Thomas Kuhn (1962; 1970) in "The Nature of Science Revolution" put it, a "paradigm is the underlying assumptions and intellectual structure upon which research and development in a field of inquiry is based". The underlying assumptions and the research paradigm are giving the frame and a lens through which the research is pursued. This research was chosen to operate under a positivist paradigm, which led to an experimental design of the research study.

The study seeks a positive verification of an observable experience, looking for a general cause-and-effect pattern that can be used for predicting and maybe even controlling of a natural phenomena (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006), in this case the influencing effect of political ideology on consumers' behaviour regarding product choices.

Hence, an experimental research study offers the most appropriate approach to fulfil these aims, leading to the choice of a quantitative method.

The quantitative methodology shares its philosophical foundation with the positivist perspective (Weaver and Olson, 2006). The positivist philosophy argues that there is one objective reality. As a consequence, valid research is demonstrated only by the degree of proof that can be corresponded to the phenomena that study results stand for (Hope and

Waterman, 2003). Although still holding the belief that objectivity and generalisation are important, we are yet suggesting that claim about the truth of research results should be made with regards to probability rather than to certainty. The epistemological position in this research study therefore represents a modern positivist stance.

The researcher (me), however acknowledges that even if there might be an objective world, the knowledge of it is filtered through the subjective experience of individuals and by its nature partial and bound by individual experiences. (Scotland, 2012) I therefore recognize that all observation is fallible and has error and that all theory is revisable.

### *3.3 Research Approach:*

As mentioned above, the method applied to a particular research study should be selected based on the research question being addressed (Malhotra, 2006). This study is two folded in the way that it represents a continuing study as much as a confirmatory study of the preliminary results of Fernandes and Ordabayeva (2014). A confirmatory study in the sense, that it aims to provide further evidence for confirming the theoretical hypothesis that political ideology influences consumers' product choices using established measurement methods and experimental interventions that have precedent in the study by Fernandes and Mandel (2013) and Khan, Misra and Singh (2013).

However, this research study also shows the characteristics of a continuing study, seeking further insights into the link between ideology and consumption decisions, by examining the hypothesis that conservatives are more likely than liberals to seek status by choosing as well as consuming luxurious products, whereas liberals are more likely to choose and consume green products.

An experimental approach offers the advantages of a certain control over variables, a careful measurement, and the aim to establish cause and effect relationships (Malhotra, 2006). Moreover, by deliberately varying the independent variable - in this case the political ideology - the effect on the dependent variable – the product choice - can be examined later to discover the effects of presumed causes (Shadish et al., 2002).

To fulfil these research aims an experimental study with a between subjects design was constructed that examines the effect of primed political ideology on product choices, but also shows if inherently held political beliefs have an effect on consumer behaviour. The research hypotheses are therefore:

1.  $H_1$ = The priming task of political ideology changes participants self-reported ideology such that those primed with conservative words will report being more conservative after the priming task than before, whereas those primed with liberal words will report being more liberal after the priming task than before
2.  $H_2$ = The priming task of political ideology influence consumers' behaviour regarding product choice between luxurious and green products such that those primed with conservative words will be more likely to choose luxurious products, whereas those primed with liberal words will be more likely to choose green products.

### *3.4 Research Design and Experiment Process*

#### *Research Design:*

To test our two main hypotheses we developed a field experiment. The whole experiment consists of five steps in which respondents' political ideology was primed with either conservative or liberal values.

The main independent variable is the political ideology of the participants, which is defined by the self-reported ideology of the participant and additionally by the results of the priming task that is expected to influence the inherently held political ideology. The independent variable can therefore either assume to be conservative or liberal.

The dependent variable is represented by the choice between a green or luxurious product. Other retrieved variables are age, gender, undergraduate or postgraduate student and nationality. A complete overview of the codebook can be found in the appendix B.

#### *Product Choices:*

The two product categories, respondents were able to decide between, are defined as relatively luxurious non-green products that primarily serve the self versus less luxurious green products that can benefit society (Van den Bergh et al. 2010). This definition corresponds to the earlier discussed underlying social-cognitive motives, which state that conservatives are status seeking whereas liberals seek equality in society.

We decided to include two product choices in the study. The intention behind this was to receive a clearer indicator whether the priming had an effect on the participants' choice and further to minimize the influence of potential cofound variables.

The first choice included four different magazines, of which two magazines represented the “luxurious choice” and the other two magazines the “green choice”.

The magazines were chosen based on different criteria. The luxurious magazines were suppose to portrait luxury products like watches, bags, cars and fashion and deliver reports and article about luxury journeys and other products that primarily serve ‘the self’. The green magazines were intended to deliver content about society, culture, and environmental issues and challenge the status quo, therefore reflecting information, which are relevant to and/or benefit the society to a certain extent.

*Vogue UK* and *Robb Report* are chosen as luxurious magazines, and *The National Geographic* and *Mother Jones* as green magazines (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Magazine Choices

As *Vogue* is usually regarded as a female magazine, *Rob Report* was chosen as the male counterpart magazine to serve the interest of both genders equally. *The National Geographic* and *Mother Jones* are seen as gender neutral magazines and were selected based on their content about wildlife, geography, popular science, history, culture, the environment and current events as well as political issues, thereby convey the desire for new experiences and to challenge the status quo.

As a second product choice in the experiment, ice cream was selected. Ice cream offers several benefits over other products that were considered. On one hand, it is a product participants are familiar with. Further it is a product that participants have to consume shortly after their participation and which will therefore most likely not be chosen with other factors in mind. Other factors considered were for example ‘I could pass it on to my friend to give him or her a treat’. Hereby the respondent would consider what the friend

would have preferred instead of his/her own personal choice. Consequently, this could have led to an inconsistent product choice in our experiment, falsifying the results.

Next to that, the ice cream market offers a wide range of products with a broad brand spectrum ranging from very luxurious to cheap, or from organic and sustainable to artificial ice cream. The diverse product availability made it easily feasible for the study to select two ice creams, which correspond to the criteria mentioned above and also fit in the funding budget of the study.

For this research study, we selected *Magnum classic* as a luxurious ice cream. *Magnum* is advertised as “a premium ice cream for adults” (Magnum, 2014) and therefore generally perceived as a more luxurious product.

As an organic or green choice *Green & Black’s* organic ice cream was chosen. *Green & Black’s* organic ice cream, is as the name suggests an entirely organic product and with a market share of over 90%, the UK’s number one organic chocolate player (Euromonitor International, 2011).

For the purpose of the study, both ice creams were vanilla flavoured and were offered in the same size of 100ml to ensure that the participant’s choice would only be made based on their perception of luxurious vs. organic.



Figure 4 Ice Cream Choices

#### Experiment Process:

As mentioned, the experiment was designed in five steps to ensure an optimal outcome of the priming task without giving away the true purpose of the study. All relevant material used in the experiment can be found in appendix A.



