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Research Dialogue

Red, blue and purple states of mind: Segmenting the political marketplace ☆

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Abstract

John Jost (2017 – this issue) provides a thoughtful review of the literature in political psychology that speaks to important distinctions between conservatives and progressives. I use his essay as a point of departure to accomplish three goals: a) further elaborate on the left/right segmentation scheme, identifying other portions of the political market that are less brand loyal and therefore more persuadable; b) offer preliminary suggestions based on consumer psychology perspectives on how voter attitudes and behaviors might be nudged by political candidates and campaigns; and c) identify some areas in which the fields of political and consumer psychology might profitably benefit from cross-pollination of theories, approaches and evidence.

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Introduction

The target article that is the topic of this commentary (Jost, 2017) is remarkable in at least three respects. First, it covers an enormous amount of intellectual ground to surface important differences between people on the right or “conservatives” and people on the left or “progressives”, a term I prefer to “liberal” because liberalism has acquired a pejorative patina, in large part due to the efforts of right-of-center media and commentators. These differences are pertinent to their psychology (personality, motivations and values), underlying cognitive processes, and the neuroanatomy that might account for or reflect these processes. Second, the article examines important dependent variables that reflect consumer preferences and behavior in a fashion that is immediately accessible and appealing to scholars in consumer psychology and marketing. Third, the article acknowledges the potential that the disciplines of marketing and consumer psychology have to influence thinking in political

science and political psychology, much like the literature in those fields has influenced research in marketing and consumer psychology on political persuasion (cf. Hedgcock, Rao, & Chen, 2009; Klein & Ahluwalia, 2005). It is this last element of Jost’s essay that will serve as a point of departure for my commentary. I will take Jost up on the implicit invitation in his concluding sentence: “...it is only a matter of time until work in consumer psychology begins to shape, in reciprocal fashion, theoretical and empirical developments in political psychology” (Jost, 2017, p. xx). I will focus on marketing and consumer psychology based approaches that political candidates and campaigns may employ to realize their goals. Specifically, in the remainder of this article, I

- a) elaborate on the left/right dichotomy that underpins Jost’s view, and develop a more nuanced set of segmentation approaches that have practical applications for understanding and motivating voter behavior;
- b) draw from extant literature in marketing and consumer psychology that might be employed to “nudge” voter attitudes, preferences and behavior based on the segmentation approaches I describe; and

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- c) briefly discuss how our two disciplines of consumer psychology and political psychology might inform each other in developing an understanding of voter and consumer behavior.

Beyond the left/right segmentation scheme

The principal concept underpinning Jost's framework is a concept that is central to marketing theory, that of *segmentation*. Specifically, Jost (2017) argues that there are "...tremendous opportunities for *ideological market segmentation*" (p. yy, emphasis added), implicitly relying on the thesis that there are two groups of people who are homogenous within and heterogeneous between. In other words, most or all progressives are likely to be alike, and the segment is relatively stable; and most or all conservatives are likely to be alike, and the segment is relatively stable. This segmentation approach allows for the development and test of a series of interesting and practical predictions regarding differences in a) marketing approaches designed to influence the consumption of commercial products and services, and b) strategies and tactics that political candidates may employ to influence voters, donors and volunteers.

Jost offers an interesting description of the historical and semantic antecedents of the left/right dichotomy in the political realm. The underlying religious and pejorative elements of the labels are provocative, to say the least. For instance, the etymology of the term "left" derives from the Latin *sinistra* (sinister in English, and "gauche" in French), designed to associate leftist political views with "ungodliness" (Laponce, 1981). In contemporary America, the divide between individuals who populate the two segments covers a substantial range of issues, from products and brands consumed, to belief in the value of the media, educational institutions, and demonstrable facts. For instance, a) when National Public Radio (NPR) tweeted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2017, some supporters of President Trump thought NPR was tweeting anti-Trump propaganda (see https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/07/05/some-trump-supporters-thought-npr-tweeted-propaganda-it-was-the-declaration-of-independence/?utm_term=.d44bc60af496); b) a recent Pew Research Center survey shows that Republicans generally believe that colleges and Universities have a negative effect on the way things are going in the country (58% negative to 36% positive), whereas Democrats do not (72% positive to 19% negative) (<http://www.people-press.org/2017/07/10/sharp-partisan-divisions-in-views-of-national-institutions/>); and c) a 2003 study by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland found that Fox News viewers (who are predominantly conservative) were more likely than National Public Radio listeners (who are predominantly progressive) to believe that i) Saddam Hussein had collaborated with Al-Qaeda (there is no evidence that he had); ii) Saddam Hussein had been involved in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center (there is no evidence that he had); and iii) that weapons of mass destruction had been discovered in Iraq (there is no evidence that they had). Similarly, disputes have occurred with respect to crowd sizes at the Presidential inauguration in 2017,

human agency and climate change, the success or lack thereof of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA also known as "Obamacare"), and whether or not Muslims celebrated in New Jersey following the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City.

