



04 CASHMERE  
throw blanket  
\$250



06 AMERICAN EAGLE  
picture frame  
\$46

# Sell to Voters, Not Consumers

Politicians have realized that framing their messages helps them resonate with different voters. Now, marketing research also shows that brands can use a similar approach to target their liberal and conservative customers.

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**An avalanche of hot takes and deep dives follows any major election, when reporters and pundits examine how exactly a candidate won. Their victory typically boils down to one simple reason: They did a better job appealing to the region's predominant values.**

Analyses of consumer shopping choices use similar language: How did consumers vote with their dollars? What items did they elect? It starts to sound political—and in fact, a growing body of research finds that shopper decisions can be based on the values of voters.

Political identity has always been a component of consumers' identity, says Vanitha Swaminathan, a professor of marketing at the University of Pittsburgh. "There's something called identity salience, which is this notion that (asks), 'How important is a component of who you are to you?' Lately, it seems to me that people's political orientation has become a salient part of their identity. It's how you define yourself more and more."

Marketing researchers are finding that election maps can predict consumer attitudes as much as traditional demographics. The use of these insights doesn't need to be overt: Ideological values can predict how consumers will respond to variations in messaging. Research on political messaging has shown as much, as studies find that conservative policies can gain liberal support when framed in terms of traditionally liberal values, such as empathy, social justice and equality of opportunity. The inverse is also true, as progressive policies were found to be more appealing to conservatives and moderates when framed in relation to traditionally conservative values such as patriotism, family, the American dream and respect for tradition.



01 **PAINT BRUSHES**  
with palette  
**\$28**

"In political campaigning, you appeal to different types of values, different types of things when trying to get people to vote for you," says Samuel Gosling, a psychology professor at the University of Texas. It's targeting by segmentation. "Political orientation is a really helpful variable because it does seem to predict a lot," Gosling says. His own research from 2008, published in *Political Psychology*, found liberals to generally be more open-minded, creative, curious and novelty-seeking, while conservatives were found to be more orderly, conventional and better organized. It's the exact type of audience insight that could make a marketer salivate.

As the nation becomes more politically polarized and Americans more entrenched in their views, political ideology may help marketers segment their audience. It's just a matter of learning what traits are typical of an ideology, and how brand messaging can speak to them.



02 **PAGODA pillow**  
**\$23**



03 **I'M OK, YOU'RE OK**  
**tea set**  
**\$37**

**01 PAINT BRUSHES with palette**

Art can be therapy, so that's why we created this harm-free, fair trade paint set. The brush bristles feature cruelty-free boar hair and the ceramic palette is an environmentally friendly alternative to plastic.

**02 PAGODA pillow** Sure, you'd rather be traveling, but now you can bring the vibrant world into your own home with this pagoda pillow. It's part of the New Experiences collection, our line of internationally themed decor.

**03 I'M OK, YOU'RE OK tea set** Free to be ... drinking tea! This groovy teapot set is perfect for a shared sip. Everyone's invited to this Mad Hatter's party.

**GROWING POLITICAL POLARIZATION MAY EXPLAIN WHY IDEOLOGY HAS BECOME SUCH A SALIENT PART OF AMERICAN IDENTITIES.**

A 2018 Gallup poll found that the number of Americans who identify as moderate shrank to 35%, down from 43% in 1992, while the portion of Americans identifying as liberal or conservative grew from 53% in 1992 to 61% in 2018. Pew Research shows Republicans and Democrats have been moving further apart in their political values, as well as approaches to addressing national issues they identify as top government priorities. Another Pew survey from 2018 found that 53% of Americans say that talking about politics with people they disagree with is generally stressful and frustrating, compared with 46% who said the same two years prior.

"Increasingly, this is going to be an important part of how people define themselves," Swaminathan says. "And because it's an important part of how people define themselves, companies and brands have no choice but to appeal to that part of identity."

As Americans cling more strongly to political ideology as identity, there are two ways brands can tap into this segmentation, according to Nailya Ordabayeva, an assistant professor of marketing at Boston College. "First, they expect companies to chime in on political issues which they feel strongly about," she says. For

**04 CASHMERE throw blanket**  
The luxurious deserve luxury. You work hard to maintain your classy lifestyle, so kick back with a leather-bound book and a glass of vintage red while snuggled under this beautiful cashmere throw blanket.