Figure 5 Experiment Process

In the first step participants are asked to indicate their political stance by assessing themselves on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from *extremely liberal* to *extremely conservative* (Appendix A). This step allows analysing the differences in product choices caused by ideology regardless of the priming effect. This scale has been validated and used in previous political ideology research (e.g., Jost et al. 2006, Oxley et al. 2008). In fact, Jost et al. (1999) administered batteries of measures that included need for closure and the single-item scale of political ideology, with several other instruments separating the two. Positive correlations were obtained between need for closure and conservatism in two separate samples,  $r(613) = .21, p < .01$ , and,  $r(733) = .26, p < .01$ . Moreover, this single-item scale accounted for approximately 85% of the variance in presidential voting intentions in American National Election studies between 1972 and 2004 (Jost 2006), making it a valid instrument for our study.

In the second step, participants are primed with either conservative or liberal concepts. Priming is an experimental technique and is concerned with the ways internal mental states mediate, in a passive and hidden manner, the effects of the social environment on psychological processes and responses (Bargh and Chartrand, 2000, p.4).

It can be defined as an effect of a recent use of a concept in one task, in this case the concept of conservatism or liberalism, on its probability of usage in a subsequent, unrelated task – the product choice by this example.

The study aims to temporarily activate the states of an individual's mental representations of a certain political ideology and how these internal readinesses interact with environmental information to produce certain perceptions, evaluations, and motivations and social behaviour with regard to product choice (see Bargh, 1997; Bargh and Chartrand, 2000).

Priming techniques can be employed either to research the passive, unintended influences of the current and recent environmental context, or to the experimentally simulate automaticity effect. The goal is to either produce behavioural and motivational or perceptual effects.

The first part of the experiment will make use of conceptual priming that involves the activation of a mental representation in the context of political ideology so that the participants exert a passive, unintended, un-aware influence of it in subsequent unrelated contexts until the activation of the priming disappears.

There are different degrees to which participants can be aware of the priming process. This experiment uses a “Scrambling Sentences Test” to prime the participants towards a certain political ideology (Appendix A). “Scrambling Sentences” is a frequently used technique for supraliminal priming in which the participants are fully aware of the priming stimuli but are unaware of the underlying pattern, which serves the construct (Bargh and Chartrand, 2000).

In the case of this research study, participants will be divided into two groups randomly receiving one out of two sets of sentence scrambling tasks that will contain either words related to conservatism or liberalism. The test was already used by Fernandes and Mandel (2014) and involves descrambling 12 phrases, which conveyed either conservative or liberal concepts (e.g. “left-wing parties in France” in the conservative prime condition, “right-wing parties in Russia” in the liberal prime condition).

The scrambling sentence test will be veiled to the participants as a cognitive language ability test to disguise the true purpose of the task. It is important to reach the right level of subtlety that on one hand enables the most powerful manipulation possible, but on the other hand does not make the participant aware of a possible relationship between the priming task and the sequential task processing that concept (Bargh and Chartrand, 2000).

After the priming task participants will take part in a sequential experiment, however the participants' task in processing the concept relevant information (the priming) is not the same as the part of the experiment assessing the priming effect. The task processing the ideological concept will examine the respondents' behaviour with regard to making a choice for a luxurious or green product while being primed for a certain political ideology. To ensure that participants do not expect any relation between the prime and the experiment task, an awareness check is conducted at the end of the study to probe for any suspicions or knowledge the participants have about the intended effect of the prime on the subsequent performance in the experiment.

After completing the scrambled sentence task, participants are asked for their personal opinion regarding different statements. The purpose of this third step is to test whether the priming task had an effect on the participant political ideology stance. The effect is tested with a political attitude scale, which was originally developed by Nail et al. 2009 ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and further validated by Kidwell et al. (2013) and Fernandes and Ordabayeva (2014).

In total 7 different, political related words are presented and participants are asked to indicate on a 9-point likert scale whether they are strongly against or in favour of these items/ targets (Appendix A). Examples of these words are “same sex marriage” or “capital punishment”.

After completing this step the participants are asked to drop all their answers into a box on the table. This step was introduced to affirm that the questionnaire is completely anonymous and to further increase the comfort level of the participants.

In the following fourth step, the participants are getting told that they have around five minutes waiting time and during this time, the possibility to occupy themselves with one out of the four different magazines, we introduced earlier in the chapter. The participants can freely choose among the magazines as well as browse them before they make their choice.

After a few minutes, the researcher hands the participant another questionnaire to fill in, which includes the demographics. This questionnaire also gets dropped into the same box after being completed.

The participants are then told that this is the end of the study and are offered the choice between two ice creams as a thank you for their participation and time. The participants learn that both ice creams are vanilla flavoured and have the same size of 100ml. However, that one is marked as a premium ice cream, whereas the other one is branded as an organic ice cream. The participant gets to choose one of them and gets dismissed.

The researcher notes the choices the participant has made regarding the magazines and the ice cream, corresponding to the particular number the participant received in the beginning of the study.

### ***3.5 Data Collection and Analysis Methods***

#### ***Data Collection:***

The experiment was conducted at Lancaster University over a period of one week.

For convenience purposes the experiment was carried out in a study room of the *learning zone*, one of the public learning places of the university with a lot of walking by traffic.

Participants were undergraduate or postgraduate students who volunteered to take part in the study. The participants were aware that the study is conducted in the context of a master dissertation. However, the true purpose of the study stayed disguised. Participants

merely knew that they would take part in a study, which included a language capability test as well as of a range of questions regarding their personal opinion. Moreover, they were informed that they would receive a free ice cream for their participation and that the study would approximately take 10-15 minutes.

The sample method can be described as non-probability, convenience sampling. A convenience sample allows the researcher to obtain a sample of convenient elements (Malhotra, 2006), in this case, students that happened to study in the learning zone of Lancaster University. The advantages of a convenience sample are that it is the least expensive and least time-consuming of all sampling techniques and that sampling units are accessible, easy to measure, and cooperative (Malhotra, 2006). However, it also limits the generalisability of the study as the sample usually cannot necessarily be taken as representative for an entire population.

#### **Analysis Methods:**

To analyse the data set the statistical program SPSS will be used. The program allows to perform the necessary analyses, which are required to test the research hypotheses and is a familiar instrument to the researcher.

For the analysis several regression tests will be conducted. Amongst others a univariate general linear model is performed which is a technique to conduct Analysis of Variance for experiments with two or more factors. This technique also enables testing models that predict categorical outcomes, which is appropriated as this research includes two categorical dependent variables. Furthermore, different chi-square, independent-samples t-tests as well as cross-tab analyses will be used to explore relationships among the variables.

### ***3.6 Ethics, Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability***

#### **Ethics:**

Ethics should be pervasive in every marketing research. From the positivist perspective, ethics are closely intertwined with the methodology, aiming to design a research study as sound as possible (DeVaus, 2002,) by balancing ethical considerations with technical and practical considerations (Crespi, 1998).

In this research study, all participants took part voluntarily. The only compensation they received was an ice cream as token of appreciation for their participation. Further, they were fully informed about the identity of the researcher. Participants could withdraw from

the study at any point in time and were able to ask questions during the whole process of the study.