Based on the existing empirical evidence about the world, it is tempting for progressives to question conservatives' grasp of reality. To paraphrase Pennycook, Cheyne, Barr, Koehler, and Fugelsang (2015) and Jost (2017), the right has a relatively high "bovine manure receptivity". However, denigration is not a particularly interesting or useful approach, as far as behavioral science is concerned. It is far more valuable to understand the underlying *emotional* bases for political belief systems, and whether and how the political preferences of the segments that subscribe to these belief systems might be "nudged".

Left/right tribalism: the Capulets and the Montagues

Perhaps it is not reason and a reliance on reality and evidence that can resolve political disputes (see Laudan, 1984 for a philosophy of science view regarding resolution of theoretical conflicts in science, and Anderson (1986) for an application to consumer research). The antecedent of the dispute between left and right lies elsewhere. Various sources suggest that there is a tribal element (in marketing we might refer to this as "brand loyalty") to political orientation at the extremes and this tribal adherence to a belief system relies to a great degree on emotion. Haidt (2012) traces the tendency to form politically like-minded tribes to a moral echo-chamber that is evolutionarily adaptive, as in-group cohesiveness is enhanced when members agree with one another and disagree with out-group members, thus increasing the odds of survival, particularly in settings where group-based activity is valuable for survival. Recent popular press accounts (e.g., Hessler, 2017) provide strong evidence that such tribalism exists and is reinforced in the face of evidence that challenges the veracity of the tribe's beliefs.

The scholarly evidence from neuroscience is consistent with this thesis. For instance, in one study, Kaplan, Friedman and Iacoboni (2007) exposed registered Republicans and Democrats to pictures of the faces of Presidential candidates (George W. Bush, John Kerry and Ralph Nader). When respondents viewed the face of the Presidential candidate representing a political orientation different from their own, the findings showed enhanced activation in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), the Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC) and insula. The enhanced insula activation suggests the elicitation of distaste, perhaps even disgust, at the sight of the opposing candidate's face. The ACC activation was located within the "cognitive" sub-region, and in combination with the observed activation in the DLPFC, the authors surmised that respondents were *up-regulating* rather than suppressing the negative emotions they were experiencing. Specifically, "... the DLPFC and the ACC actively induce increased feelings of anger, fear, and disgust in the insula, putamen, anterior temporal cortex, and inferior frontal gyrus, (and) may be the physiologic basis of *negative thoughts inducing negative emotions*"

(p. 61, emphasis added). Simply put, respondents experienced a negative emotion (distaste) upon viewing the face of a Presidential candidate from the opposing ideological orientation; they then increased their sense of distaste by, perhaps unconsciously, cogitating about the experienced negative emotion. This affect → cognition → affect cycle is reminiscent of other famous “tribal” rivalries whose antecedents are obscure, such as between the Capulets and Montagues. The research on dyed-in-the-wool-conservatives and progressives suggests that they are “brand loyal” and their loyalty is, for all practical purposes, relatively stable. This conclusion ought to be tempered. In a meta-analysis, Burke, Kosloff, & Landau, 2013 observe that, consistent with Terror Management Theory, mortality salience primes often induce “conservative shifting”, even amongst progressives. Thus, fear inductions (recall the infamous “wolves” ad the weekend prior to the election pitting George W. Bush against John F. Kerry, in 2004) might shift preferences amongst progressives, making them behave in a conservative manner, particularly in the privacy of a voting booth. Further, and consistent with Jost’s research, there is an asymmetry in shifting (i.e., there is little corresponding “liberal shift” in the absence of mortality salience), perhaps because “... liberals are higher in openness...” (pp. zz) and are less rigid. The general conclusion regarding brand loyalty and the possibility that preferences may be shifted has obvious and important tactical implications for political candidates and their campaigns.