**05 GLASSWARE** Some days you feel like a whiskey, neat, and other days you feel like a martini, shaken. So why not have a glassware set that shows the same variety?

**06 AMERICAN EAGLE picture frame** Add a touch of pride to your walls with this American eagle picture frame. It'll make you nostalgic for picnics with the family on the Fourth of July—in fact, that's a memory worth framing!

example, Edelman's 2018 Earned Brand study found that 64% of respondents said that they are buying from or boycotting brands based on the company's stance on a social or political issue. Such belief-driven buyers were the majority in every market, age group and income level surveyed. The study also found that 67% of respondents purchased something for the first time because of the brand's position on a controversial issue, while 65% said that they would not buy a brand because it stayed silent on an issue it should have addressed.

Appealing to consumers' political ideologies by taking a stand on an issue has well-documented successes: In December 2017, Patagonia announced plans to sue the Trump administration in response to the government's decision to reduce the protection on two national monuments in Utah. According to e-commerce and analytic company Slice Intelligence (now Rakuten Intelligence), Patagonia sales were 7% stronger the week of the statement than they were the previous week—a week that included Cyber Monday. Similarly, Nike sales surged 31% after it released its ad featuring Colin Kaepernick, according to Edison Trends.

But not all brands that take a stance will see an uptick in sales. They can also run the risk of coming across as inauthentic or opportunistic (see: Pepsi's Kendall Jenner commercial). And the ones that are successful in driving brand affinity for some can still alienate others (see: consumers burning their Nike apparel after the Kaepernick ad).





06 AMERICAN EAGLE picture frame \$46

**“THERE IS ALSO A MORE SUBTLE AND PERHAPS MORE PERVERSIVE WAY IN WHICH POLITICAL IDEOLOGY CAN IMPACT CONSUMPTION,” SAYS ORDABAYEVA.**

“My work falls within the second line of influences, of the implicit impact of ideology on consumer shopping behavior that has nothing to do with politics.”

This second line of influence uses the traits and beliefs that are commonly attributed to liberals or conservatives to inform marketing messages. It’s segmentation by ideology in what products or services appeal to the two groups, but also in how the messaging can speak to their ideological values.

Ordabayeva’s research, published in August 2018 in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, used seven studies to illustrate how political ideology influences consumers’ preferences for how they differentiate themselves. This idea is based on social psychology research that found

people have a fundamental desire to showcase their identity to others. The defining trait that Ordabayeva and co-author Daniel Fernandes explored was expression of social hierarchy, which found that conservatives differentiate themselves from others by signaling superiority, while liberals differentiate themselves by signaling how they’re unique.

“We find that conservatives like signals of superiority because they very much endorse the idea of vertical hierarchical structure being legitimate and a reflection of real differences in individual hard work and character,” Ordabayeva says, “whereas liberals don’t endorse that idea. This is why they look for ways to differentiate non-hierarchically through these signals of uniqueness.”

These consumer-signaling strategies can be used by brands in their market positioning and messaging. Ordabayeva provided two examples in an article for *Harvard Business Review*: Mercedes-Benz catered to consumers who wanted to show their superior qualities and positions with its “A Class Ahead” tagline, while ad slogans such as Apple’s “Think Different” speak to consumers wishing to highlight their uniqueness.

In one of Ordabayeva and Fernandes’ studies, they offered participants a choice between a mug with their name and the message “Just Better” or “Just Different.” They found that conservatives were 2.2 times more likely than liberals to choose the “Just Better” mug. In another of their studies, participants could win a gift card for participation from either Ralph Lauren, which their brand perception pretests showed signals superiority, or Urban Outfitters, which they found signals uniqueness. Conservatives tended to prefer Ralph Lauren while liberals tended to prefer Urban Outfitters.