Moreover, participants received participation numbers to ensure their full anonymity. As political opinions are often seen as a private matter and as not everyone feels comfortable to discuss them publicly, all filled in questionnaires were dropped into a *hand-in* box by the respective participant without passing by the researcher. This step was introduced to improve the quality and the honesty of the responses and to encourage participation, thus to improve the responsiveness of the sample.

Regarding the data analysis the research remained critical when analysing the findings and did not, in any circumstance, tried to manipulate the outcome of the research.

#### Validity, Reliability and Generalisation:

Validity is the most fundamental consideration in instrument development and refers to the degree that the instrument measures what it claims to measure (DeVaus, 2002). Validity can be differentiated between internal and external validity (Malhotra, c2010). The internal validity measures in how far the manipulation of the independent variables or treatments actually caused the observed effects on the dependent variables and if there are other extraneous variables, which might could have caused the effect. A pre-test was conducted prior to the start of the study to test the validity, reliability and feasibility of the experiment. 5 different students (3 males and 2 females) with different nationalities took part in the pre-test and delivered valuable feedback. The pre-test was useful to detect possible problems concerning the comprehensiveness of the individual experiment tasks, the process of the experiment and eventual environmental influencing factors. Due to the feedback, the experiment was relocated to the quieter environment of the *learning zone* and we introduced the *hand-in* box for the completed questionnaires to increase the comfort feeling of the participants.

Our sample size provides more than 35 participants for every condition, which is well more than the required threshold of 20 observations per cell. One reason is that a smaller sample size does usually not allow to detect all meaningful effects (Simmons et al., 2011).

It is important to control for possible cofound variables in order to be able to draw a valid inference about the causal relationship between the dependent and independent variable. We measured age, gender, undergraduate or postgraduate and nationality as possible cofound variables. As the majority of the sample consists of postgraduate students (94.7%), we disregarded this variable as possible cofound factor in the analysis. Further,

we also did not consider age, as the majority of the respondents belonged to the age groups 18-25 and 26-30 years old, which did not significantly differ in their self-reported ideology and were therefore not likely to be influential. Six participants were regarded as invalid responses due to incomplete questionnaire answers or incorrect scrambled sentences task fulfilment, leaving a sample size of 75 valid responses.

To control for the reliability of newly formed constructs we measure Cronbach's alpha. Values above 0.7 are considered acceptable, however values above 0.8 are preferable (Pallant, 2011).

We tried to design the study as realistic as possible while at the same time keeping the influence of eventual confound variables as minimal as possible. This was ensured by randomly assigning participants to conditions. The randomization is a key characteristic of experiments that allow the researcher to make causal claims of the effects observed (Shadish et al., 2002).

The external validity refers to whether the results of the experiment can be generalised beyond the experiment itself (Malhotra, c2010). This was ensured by performing the experiment outside the lab in the campus of the university. Most experiments are done in the lab. This is because laboratory settings are useful to remove any noise. This makes lab studies better able to detect an effect. However, laboratory settings are artificial. Thus, field studies are very important to test whether effects encountered in the lab also occur in real life (Shadish et al., 2002).

However, causal relationships are not deterministic but increase the probability for an effect to occur (Eells, 1991, Holland, 1994). To different degrees, all causal relationships are context dependent, so the generalization of experimental effects is always an issue (Shadish et al., 2002).

## **4. Data Analysis:**

### *4.1 Descriptive Statistics:*

#### *Sample Profile:*

Seventy-five undergraduate (5,3%) and postgraduate (94,7%) students at an UK university campus were recruited to participate in the study. The sample is composed of 53,3% men and 46,7% women. The biggest age group are 18-25 year olds, representing 66,7% of the sample followed by 26-30 year olds with 25,3% (Appendix C).

Figure 6 Sample Characteristics (N =75)

<b>Gender</b>	Frequency	%	<b>Nationality</b>	Frequency	%
Male	40	53.3	European	36	48.0
Female	35	46.7	Non-European	39	52.0

<b>Age</b>	Frequency	%	<b>Nationality</b>	Frequency	%
18 - 25	50	66.7	Western	41	54.7
26 - 30	19	25.3	Eastern	34	45.3
31 - 35	4	5.3			
36 - 40	2	2.7			
41 and older	0	0.0			

<b>Student</b>	Frequency	%
Undergraduate	4	5.3
Postgraduate	71	94.7

As the set of nationalities in the sample is very diverse (22 different nationalities), participants were grouped into Europeans and Non-Europeans, representing 48% and 52% respectively and alternatively into Western (54.7%) and Eastern (45.3%) countries participants. These divisions allowed us to control for possible effects on respondents' behaviour due to cultural and ideological differences based on their geographical origin. We purposely chose these two different categorisations to, on the one hand, be able to look at potential differences in ideologies from a more geographical perspective (Europe vs. Non-Europe) and on the other hand from a more ideological perspective (Eastern vs. Western countries).

#### 4.2 Hypotheses Testing:

##### Effect of Priming on Self-reported Ideology:

We started our analysis by testing whether the priming task had an effect on the self-reported ideology of the participants. This test aims to find an answer to our first hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>: the priming task of political ideology changes participants self-reported ideology such that those primed with conservative words will report being more conservative after the priming task than before, whereas those primed with liberal words will report being more liberal after the priming task than before.*

To test this hypothesis a linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether the self-reported ideology had changed after the participants conducted the priming task.

To do so, the construct re-test\_ideo\_avg of the multi-item scale of the Personal opinion test (step 3 in the experiment) was created. However, the reliability test showed a Cronbach's alpha value of .492, indicating a low internal consistency of the construct. After checking Cronbach's alpha value 'if item deleted', it could be seen that the reliability would improve if the variable ideo1, representing 'Capital punishment' was deleted. However, with a value of .53, Cronbach's alpha was still found to be below the required reliability value of .7. As our scale contained less than 10 items, which often leads to low alpha values (Pallant, 2011), we also checked the inter-item correlation, nonetheless indicating likewise a low correlation (M=.115).

Nevertheless, we created a new variable ideo\_change representing the change in ideology after the priming task for each participant. Subsequently, a linear regression was performed with prime condition as predictor and change in ideology as dependent variable, to assess the impact of the priming task on the political ideology of the participant. The ANOVA test was found to be insignificant ( $p = .694$ ), indicating that the priming task had no influence on the primarily held political ideology (Appendix D). Consequently, our first hypothesis needed to be rejected, as participants did not show a stronger tendency for conservatism or liberalism after they completed either one of the respective priming tasks.

#### The Effect of Priming on Product Choice

In the next step, we tested our second hypothesis to see whether there were any direct or indirect effects of the prime on the choices made by the participants.