The political middle

For a multitude of reasons, the left/right segmentation scheme, although informative and actionable, is likely incomplete. Specifically, the popular press as well as the political marketing literature suggests that, in addition to voters and consumers who subscribe to one or the other political ideology, there exists a segment of “independents” or “centrists”, that often votes for candidates of both parties (“ticket splitters”), or neither party (Kim, Rao, & Lee, 2009). Such independents either do not subscribe to an ideology, or subscribe to elements of both ideologies (e.g., fiscal conservatives who are socially progressive), or subscribe to some other viewpoint, and thus do not comfortably fit into either camp. Because the voting behavior of individuals who populate this segment is relatively unpredictable, they might be described as “brand switchers” or as “unloyals” (Kim et al., 2009).

Political independents are important for a variety of reasons, including the strong possibility that they disproportionately affect electoral outcomes. That is, most political candidates and campaigns tend to take their base for granted (other than to encourage turnout), tend to ignore the opponent’s base (other than to discourage turnout), and tend to focus disproportionate resources on the persuadable middle.

It turns out that the middle, seemingly ideologically independent segment comprises at least three sub-segments: the *undecided*, the *uninformed*, and the *uninvolved* (Rao, 2007). Undecided voters tend to pride themselves on their independence, information seeking, and their desire and willingness to

vote based on issues rather than party identity or surface-level attributes of candidates (such as age, race, gender, sexual orientation and the like). Such voters occasionally split their votes between Democratic and Republican candidates for various offices (as well as those of other parties) to appear even-handed and balanced (Hillygus & Shields, 2009).

Uninformed voters, sometimes termed “low-information voters”, are not *au courant* with issues, candidates and party positions, but do have a relatively high propensity to vote. As the election becomes temporally proximal, their attention towards candidates and issues might increase, but they tend to pay relatively little attention when the decision is temporally distant. The narrative that likely best describes this segment is: “I’m busy; I’ll get to it when the time is right and it becomes important. Don’t bother me now”. These traits lead me and others to speculate that uninformed voters are less likely to pay attention to and vote in primaries, relative to the general election, and are less likely to vote in mid-term and special elections, relative to Presidential election years (<http://californiapolicycenter.org/tag/low-information-voters/>).

Uninvolved voters are a different cup of tea, in that their opportunity costs of voting are likely higher than any perceived benefits of voting. Consistent with the “rational voter model” (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968), at minimum these voters, a) tend to subscribe to the view that their vote will not make a difference to the electoral outcome and/or, b) do not believe in the political system as currently constructed and/or, c) are simply too busy with other demands in their lives (work, childcare, eldercare and the like). Hence, they are quite disengaged from the political milieu and tend not to vote.

The task of influencing these three sub-segments is, as noted above, of substantial significance to political candidates and campaigns. In this regard, the marketing and consumer psychology literatures offer some prescriptions that are of potential value. However, before I turn to the practical implications of this segmentation scheme, I address another important, though obvious, segmentation scheme that is also of substantial significance to political candidates and campaigns.

Demography: ethnic minorities and “millennials”

Particularly in non-Presidential year elections, turnout amongst particular sub-groups such as Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, African-Americans and younger voters tends to be relatively low. There is a small cottage industry of popular press books and opinions about how one might appeal to one or another of these minority groups, much of it descriptive (cf. Burgos & Mobolade, 2011; Phillips, 2016). Understanding the psychology of these segments is likely to prove critical in influencing their preferences and motivating them to act, and some available theory might be of value in accomplishing those goals.

Demographic sub-segments

Perhaps the best psychological marker of demographic distinctions is the notion of culture. That is, each group, be it an ethnic minority, sexual preference identifier, age category or

economic class, is typified by particular cultural norms and patterns. These cultural markers influence how people view themselves, identify their goals, and specify what makes them happy. Perhaps the most investigated cultural dichotomy is that of independence and interdependence. For instance, independents (e.g., European-Americans), focus on the self as unique and distinct from others. They tend to pursue personal benefits, self-expression, and tend to be promotion-focused. On the other hand, interdependents (e.g., Hispanic-, Asian-Americans) focus on their relationship with others and pursue relational benefits, comply with norms and others' expectations, and tend to be prevention-focused (cf. Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991).

Employing this cultural segmentation approach provides a nice first-cut at constructing culturally appropriate messaging. For instance, messages that address interests of relevance to the collective are likely to be more effective on segments who belong to an interdependent culture (Hispanic-Americans), whereas messages that address interests of relevance to the individual are likely to be more effective on segments that belong to an independent culture (white millennials, roughly, those born after 1982 and lie in the 18–35 age range; Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). But, these first-cut approaches need to recognize further nuances for messaging purposes.