The patterns were consistent whether political ideology was captured by a basic either-or option (“Are you liberal or conservative?”), by a 1 to 9 scale (one being “extremely liberal” and nine being “extremely conservative”) or measured by people’s attitudes toward various political topics (such as views on abortion, gun control, same-sex marriage or illegal immigration). Another of their studies verified that the results were consistent across income brackets.

Political ideologies also predict other traits. Swaminathan and her colleagues found that liberals’ and conservatives’ relationship to power can also guide messaging. The research, published in the *Journal of Marketing* in February, targeted conservatives and liberals on Facebook to find that power-distance beliefs play a role in consumers’ preference of user-designed products.

“For liberals, they were more inclined to like the product if it had user design in it, but conservatives didn’t,” Swaminathan says. “We argue that the reason is that power distance beliefs are quite different between liberals and conservatives. Conservatives have a belief

in high-power distance: that organizations are superior, they're elite and therefore are able to make better decisions and should be in charge of the design of the product. Liberals, on the other hand, are much more low-power distance in that they believe that everybody should be equal, so consumers should be equally placed to give input."

Another study, published in the *Journal of Marketing* in September 2018, found political ideology can segment how consumers of luxury products respond to messaging. The researchers found that conservatives' desire for luxury goods relates to their goal of maintaining status, based on the idea that conservative political ideology increases the preference for social stability. In fact, upon activating status maintenance in study participants who identified as strongly conservative, these consumers were willing to pay \$109.80 on average for a set of headphones, compared with those with weak conservative views who were only willing to pay \$65.10.

#### **AS THE U.S. EDGES TOWARD THE NEXT ELECTION SEASON, AMERICANS' THOUGHTS ARE TURNING TOWARD POLITICS, MAKING THEM MORE COGNIZANT OF THEIR IDEOLOGIES.**

"I would expect elections to increase the salience of one's political identity and thus the effect to be stronger around election days," says David Dubois, a professor of marketing at INSEAD and co-author of the study on status messaging for luxury goods. "It may make sense for brands to tune their message before Election Day as one's political identity gets stronger."

There's proof that as Americans have become more polarized in their politics, they've begun pulling their identities with them. New York University political scientist Patrick Egan found evidence that people shift the nonpolitical parts of their identity to better align with being a Democrat or a Republican. His October 2018 paper used public opinion data collected through the General Social Survey, specifically a cohort of 3,900 people who were interviewed three times for the surveys, starting either in 2006, 2008 or 2010. Each time the survey was conducted, respondents were asked to rank themselves on a seven-point ideological scale, then asked questions about their identities related to, for example, their heritage or religious beliefs. Among the shifts noted by Egan, conservative Republicans were much more likely than liberal Democrats to become born-again Christians and to stop identifying as non-religious. Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, were much more likely than conservative Republicans to leave religion and stop describing themselves as born-again.

If more Americans are shifting their identities to

match their ideologies, and researchers have found that ideology can predict what messaging will appeal to shoppers, political orientation can serve as a new method of marketing segmentation.

"There are clear metrics of the ideologies of different markets," Ordabayeva says. "There are electoral maps, voting data, in addition to demographic data such as Gallup poll data that can help marketers discern the political beliefs and ideologies of their consumers."

For instance, Gallup polling from 2018 shows that audiences with the strongest conservative leanings include seniors, adults ages 50 to 64, men, residents of the South and adults with no college education, all of whom lean conservative by more than 15 percentage points. Whites, adults with some college education (but no degree) and residents of the Midwest lean conservative by at least 10 points. On the other side, adults with postgraduate education were 15 points more liberal than conservative and blacks were nine points more liberal. Adults ages 18 to 29 lean more liberal than conservative by four points, and adults ages 30 to 49, women and residents of the East lean slightly more liberal.

"Given that different geographies and different locations tend to lean politically one way or the other, companies could think about tailoring the positioning and the advertising, the messaging around their products toward superiority versus uniqueness in order to appeal more strongly to the ideological base of the specific market," says Ordabayeva, in reference to her own research on differentiation signaling.

She also recommends that marketers consider targeting different outlets. It's worth following where Republican and Democratic candidates place their ads. For example, digital and advertising strategy company Echelon Insights found in 2014 that 93% of political ads on the Golf Channel were for Republican candidates and 94% of the political spots on the E! Network were for Democratic candidates.