*H<sub>2</sub>: The priming task of political ideology influence consumers' behaviour regarding product choice between luxurious and green products such that those primed with conservative words will be more likely to choose luxurious products, whereas those primed with liberal words will be more likely to choose green products*

In the first step, we performed a cross-tab analysis and chi-square test for independence to see whether the priming task had a direct effect on the respondents' product choice. The test (with Yates Continuity Correlation) indicated a significant association between prime and the chosen ice cream,  $\chi^2 (1, N=75) = 5.875$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\phi = 0.307$ . Respondents that received a conservative prime chose predominantly the luxurious ice cream (65.8% vs.

34.2%) whereas respondents with a liberal prime mostly went for the green ice cream (64.9% vs. 35.1%) (Figure 7).

For the magazine choice the chi-square proofed to be insignificant  $\chi^2(1, N=75) = 1.14, p = 0.286, \phi = 0.15$ . Nevertheless, the results can be interpreted as directional as the cross-tab showed that respondents with a conservative prime equally had chosen luxurious magazines (50% vs. 50%) whereas liberally primed respondents clearly predominately selected green magazines (64.9% vs. 35.1%) (Graph: 4).

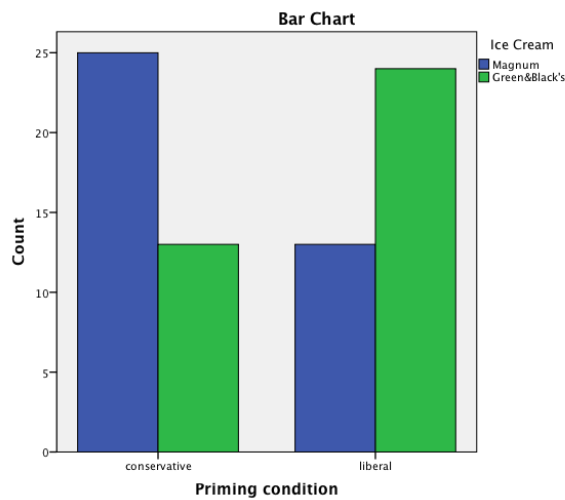


Figure 7 Priming Effect on Ice Cream Choice

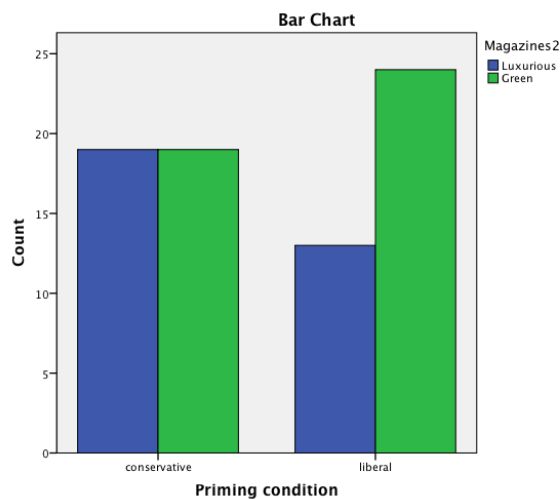


Figure 8 Priming Effect on Magazine Choice

In the second step, we analysed if the prime condition had an influence on the overall product choice. Combining the two choices every respondent made, helped us to minimize eventual cofound effects in the single product choice. Therefore, we computed a new

variable (choice\_sum), which represented the sum of all choices every particular respondent had made. Subsequently, we ran a univariate general linear regression, with prime condition as independent variable and product choice as dependent variable, to measure the effect of prime on the overall product choice.

The significance level of the Lavene's Test of Equality was above  $0.949 > 0.5$  indicating that there was no violation of the homogeneity of variances assumption and that equal variances can be assumed. We found a statistically significant main effect for prime condition  $F(1, 2.26) = 5.04, p = .028$ . Moreover, the effect size was medium to strong (partial eta squared = .065), indicating that the prime condition had an impact on the overall product choice (Appendix E).

#### Cofound Variables:

In the final step of the analysis we wanted to test whether one of the cofound variables (gender, nationality) had a significant influence on either the primed or inherently held ideology or on the product choice itself.

##### *Gender*

We first analysed the possible influence of gender on product choice. In order to do so, a cross-tab analysis and a chi-square test for independence for both products was performed. For magazines, the test indicated a statistically significant association between gender and product choice,  $\chi^2 (1, N=75) = 9.443, p = 0.02, \text{phi} = -.382$ . The figure 9 shows that male preferred the green magazines (75% vs. 25%) whereas females preferred the luxurious magazines (62.9% vs. 37.1%).

For ice cream, the test was likewise statistically significant  $\chi^2 (1, N=75) = 8.327, p = 0.04, \text{phi} = .36$ , indicating that males prefer the luxurious ice cream (67.5% vs. 32.5), whereas females rather chose the green ice cream (68.6% vs. 31.4%).

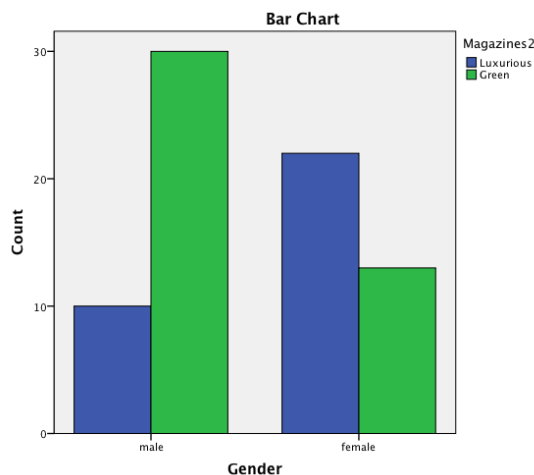


Figure 9 Association across Gender and Magazine Choice

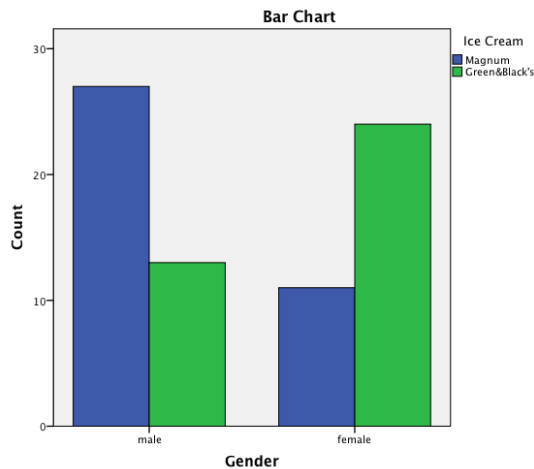


Figure 10 Association across Gender and Ice Cream Choice

The test results suggested to look deeper into the association between gender and the resulting product choice. Consequently, to make sure that there was no association across gender and the prime task, a cross-tab analysis and a chi-square test were performed. The chi-square test for independence indicated no significant association between gender and prime,  $\chi^2(1, N=75) = 0.12, p = 0.914, \phi = .039$ . Subsequently, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare self-reported ideology for males and females. There was no significant difference in score for males ( $M = 3.93, SD = 1.72$ ) and females ( $M = 4.0, SD = 1.60; t(76) = -.183, p = .855$ , two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference =  $-.069$ , 95% CI:  $-.82$  to  $.68$ ) was very small, indicating that there is no association between gender and self-reported ideology. Consequently, both tests showed that there was no confound effect of gender on the overall study.