Nuances in demographic sub-segments

Each ethnic or age-based sub-segment is itself comprised of a complex set of sub-groups. For instance, Hispanic-Americans hail from multiple countries of origin (e.g., post-Castro Cuba versus Mexico) and espouse different political and social views. Similarly, African Americans comprise first generation immigrants (e.g., from Haiti) versus those who are U. S. born, and again, these distinctions have important tactical ramifications. Similarly, millennials might be quite diverse in their voting history, their use of social media, their employment, social and economic status, and their own responsibilities and obligations. Finally, an individual can belong to two or more segments simultaneously (e.g., Hispanic-millennials). In sum, it would be profitable for political candidates and campaigns to develop an

intimate understanding of the nature of the micro-targets they plan to address.

Clearly, there exist several other demography-based segmentation schemes that are amenable to theoretical analysis. My intention here is to draw attention to one theoretical approach that has potential in two respects, a) develop a distinction between sub-segments using culture as a segmenting variable and, b) recognize that there might be additional, interesting complexities (such as the existence of “bicultural” individuals (e.g., Hispanic-millennials) whose cultural orientation might be a hybrid of two or more cultures (Chen, Ng, & Rao, 2005; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet Martinez, 2000; Ng, Kim, & Rao, 2015). The implications merit rigorous scholarly scrutiny.

Reprise

To summarize, my point of departure from Jost's (2017) target article is to develop an actionable segmentation scheme. Combining the undecided, uninformed, and uninvolved distinction with the cultural identifiers associated with various demographic groups yields a matrix, shown in Fig. 1, that suggests the existence of “micro targets” that ought to be responsive to unique persuasive and motivational messages from political campaigns. Several popular press accounts support the suggestions pertinent to persuading micro-targets, provided in Fig. 1. (For instance, see https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2017/07/18/these-obama-voters-snubbed-hillary-clinton-and-they-dont-regret-what-they-did/?hpid=hp_no-name_opinion-card-d%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.c4145dcc589f for support for the suggestion in the Undecided/Interdependent cell). I turn to an examination of the micro-targeting issue in the next section.

Persuading and mobilizing

To illustrate how persuasion and motivation might be accomplished with segment-appropriate messaging, I will draw upon the well-established principle of loss aversion. Specifically,

Illustrative Micro-Targets and Messaging Approaches

	UNDECIDED	UNINFORMED	UNINVOLVED
INTERDEPENDENT	<p><i>Segment:</i> Young African-Americans who are engaged</p> <p><i>Message:</i> Loss of benefits to the community</p>	<p><i>Segment:</i> First generation Asian immigrants</p> <p><i>Message:</i> Loss of hope for their children, that immigrants value</p>	<p><i>Segment:</i> First generation Hispanic Immigrants</p> <p><i>Message:</i> Not being a voter jeopardizes the community</p>
INDEPENDENT	<p><i>Segment:</i> (Older) white Millennials (28-32 year olds)</p> <p><i>Message:</i> Loss of future prospects</p>	<p><i>Segment:</i> Middle-aged white women</p> <p><i>Message:</i> Loss of retirement protection, health care</p>	<p><i>Segment:</i> (Young) white millennials (18-20 year olds)</p> <p><i>Message:</i> Not being a voter jeopardizes their future</p>

Fig. 1. Illustrative micro-targets and messaging approaches.

where appropriate, I will leverage the notion that losses are more aversive than gains are pleasurable (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), which implies that when individuals are confronted with information about a loss (such as the loss of health care) they are likely to be persuaded to oppose the program that would result in the loss. Further, because gains are preferred to losses (e.g., price discounts for paying in cash are preferred to price premiums for paying by credit card), candidates ought to frame their policies as gain generating, and frame the opponent’s policies as loss generating. Although there is considerable empirical evidence at the micro (neuro) level for the existence of loss aversion (cf. Barkley-Levenson, Van Leijenhorst, & Galvan, 2013; Canessa et al., 2017; Tom, Fox, Trepel, & Poldrack, 2007), a stark illustration at the macro level is provided in Fig. 2. It shows that support for the PPACA increased substantially following the 2016 election, as the electorate began to focus on the potential loss of healthcare, a frame that had been missing in periods prior to the election.