If a brand can use its existing demographics data to determine whether its customers are more liberal- or conservative-leaning, it can shape its messaging around that ideology's values. If its customers span the spectrum, a brand can use that demographics data to shape what messaging appears across the country and on different media platforms.

"That's where the real traction is, in values," Gosling says. "That's really what differentiates liberals and conservatives. And there's a lot of flexibility in how you can appeal to those different values with the very same product."

To win votes, politicians must appeal to their constituents' values. To win customers, marketers may well use the same tactics. ■

# Traits of Liberals and Conservatives: What else research has shown about political ideologies

Despite conservatives' greater desire for control, three studies showed conservatism is positively related to variety-seeking. The study's authors wrote that if a marketer wishes to target consumers who do not engage in variety-seeking among different brands—those who are brand loyal—they might target neighborhoods that are politically liberal or advertise in liberal media. On the other hand, if they wish to target consumers who are open to variety when introducing a new product, the marketer might target politically conservative neighborhoods or advertise in conservative media.

*"Political conservatism and variety-seeking," Daniel Fernandes and Naomi Mandel; Journal of Consumer Psychology*

Researchers developed tailored persuasive messages about recycling that appealed to consumers' political ideologies. They used messages related to individualizing foundations for liberals, based on fairness and avoiding harm to others, and the binding foundation for conservatives, based on duty and an obligation to adhere to authority. These appeals significantly affected consumers' acquisition, use and recycling intentions and behaviors.

*"Getting Liberals and Conservatives to Go Green: Political Ideology and Congruent Appeals," Blair Kidwell, Adam Farmer and David M. Hardesty; Journal of Consumer Research*

In a study on charity advertising, researchers found liberals respond more favorably to equality-based rewards, whereas conservatives respond more favorably to proportionality-based rewards. They found liberals perceive greater effectiveness in equality-based rewards for donations based on random drawings, compared with conservatives who felt proportionality-based rewards based on donation amounts were more effective.

*"How Liberals and Conservatives Respond to Equality-Based and Proportionality-Based Rewards in Charity Advertising," Younghwa Lee, Sukki Yoon, Young Woo Lee and Marla B. Royne; Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*

In a study of attitudes toward human rights, liberals responded most significantly and were more motivated to act in response to messages framed to emphasize the suffering of victims. Conservatives were more likely to feel motivated when the information is framed by graphic visual imagery of human rights abuse.

*"Rights on the Left and Right: How Ideological Predispositions Affect Human Rights Attitudes," Joseph Braun*

Political orientation is associated with problem-solving strategy: In a study, liberals solved significantly more problems through insight and aha! moments instead of in a step-by-step, analytic fashion. Conservatives were more structured and preferred clear answers.

*"The politics of insight," Carola Salvi, Irene Cristofori, Jordan Grafman and Mark Beeman; Psychological Science*

Research on openness to new experiences and conscientiousness found liberals are more open to experience and conservatives tend to be attracted to normality. The researchers polled and observed subjects in their tests, but also looked for physical clues in dorm rooms and offices. Conservatives' bedrooms tended to have more calendars, postage stamps, flags and sports posters. Their rooms were also neater and better lit. Liberals' bedrooms had a greater variety of books, more CDs and a greater variety of music, along with more art supplies, cultural memorabilia and maps of other countries.

*"The Secret Lives of Liberals and Conservatives: Personality Profiles, Interaction Styles, and the Things They Leave Behind," Dana R. Carney, John T. Jost, Samuel D. Gosling and Jeff Potter; Political Psychology*

A 2014 quiz by Time magazine of 220,192 respondents found liberals were more likely to believe, for example, that self-expression is more important than self-control. The survey also found liberals are more likely to prefer cats to dogs and are more willing to try a new restaurant that blended the cuisines of two very different cultures. Conservatives, on the other hand, were more likely to believe that all children need to learn respect for authority. They were also more likely to be proud of their country's history and would prefer visiting Times Square than the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

*"It's True: Liberals Like Cats More Than Conservatives Do," Time, February 2014*