*Nationality:*

Another confound variable we expect to might have an influence was the nationality of participants. Value systems and political ideological understanding differ from geographical regions due to for example a history of different political systems (Duriez et al., 2005).

To examine whether there was a difference for self-reported ideology for Europeans and non-Europeans an independent-samples t-test was performed. There was no significant difference in score for Europeans ( $M = 3.84, SD = 1.60$ ) and non-Europeans ( $M = 4.10, SD = 1.74; t(75) = -.682, p = .497$ , two-tailed). Also for the differentiation of nationalities between West ( $M = 3.90, SD = 1.60$ ) and East ( $M = 4.05, SD = 1.76$ ) the independent-samples t-test was insignificant ( $t(75) = -.693, p = .693$ , two-tailed), indicating that there is

no difference in self-reported ideology among the different nationalities. However, we also tested if there are differences between the nationalities and the personal opinion item scale. In this case, the independent sample t-test showed a statistically significance in the means for *abortion* between Europeans (M= 6.57, SD= 2.33) and Non-Europeans (M= 4.95, SD= 2.49;  $t(72) = .127, p = .005$ , two-tailed) and even more across West (M= 6.6, SD= 2.32) and East (M= 4.68, SD= 2.42;  $t(72) = .002, p = .001$ , two-tailed). This could be a potential reason why our construct of the political item scale (re-test\_ideo\_avg), which measured the prime effect, reported an unreliable alpha.

We further examined if there is any association between the nationalities and the prime effect. The conducted chi-square test was insignificant for both of the nationality groupings ( $p = .725$  and  $p = .569$ ), indicating that there is no association.

The tests for the cofound variables detected some associations, however none of them had an influencing effect on the overall study results.

## **5. Discussion:**

### ***5.1 Review of Hypotheses results:***

A large body of recent research has shown that political ideology is connected to certain personality traits and that these are accompanied by numerous behaviours (Fraley et al., 2012; Jost, 2009; Thorisdottir et al., 2007). Over the last years, more and more evidence was provided that political ideology can be accounted for as a factor that influences individual behaviour and a relatively smaller literature has started to link how political ideology might also bias non-ideological choices (Fernandes and Mandel, 2014; Khan et al., 2013; Morris et al., 2008).

We added to this line of research by demonstrating in an experiment that political ideology indeed has an effect on consumption decisions even if they are made in a political free context. Further, we provided evidence that supraliminal priming enhances the consistency between political ideology and product choice. It was shown that conservatives are more likely to choose the luxurious version of the products available than liberals, whereas liberals mostly preferred the green products offered.

Nevertheless, we could not validate that the priming task had an effect on the inherently held political ideology, suggesting that the prime was not strong enough to alter the self-reported ideology.

**Figure 11 Hypotheses Results Overview**

Hypothesis	Results
<i>H<sub>1</sub>: the priming task of political ideology changes participants self-reported ideology such that those primed with conservative words will report being more conservative after the priming task than before, whereas those primed with liberal words will report being more liberal after the priming task than before.</i>	Not significant
<i>H<sub>2</sub>: The priming task of political ideology influence consumers' behaviour regarding product choice between luxurious and green products such that those primed with conservative words will be more likely to choose luxurious products, whereas those primed with liberal words will be more likely to choose green products</i>	Significant

### **5.2 Effect of Priming Task**

Our first hypothesis aimed to test and confirm a causal effect of primed ideology on consumers' inherently held ideology. Our results however showed no statistically significant effect ( $p=.694$ ), which means that participants did not become more conservative or more liberal after they completed the respective priming task. We therefore could not replicate the study results reported by Fernandes and Mandel (2014), who used the same supraliminal priming task and, on the contrary, experienced a significant effect. This could be due to several reasons; for once our sample was composed of many different nationalities, only including a minority of native English speakers. The language barrier might have partially offset the prime effect because participants concentrated harder on building a grammatically correct sentence, than on the actual meaning of the words. Moreover, this particular scrambled sentence task was originally developed for Americans, so the sentences used might trigger their political mentality in a better way than they trigger it for other nationalities.

In addition, the study design used here was different from the one used by Fernandes and Mandel (2014). Whereas Fernandes and Mandel (2014) used a between-subjects manipulation by comparing a conservative priming condition and a liberal priming condition relative to a neutral priming condition, we used a within-subjects manipulation by comparing a conservative priming condition and a liberal priming condition before and after the priming task. It could be that in our case participants tried to be coherent with

their ratings by giving similar answers before and after the priming task.

Moreover, we tested the prime effect with a political attitude scale, which was originally developed by Nail et al. 2009 and further validated in a study by Fernandes and Ordabayeva (2014). However, so far this scale has only been used in Western countries. It is calibrated to test participants' left-right wing ideology based on items that are related to either one of the two ideologies in the context of a Western political ideology understanding. Our sample nevertheless also contained a large proportion of participants from Eastern cultures, which might have classified the presented political attitudes to a different political stance point. Thorisdottir et al. (2007) presented evidence of both universal and context-specific effects regarding the cognitive and motivational antecedents of left-right political orientation. One example for a context-specific effect is that individuals from Eastern European countries in comparison to individuals from Western European countries associate status quo and stability rather with a left-wing ideology due to their political history of communism (Duriez et al., 2005). In our analysis, we saw that participants from Eastern countries ( $M=4.67$ ) differed significantly from participants from Western countries ( $M=6.6$ ) in their opinion regarding *abortion*. On average Eastern countries participants were against abortion despite the self-reported ideology they had disclosed, indicating that this item might have to be regarded as context-specific.

Following the argumentation above, it seems difficult to conduct a cross-national research study concerning the priming of political ideologies. The different political cultural backgrounds require differently designed priming tasks that use the correct stimuli for the desired prime direction. This implicates that future researcher should differentiate participants in their studies based on their cultural origin, to ensure a successful prime effect for political ideology.

### ***5.3 Effect of Priming on Product Choice***

Our study did find evidence, however that priming ideology influences participants' choices and therefore supports our second hypothesis. As predicted, participants primed with conservative words chose a luxurious product more often as participants primed with a liberal context. Furthermore, participants who received a liberal prime also primarily picked the green option of the products available. We therefore conclude that priming makes people behave more consistent with their inherently held ideology. Due to the fact that the priming did not seem to have a direct effect on the originally held ideology, we

assume that the primes influence people at a non-conscious level. The priming literature states that consumer goals can be automatically activated and pursued outside of conscious awareness and that these goals then operate outside of awareness to influence choices and preferences (Chartrand et al., 2008). For that reason, we believe that the ideological primes subconsciously triggered the associated subjacent motives and traits of the respective inherently held political ideology and consequently had an indirect effect on the product choice.