Speaking to the undecideds

Recall that this segment is typified by seeing pros and cons of both candidates (in a two-candidate race). In other words, much like consumers choosing from amongst two multi-attribute options that include demonstrably superior features

associated with one option and a substantially lower price associated with the other option, voters are caught on the horns of a dilemma. Tradeoff analysis is often employed to study how preferences might be shifted when individuals have difficulty choosing between two options that are equally attractive, but perhaps for different reasons (Huber, Payne, & Puto, 1982). According to the literature on the attraction effect, when two options are deemed equally attractive (i.e., they own 50% marketshare apiece), the introduction of a decoy that is asymmetrically dominated by one of the options increases the share of the most similar option (the “target”) relative to that of the other (the “rival;” Huber & Puto, 1983). For instance, if the target is high on one attribute (safety) but not on another (convenience), and the rival is high on the other attribute (convenience) but not on the first (safety), they might typically split the market equally. The introduction of an asymmetrically dominated decoy that is moderately good on the first attribute (safety) but, like the target, is poor on convenience, generally yields an increase in market share for the target (see Fig. 3). That is, adding a dominated alternative to a choice set results in an attraction towards the dominating alternative (Huber et al., 1982).

This finding has been applied on at least three occasions to demonstrate that preferences for political candidates can be influenced by the presence of a decoy (including one that is unselectable, i.e., a phantom decoy; Hedgcock & Rao, 2009a; Hedgcock et al., 2009; Pan, O’Curry, & Pitts, 1995). The general consensus is that, indeed, the presence of a decoy candidate (such as Ralph Nader during the 2000 Presidential election) can help the candidate deemed to be most similar to the decoy (in this case, Al Gore), regardless of whether the decoy remains in the race or withdraws prior to the election. The phenomenon is likely multiply determined. One argument that has received empirical support is that the presence of multiple options that perform well on a particular attribute tends to increase the weight attached to that attribute, as a consequence of which the observer chooses the option that performs best on that attribute (Hedgcock et al., 2009). Another, neuroscience-based analysis suggests that the presence of the third (decoy) option makes the decision problem easier, relative

For the first time, 2010 health care law draws majority approval

% who ____ of the health care law passed by Barack Obama and Congress in 2010

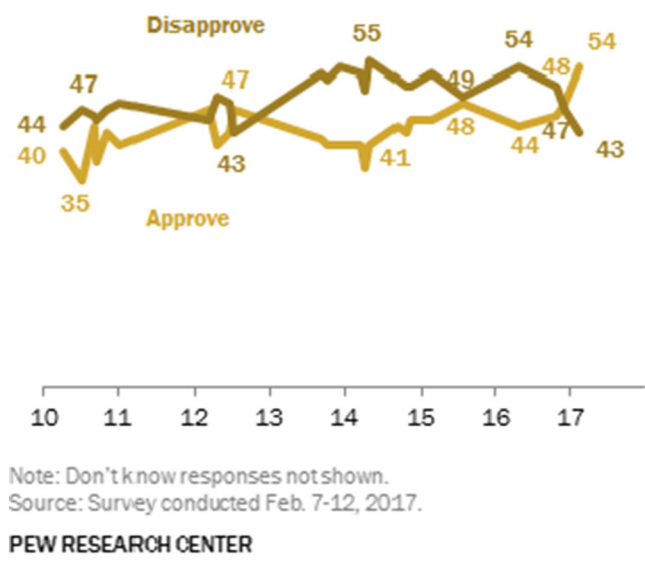


Fig. 2. Illustration of loss aversion at the macro level: how support for the patient protection and affordable health care turned positive following the 2016 presidential election.

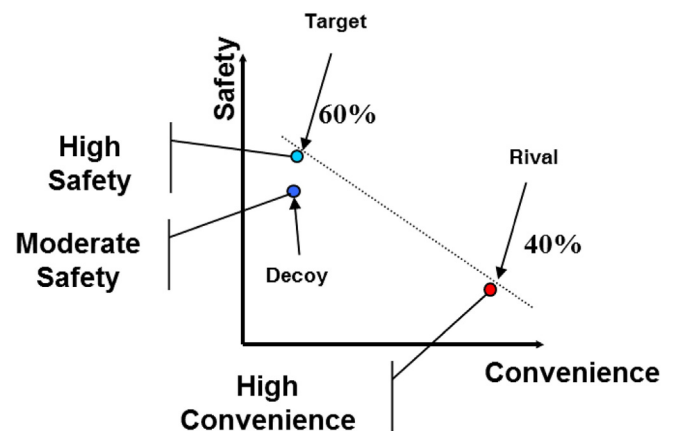


Fig. 3. Graphical illustration of an asymmetrically dominated decoy generating an attraction effect.

to when only two, equally attractive options are present in a choice set, as evidenced by dampened amygdala activation in the three-option choice set (Hedgcock & Rao, 2009a).

One key driver of the attraction effect is the anticipation of regret due to the *loss* of an attractive option, once the individual chooses another option. That is, selecting the target implies the non-selection of the rival and, like Buridan's Ass (Hedgcock & Rao, 2009b), an individual might freeze because of an inability to choose; some fraction of these undecided voters may exit the market (i.e., choose not to choose) because the decision-making process is so taxing that it leads to decision fatigue. In principle, therefore, the provision of a decoy in the choice set leverages loss aversion by offering voters a *gain* frame: The target dominates the decoy and thus represents a gain, and the rival is rendered irrelevant to the choice problem; that is, voters are provided a mechanism to break a tie.

Incorporating the notion of loss aversion into findings from the attraction effect literature suggests three conclusions. First, the presence of multiple options on one axis is an important driver of persuasion amongst undecided voters. Recall that in 2016, the Republicans had seventeen candidates seeking the Presidential nomination, whereas the Democrats had five. For this and other reasons, Republican debates and primaries received considerably more media attention than did Democratic debates and primaries, potentially yielding more attention and weight to Republican issues and narratives. Second, finding ways to increase the weight associated with issues on which the focal candidate dominates, and finding ways to frame a potentially adverse electoral outcome for the focal candidate as a loss, are important messaging tasks for political campaigns. Finally, in a three (or more) person race, the focal candidate should identify the candidate that is most similar, identify the attribute on which s/he dominates that most similar candidate, and expend resources to convey this position to prospective voters.

Speaking to the uninformed

The uninformed segment is likely to be persuaded by surface level information because they may be passively attending to the vast amount of advertising and free-media information with which they are inundated during the long runup to an election. That is, this segment is, perhaps unknowingly, influenced by messaging that they process in a low-involvement fashion, depending on the temporal distance to the electoral decision. Therefore, one candidate theory that can be employed to study the manner in which uninformed voters can be persuaded is Construal Level theory. Specifically, the temporal distance to Election Day is an important determinant of the potential impact of differentially constructed messages.

Kim et al. (2009) employed this approach to assess whether, in a political context, *abstract* messages that employ “Why” based language are more effective at persuasion when the choice is temporally distant, and *concrete* messages that employ “How” based language are more effective when the choice is temporally proximal. In a series of studies, they demonstrated that, indeed, matching abstract (concrete) messages

to temporally distant (proximal) political choices has an impact on candidate preferences, but only for political *naifs*. They also demonstrate that the effect is driven by an experience of fluency. Abstract messages are perceived to be fluent (and concrete messages are perceived to be disfluent) when choice is distant, and vice versa. Kim et al. (2009) field tested their approach in Senator Amy Klobuchar's first (2006) campaign, which she “... went on to win by a healthy (two-digit) margin in a state in which all other major races were determined by single-digit margins.” (p. 887). Her initial rhetoric emphasized abstract themes (“I believe in standing up for people without fear or favor” and “real leadership”); closer to the election she employed more concrete language and released a detailed federal budget deficit plan.

Combining temporal construal based fluency effects with loss aversion suggests that messages to the uninformed when the choice is far away ought to emphasize a) abstract losses (such as loss of national pride and stature) should the opponent win and, b) abstract gains (such as “Hope and Change”) should the focal candidate win. As the election draws closer, loss messaging should emphasize concrete elements (such as loss of health care) should the opponent's policies be enacted, and gain messaging should also emphasize concrete elements (such as an increase in take home pay, buying power and the like), should the focal candidate's policies be implemented.

Mobilizing the uninvolved

The task with respect to the uninvolved segment is different. Because their propensity to vote is relatively low, campaigns need to develop tactics that yield behavior (rather than attitude) change. Specifically, the goal is to “Get Out the Vote” (GOTV). To accomplish this goal, campaigns can draw on at least three behavioral science based approaches: a) rhetoric that emphasizes traits (nouns) rather than actions (verbs); b) social comparisons that elicit a “Keeping Up With the Joneses” effect; and c) persuading voters to make a specific plan for actions that they will take on election day (“self-prophecy fulfillment”).