That implies that the conservative priming enhanced the primarily held conservative ideology of participants and therefore strengthened the accompanied underlying social cognitive motives. Consequently, this has increased the likelihood of conservatively primed participants to choose the luxurious product over the green alternative. The exact opposite is true for the liberal priming condition.

The literature showed that if the prime is consistent with the active-self concept of the participants it increases the assimilation effect of the prime on behaviour (Wheeler et al., 2007). The *Active-Self account of prime-to-behavior effects* is an approach developed by Wheeler et al. (2007), which assumes that the activation of traits, stereotypes, and other social constructs can drive behaviour by temporarily affecting active self-representations in ways either consistent or inconsistent with the primed constructs. This would imply that participants who inherently gravitate toward conservative ideology would most likely find that a conservative prime is consistent with their active-self concept. Consequently, this would lead to a stronger conservative predicted behaviour. This is further supported by findings of Kidwell et al., (2013) who showed that coherence of advertising appeals and political ideologies can influence consumers' acquisition, consumption, and disposition behaviour and that consumers are particularly vulnerable to congruent ideological appeals.

Our assumption that conservatives are more likely to choose luxurious products was based on the ideology - social comparison link. The active-self concept is closely related to the social comparison process, which as discussed earlier, is concerned with the effects of social comparison standards on individuals' self-evaluation and self-beliefs (Wheeler et al., 2007). The conservative active-self most likely overlaps with the underlying conservative social cognitive motive of status seeking which is enhanced by participants' sensitivity to social comparison. The conservative prime boosts the status-seeking tendencies by strengthening the underlying motives of engaging in social comparison (Fernandes and

Ordabayeva, 2014).

However, factors that decrease assimilative changes in the self-concept also decrease the assimilative effects of primes on behaviour. We therefore can assume that the participants who receive a priming task, which highly contradicted with their inherently held political ideology, also did not experience a significant prime effect on their choice behaviour. Wheeler et al. (2007) pointed out the importance of the active-self-concept in determining the magnitude and the direction of the priming effects on behaviour. Considering and integrating the active-self-concept in the priming process for future studies might help to increase the effectiveness of the prime on behaviour. This might further help to provide improved prediction regarding the individuals for whom, the conditions under which, and the direction in which prime-to-behavior effects occur (Wheeler et al., 2007, p.256).

So far it remained unclear what effects liberal ideology has on consumption decisions. A study by Khan et al. (2013) proposes the assumption that liberals seek status through spending money on something that benefits society. This would be coherent with the typically liberal associated psychological traits of openness and the desire for an equal society. In our study participants who had been primed with liberal content primarily choose the green options of the products available. We provided among others *The National Geographic* as a green option for the participants. The topics covered by *The National Geographic* such as travelling to new places and reports on environmental changes are examples that can be closely connected to liberal traits and beliefs such as seeking new experiences and challenging status quo. However, future research will be needed to validate, which particular underlying motives trigger liberals' consumption decisions.

## **6. Conclusion:**

### **6.1 Achievements**

In this study, we set out to confirm the link between political ideology and consumer behaviour by exploring the effect of an individual's political tendency on consumption behaviour and in particular the connection between political ideology and social comparison. We further aimed to investigate the possibility to influence the inherently held political ideology of participants via supraliminal priming. So far existing research had primarily focused on correlational relationships between political ideology and consumer

behaviour and merely looked at choices made in a political context and not at more trivial, non-political laden decisions. However, gaining insights about this not yet fully explored part of political ideology, can offer highly relevant implications for marketers and may utilize political ideology as a predictive power to consumer behaviour.

The two particular questions sought to be answered by our study were:

- 1) Does political ideology have an influence on consumers' behaviour with regard to product choice? Specifically, are conservatives more likely than liberals to seek status by choosing luxury products whereas liberals are more likely to choose green products?
- 2) Does the priming task of political ideology cause changes in self-reported ideology

The empirical findings of our analysis are presented in detail in chapter five. The following paragraphs synthesise the answers to our research questions and provides an overview of their contribution to this research field.

Our experiment showed that political ideology indeed has an effect on consumption decisions even if they are made in a political free context. As predicted, conservatives were more likely to choose the luxurious version of the products available than liberals, whereas liberals mostly preferred the green products offered. The supraliminal priming hereby enhanced the consistency between political ideology and product choice. By drawing a connection between the active-self-concept (Wheeler et al., 2007) and the ideology - social comparison link we provide new insights of the underlying motives that can predict consumer behaviour and might even be purposely evoked.

Nevertheless, we could not validate that the priming task had an effect on the inherently held political ideology, suggesting that the prime was not strong enough to alter the self-reported ideology.

However, our findings have important implications for research and practice.

## ***6.2 Theoretical Implications***

Our research further highlighted the importance of incorporating political ideology as influencing factor in consumer behaviour. We added to this line of research by providing evidence that ideology has indeed an effect on behaviours that are devoted of political content. Hereby, we built up on previous findings that linked political ideology to social cognitive motives and their influence on consumers' behaviour (Jost et al., 2003).

By doing so we substantiated the findings by Fernandes and Ordabayeva (2014) that consumers' political ideology has indeed an influence on product choices and that conservatives' desire for status-seeking leads them to engage in social comparison which makes them more susceptible to choosing luxurious products. Our findings also indicated that liberals have a preference for green products. One possible explanation we gave, was that liberals might perceive green products or products that represent a green lifestyle as beneficial to society and as an indicator of change. This would be in line with social cognitive motives of liberals such as openness to new experiences and desire for equality in society. However, future research will be needed to further investigate this possible relationship.

We further pointed out the connection between the active-self concepts, social comparison and how both concepts can be used to influence consumers' behaviour via priming methods. Taking this connection into account might help future research to design primes more effectively by being able to predict the prime direction on behaviour and consequently reach the desired significant effect.

### *6.3 Managerial Implications*

Our findings also have practical implications, particular in the field of marketing. We designed our research study as a field experiment with the aim to create the most realist scenario possible, making our results more applicable to the real world.

By further substantiating that the underlying motives of a political ideology influence consumers' product choices we discovered new important insights for marketers on how to segment customers, the way these different segments can be approached and how advertising messages can be effectively designed to reach those segments.

Including political ideology as a substantial factor when looking at consumer behaviour can help marketers in their targeting positions. As mentioned earlier, the differences between liberal and conservative opinions keep growing (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008) and so does consequently the gap between their different psychological traits, motives and needs. This offers marketers the opportunity to additionally segment their customers into political camps based on their specific characteristics. By creating different political profiles, marketers gain a better understanding of their potential customers and are able to better predict their behaviour. Products and brands can therefore be positioned accordingly. Status-enhancing products and brands for example might therefore work better in a conservative target market than in a liberal one.