Noun vs. verb oriented rhetoric

Drawing from early literature on malleable self-perceptions, Bryan, Walton, Rogers, and Dweck (2011) demonstrated a sharp increase in voter registration intentions and actual turnout amongst those who were primed to think of themselves as *voters* (a noun that described a trait) versus those who were asked *to vote* (a verb). That is, “...people may be more likely to vote when voting is represented as an expression of self—as symbolic of a person's fundamental character—rather than as simply a behavior” (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 12653). Prospective voters who were asked “How important is it to you to be a voter in the upcoming election?” turned out at a higher rate (roughly 25% higher in the Presidential election year of 2008 in California and 10% higher in 2009 for a Gubernatorial election in New Jersey) than those who were asked “How important is it for you to vote in the upcoming election?” Individuals are more responsive to appeals that engage a trait, rather than an action. Although this approach is considered a best practice amongst

many political professionals, it is certainly not universally employed. Consider, for example, actor Samuel Jackson's robocall on behalf of Jon Ossoff in the Georgia Congressional primary in April 2017. It emphasized verbs ("Go Vote") rather than nouns ("Be A Voter") (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/samuel-l-jackson-just-dropped-an-ad-with-a-message-for-georgia-voter>).

Combining these results with the principle of loss aversion would suggest that alerting individuals to the negative consequences of not being a voter might be a more effective a strategy than alerting individuals to the negative consequences of not voting.

Social comparisons

A large body of work in social and consumer psychology has demonstrated the effect of comparisons with relevant peer groups on individual behavior. For instance, Goldstein, Cialdini and Griskevicius (2008) demonstrated that hotel guests reuse towels more frequently when they are told that others who stayed in that particular room reused *their* towels, relative to those who received a message that emphasized the protection of the environment, as a reason for towel reuse. This finding has been employed in a host of applied settings including in motivating utility consumers to conserve energy.

Although these principles are applicable to motivating every segment, the application to motivating behavior amongst the uninvolved is particularly important. Getting people to vote based on their past voting behavior relative to their neighbors is a social norm-driven strategy with potential (Green & Gerber, 2015, pp. 141–154). Alerting individuals to their past voting behavior and how they have "performed" relative to their neighbors is an effective strategy, particularly when the focal individual is apprised of the likelihood that somebody will check on whether they actually voted by examining post-election, publicly available data. (Such an approach may also elicit a backlash because voters do not appreciate the possibility that they are being spied upon (Mann, 2010); however, "gratitude messages" that thank the voter for having voted in the past have been employed with the same effect (Panagopoulos, 2013)).

One persuasive explanation for why social comparison works is that of loss aversion. "Keeping Up with the Joneses" is predicated on the notion that one does not want to lose a social competition, because such losses are aversive. But, in any population, roughly half the voters will perform better than their peers (precisely half, if the comparison invokes medians rather than means). So, messages that urge individuals to "Be A Voter like your neighbors" that feature one's voting report card may not be effective if one has voted more often than one's average neighbor; in fact, it may provide one the license to not vote. Social approval may be employed in such instances, using one of two strategies. The first strategy provides social approval to above-average performers, to motivate them to not slide in the future. For instance, the utility bills of those who consumed less energy than their neighbors often include messages featuring a "smiley face" (a means of providing social approval), in an attempt to motivate such high-performing customers to

continue to save energy, even though they have performed better than their neighbors in the prior period, so that such high-performing voters do not slide in the next period (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007). A second, potentially powerful approach employs a change in the denominator in the comparison. Here, rather than comparing the focal voter to all neighbors, a candidate might induce the necessary loss frame by comparing the focal voter to "civic-minded neighbors" (who are high-performing voters). Thus, a message that urges a voter to "Be A Voter Like your high-civic minded neighbors", whose voting behavior in prior years is stellar, might induce better voting behavior, much like alerting utility consumers to their performance relative to neighbors who excel at conservation induces reduced utility consumption.

Self prophecy

A third approach that has received considerable empirical support is asking voters to make a specific plan for how they will vote on Election Day. Predictions about one's own behavior are influential (Sherman, 1980) because they make the behavior more cognitively accessible and because they elicit a sense of obligation to follow through (see also Morwitz & Fitzsimons, 2004). Such self-prophecy or "implementation intentions" research suggests modest increases (on the order of between 2 and 4% relative to control groups) in voter turnout amongst those who specify their plans for Election Day (Green & Gerber, 2015). However, since many electoral outcomes are determined by small percentage differences, such small increases in turnout can occasionally be determinative. Combining the self-prophecy fulfillment notion with the principle of loss aversion suggests that, when individuals are asked to make a plan for Election Day, they might also be asked to list the losses they will experience should they not vote.