Conservatives and liberals also respond differently to advertising messages (Kidwell et al., 2013). Marketers can take this into consideration when designing new campaigns and customize the messages accordingly. Our results showed that priming increases the consistency between the political ideology and the consumer's choice. This gives marketers an opportunity to create specific advertising messages that are tailored to conservatives' needs and motives of for example status seeking. By using specific key words in their advertising messages that are associated with a particular ideology context, marketer could be able to indirectly prime consumers towards a desired buying behaviour. This is especially beneficial in situations in which consumer lack a strong conscious rational for choosing a product over another as this increases the influence of subconscious motives (Morris et al., 2008). In-store advertising could be used to enforce the prime and might increase the chance to activate political ideology connected behaviour during the consumer buying process. The design of website offers another opportunity to subconsciously prime consumers towards a certain political ideology. Engaging with words that are associated with a particular political context would be related to the scrambled sentences task we used in our study to prime the participants and could therefore have a similar effect.

Moreover, conservatives' preferences for luxurious products and their desire for status quo might be a way to approach their loyalty towards a brand or product, as it is probable that conservatives therefore are more susceptible for brand and product extensions.

These practical implications are not only interesting in the context of marketing but might also be relevant for policy makers, who want to distribute a certain message or want to implement new policies and need the support of different political groups.

#### ***6.4 Limitations and Future Research***

Due to the nature of this study and the circumstances under which it was conducted; this research has several limitations, which should be acknowledged. In general, we took a pragmatic approach when designing this study, limiting its level of generalisation. Our sample was conducted as a non-probability sample including many different nationalities and non-native speakers. The products chosen for this study were carefully selected, however it is not excludable that other factors played a role in the participants decision process obscuring the effect of ideology. The political item scale we used to test the prime effect, was originally developed for an American study and might have been unsuitable for some of the participants.

The following paragraph reflects on the limitations mentioned above and gives suggestions on how they can be addressed by future research as well mentions additional points of interest for future research in the field.

A non-probability, convenience sample was chosen for this study due to financial and time constraints as well as the feasibility of an experiment. However, we ensured that the sample size for all relevant in-between groups was large enough to receive significant and meaningful test results. We selected students randomly on the basis that they were passing by the experiment location on campus. Lancaster University however has a very international student population, including many students from Eastern countries. This led to a very diverse sample, which might have interfered with the priming effect on the different participants. In experiments, researchers often favour using homogeneous samples such that the only thing changing in the study is the experimental manipulation. The priming task was originally developed for native speakers and even though we pretested the task with non-native speakers some participants had language difficulties and were not familiar with every word. The language barrier might have been a potential reason why the priming task did not show a significant effect on the self-reported ideology. Further differences in the political ideology background might have led to the fact that participants connect different values and beliefs to conservatism and liberalism in the East than in the West. People from Eastern countries with a communist history relate stability and status quo rather with a left-wing ideology than with a right-wing ideology (Duriez et al., 2005), which potentially could have weakened the priming task as some words might have evoked the opposite effect as intended. The problematic of universal and context specific values and ideological beliefs is also applicable to the political item scale, which was used to test the prime effect. The scale was originally developed and tested on US students and some of the words used might have been rather context specific for the American political landscape leading to a potential decreasing effect on the prime for participants other nationalities. However, overall our results regarding the influence of primes on product choice proved to be significant which means that the discussed points above did not have an overruling effect on the whole study. Thus, despite the fact that our sample was heterogeneous, the randomization of participants to conditions ensured that there was no substantial difference between the conditions other than the manipulation itself.

We found a significant effect of gender on product choice. In particular, females seemed to prefer *The Vogue* magazine and organic ice cream whereas males predominately chose *The*

*National Geographic* and the luxurious ice cream. Concerning the magazine choices, one potential explanation might be the familiarity with these two magazines. *Mother Jones* and *Rob Report* are lesser-known magazines and serve a smaller target market, which might have made it less likely for participants to pick these magazines over the more familiar ones. Looking at the reported association between gender and ice cream, females have predominately chosen the organic ice cream. One possible explanation is that they perceived it as the healthier option. Studies have shown that the word organic is closely associated with a healthier lifestyle (Magnusson et al., 2003) and that organic food consumption is part of a way of life. It results from “an ideology, connected to a particular value system, that affects personality measures, attitudes, and consumption behaviour” (Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis, 1998). It might have been that the desire to be healthy and to be perceived of as living a healthy lifestyle played a bigger role for females than for male participants. Nevertheless, we did not find any association between gender and prime and therefore also no potential confound effect.

For future research it would be interesting to re-test a possible effect of primed ideology on inherently held political ideology, especially because previous research studies already have reported significant effects (Fernandes and Mandel, 2014). Hereby we recommend taking the active-self-concept into consideration, which could help to make the priming more precise and consequently more effective. It also helps to estimate the direction of the prime and better predict the desired resulting behaviour (Wheeler and Berger, 2007). This however was partially expected given the circumstances that participants were randomly assigned to the conditions, that is, to either receive the conservative or the liberal priming. Further it would be interesting to examine whether the differences in cultural political background translate into different priming effects and ultimately into different product choices. There is substantial evidence that there are both universal and context-specific effects regarding the cognitive and motivational antecedents of left-right political orientation (Thorisdottir et al., 2007). By examining possible context-factors of political ideological driven behaviour before conducting the study, future research might be able to design the priming task according to the particular nationality of the respondents, leading to a stronger effect of the prime. This could be particularly relevant for global brands that want to customize their marketing strategy according to their target markets in different countries with divergent political ideology cultures.

Our experiment was designed to trigger the unique underlying social cognitive motives of each ideology and when congruent with their ideological foundation they evoke the

predicted product choice. The results showed that liberals predominately chose green products. However, future research will be needed to investigate which underlying motives triggered this behaviour.

We build on the view that conservatives engage in social comparison due to status seeking behaviour. One reason is that social threat (evoked by an unfavourable comparison to others) increases this motive (Fernandes and Mandel, 2014). Going forward, it would be important to investigate which other factors increase conservatives' status seeking behaviour. To gain deeper and more holistic insights future research should further explore which other social cognitive motives influence conservatives' and liberals' product choice. Overall our study showed that tapping into underlying foundations of both liberals and conservatives can provide a compelling means to initiate behaviour and offers new possibilities for marketers to position their products in a more targeted manner.

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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix A - Experiment Questionnaire

#### Page 1

Please locate yourself on the following scale of political orientation by circling the applicable number:

1 = Extremely Liberal

9 = Extremely Conservative

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9

Extremely liberal Extremely conservative

#### Page 2 - Priming Task: Liberal

In this experiment, we are interested in measuring your cognitive ability to form four-word sentences/phrases from five-word options. Therefore, please write four-word sentences or phrases taking four of the five options you have for each sentence/phrase.

Example:

is the office lawyer rich: the lawyer is rich

#	WORDS	RESPONSE
1	I feel today to open	
2	free minds have art produce	
3	open-minded play opportunities creates being	
4	parents my liberals are he	
5	and an enthusiastic, person easygoing	
6	in France parties for left-wing	
7	making are progress we much	
8	people have different the opinions	
9	they changed share their objectives	
10	to diversity stimulates and pluralism	
11	with speech the freedom of	
12	give love and is share	

Please re-read your answers before turning to the next page.



<b>Strongly against</b>									<b>Strongly favour</b>
Same-sex marriage									
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Strongly against</b>									<b>Strongly favour</b>
Illegal immigration									
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Strongly against</b>									<b>Strongly favour</b>
Democrats									
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Strongly against</b>									<b>Strongly favour</b>

**Page 4 - Demographics**

*Your answers to the following questions will be used to help us interpret the information you have provided.*

1) Are you...?

Male  Female:

2) Please indicate:

Undergraduate Student  Postgraduate Student:

3) Please indicate your age:

- Under 18
- 18–25
- 26–30
- 31–35
- 36–40
- 41–45
- 46+
- Refused

4) What is your nationality?

*Thank you very much for your participation. ☺*

**Page 5 - Participant Information**

**Participant Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Magazine Choice:**

Vogue:

Robb Report:

Mother Jones:

National Geographic:

**Product Choice:**

Magnum:

Green & Black's:

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

## Appendix B – Codebook

Variable Name	Label	Statement	Construct	Response Answer
ppnr	participant number	Random allocated number		
ideo	Political Ideology	Please locate yourself on the following scale of political orientation by circling the applicable number:		Likert Scale 1= Extremely Liberal to 9= Extremely Conservative
cond	Priming condition	Random allocated		1= Conservative 2= Liberal
ideo1	Capital Punishment	Please indicate the degree to which you are against or in favour of the following items on a scale from 1 (strongly against) to 9 (strongly favour). There are no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your honest opinion.	ideo_avg	Likert Scale 1= Strongly against to 9= Strongly in favour
ideo2	Abortion			
ideo3	Gun Control			
ideo4	Social Healthcare System			
ideo5	Same Sex Marriage			
ideo6	Illegal Immigration			
ideo7	Democrats			
magazine	Magazines	Please choose a magazine that interests you the most		1= Vouge 2= Robb Report 3= Mother Jones 4= National Geographic
ice	Ice Cream	Would you like a premium or an organic ice cream?		1= Magnum 2= Green & Black's
gender	Gender	Please indicate your gender	Demographics	1= Male 2= Female
student	Student	Please indicate if you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student		1= Undergraduate Student 2= Postgraduate Student
age	Age	Please indicate your age		1= under 18 2= 18-25 3= 26-30 4= 31-35 5= 36-40 6= 41-45 7= 46+ 8= Refused
nation	Nationality	Please indicate your nationality		Open Questions
problems	Problems			0= Correct fulfilled Priming Task 1= Incorrect fulfilled Priming Task
pretest	Pre-test			0= Actual Experiment 1= Pre-test
magazine2	Magazines2		Magazine Choice	1= Luxurious Magazine 2= Green Magazine

nation2	Nationality2	Devison into European and Non-European participants		1= European 2= Non-European
nation3	Nationality3	Division into Western countries and Eastern Countries participants		1= Western Country 2= Eastern Country
retest_id eo_avg		Change in self-reported ideology after priming task		Likert Scale 1= Extremely Liberal to 9= Extremely Conservative
change_ideo		Difference of Change in Ideology after priming	re- test_ideo - ideo	
cond_reflection	cond_reflection	Recoding of priming condition		-1= Conservative 1= Liberal
interaction_ideo		Interaction between self-reported ideology and primed ideology		-1to -7 = Range of Conservatism 1 - 7 = Range of Liberalism
choice_sum		Sum of all choices made		0= No luxurious products chosen 1= One luxurious product chosen 2= Two luxurious products chosen

### Appendix C – Descriptive Statistics

#### Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18-25	50	66.7	66.7	66.7
26-30	19	25.3	25.3	92.0
31-35	4	5.3	5.3	97.3
36-40	2	2.7	2.7	100.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0	

#### Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid male	40	53.3	53.3	53.3
female	35	46.7	46.7	100.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0	

#### Student

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid undergraduate	4	5.3	5.3	5.3
postgraduate	71	94.7	94.7	100.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0	

**Nationality2**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Euopean	36	48.0	48.0	48.0
	NonEuropean	39	52.0	52.0	100.0
	Total	75	100.0	100.0	

**Nationality3**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Western	41	54.7	54.7	54.7
	Eastern	34	45.3	45.3	100.0
	Total	75	100.0	100.0	

*Appendix D – Prime Effect on Self-reported Ideology*

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.047 <sup>a</sup>	.002	-.012	2.13231

a. Predictors: (Constant), Priming condition

b. Dependent Variable: change\_ideo

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.708	1	.708	.156	.694 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	318.271	70	4.547		
	Total	318.978	71			

a. Dependent Variable: change\_ideo

b. Predictors: (Constant), Priming condition

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.156	.788		2.735	.008
	Priming condition	-.198	.503	-.047	-.394	.694

a. Dependent Variable: change\_ideo

*Appendix E – Prime Effect on Overall Product Choice*

**Between-Subjects Factors**

		Value Label	N
Priming condition	1.00	conservative	38
	2.00	liberal	37

**Descriptive Statistics**

Dependent Variable: Sum of all choices made

Priming condition	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
conservative	<b>1.1579</b>	.67888	38
liberal	<b>.8108</b>	.65988	37
Total	.9867	.68760	75

**Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances<sup>a</sup>**

Dependent Variable: Sum of all choices made

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.004	1	73	<b>.949</b>

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + cond

**Sig. >.05 no violation of homogeneity of variances assumption, equal variances assumed**

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Sum of all choices made

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2.258 <sup>a</sup>	1	2.258	5.037	.028	.065
Intercept	72.658	1	72.658	162.063	.000	.689
cond	2.258	1	2.258	5.037	<b>.028</b>	<b>.065</b>
Error	32.728	73	.448			
Total	108.000	75				
Corrected Total	34.987	74				

a. R Squared = .065 (Adjusted R Squared = .052)

# Lessons of a Master Student

Reflection on my dissertation  
process

# Research Background

- My dissertation focuses on political ideology and its influence on consumer behaviour, with emphasis on choice preferences
- I analysed the consumption preferences of conservatives and liberals with regard to luxurious and green products
- Further I examined in how far consumer behaviour can be subconsciously influenced via priming methods
- To do so, I developed and conducted a field experiment which involved careful preparation, detailed execution and intensive after work

# Managerial Implications

- Validating political ideology as a powerful predictor for consumer behaviour
- Increased knowledge for marketers how to use political ideology for segmentation positioning and targeting
- New insights on how to subconsciously influence consumers behaviour via priming task → new implications for marketing tools and advertising messages

# Personal Take-aways

- Being able to familiarise with new areas and subjects quickly - The subject of Political ideology and in particular the psychological background of it was completely unfamiliar to me, however I managed very fast to become knowledgeable in this area
- Increased attention to details and consequences of planned actions – Experiments require careful planning & execution to gain valid and useful results
- Time management planning – A dissertation is similar to a little project that requires careful planning & dealing with unforeseen events
- Critical thinking and further processing of gathered information