Appealing to different demographic segments

Broad cultural differences in independence versus interdependence, combined with the principle of loss aversion suggest some fairly straightforward conclusions when appealing to different demographic segments. Interdependence oriented sub-groups (such as Hispanic-, Asian- and African-Americans) should be alerted to losses that affect their *communities* (families, church groups and the like), whereas independence oriented sub-groups (such as white millennials) should be alerted to losses that affect *their* future prospects. Further, independents are likely to engage in an action to mitigate a "promotion loss", i.e., they will act if inaction will result in their not achieving a desirable outcome; interdependents are likely to engage in an action to mitigate a "prevention loss", i.e., they will act if such an action will prevent an undesirable outcome (Chen et al., 2005). Subtle word choices in messaging can evoke such promotion and prevention losses. For instance, adapting Chen et al.'s stimuli to the political context suggests that an individualized promotion loss might be phrased as "If you choose to not be a voter, you lose the ability to enjoy the economic lifestyle you deserve" whereas a interdependent prevention loss

could be phrased as “If you choose to not be a voter, you and your community will suffer economic hardships you do not deserve”.

Two additional complexities deserve mention. The first is the role of technology in communicating with the segments identified. Clearly, elderly first generation immigrants rely on print, radio and television more and social media less, than white millennials. Considering the role of text messages versus email for instance, anecdotally it appears that whereas emails from political candidates and campaigns are routinely deleted without being read, text messages are not. In light of the preference that millennials have for texting, that is likely the more effective channel of communication with them.

The second complexity is that of bi-cultural or hybrid segments. As alluded to above, individuals occupy multiple sub-groups (e.g., Hispanic-millennials). To the extent that one or the other sub-culture can be primed through the use of language (cf. Lee, Oyserman, & Bond, 2010), for such a bi-cultural individual, it is likely that a message in English will prime an independent self, whereas a message in Spanish will prime an interdependent self. Hence, the form of communication might influence the content of the communication.

Conclusion

Our field owes Professor Jost a debt of gratitude for having curated a substantial literature and structured it in a fashion that is consistent with the mind-set of most scholars of consumer psychology. The paper is remarkable in scope and rigor, and there is little with which one might take issue, in the description of the literature or the conclusions that follow. However, two caveats are in order. First, scholars in marketing will recognize that segments are dynamic – people do transition from one state to the other because of changes in life-stage, the environment, marketing persuasion and the like. Second, scholars in neuroscience will recognize the pitfall of “reverse inference” (Poldrack, 2006); just because a particular brain region is activated in conjunction with certain stimuli (or a personality trait) does not unambiguously imply that *that* brain region is responsible for the response (or the trait). In other words, care should be employed when establishing brain-behavior (attitude) correspondence when relying on “neural correlates” associated with brain regions that might be responsible for multiple functions. Specifically, Jost (2017) is on firm ground in light of past research (Huettel & Payne, 2009) linking the amygdala with conservatism. However, in addition to conflict resolution (e.g., correcting for racial bias, Inzlicht & Gusell, 2007; Richeson et al., 2003) the ACC is involved in several other functions that include cognitive and emotional elements such as reward anticipation (Bush et al., 2002). Thus, linking the ACC to particular behaviors or traits would require identifying particular Brodmann areas with some specificity before one can link conflict monitoring with a particular political ideology.

Quo Vadis?

I have chosen to focus on how consumer psychology and marketing may inform political psychology and science, but as

Jost correctly observes, there are many areas in which research on consumer psychology might be enriched by incorporating the respondent’s political ideology as a covariate. In light of this plausible and useful avenue for research, I offer opportunities for consumer researchers below, using the familiar 4Ps structure as an organizing framework.

The product: branding

It is clear that certain commercial brands achieve a conservative or progressive persona by engaging in activism associated with one or the other orientation (e.g., Chick-Fil-A, a brand that apparently embodies conservative values, versus Starbucks that seemingly embodies progressive values). What is less clear is whether and when a political party’s brand dominates a candidate’s brand and how that comes about. For instance, one element of brand equity is *trust*, which itself comprises two components: *benevolence* (the brand has the customer’s best interests at heart) and *competence* (the brand will be able to successfully fulfill its promise). Benevolence has an emotional undertone, whilst competence has a rational undertone. Because political choices might be characterized as a “principal-agent” problem, according to which voters (principals) delegate decision making regarding their well-being to elected officials (their agents), the benevolence of the agent is likely to be of considerable relevance to voters. Voters also face a “moral hazard” problem, which is the concern that their candidates for office will change their pre-election positions on policy matters (Kirmani & Rao, 2000), and therefore benevolence might play a substantially greater role than competence in voters’ minds. In light of the extant evidence on the role of emotions in consumer choice, it would be fruitful to identify the circumstances under which the umbrella brand (party affiliation) versus the candidate’s brand elicits stronger emotional resonance, particularly amongst those who are not brand loyal to begin with.

Promotion: false advertising (“fake news”)

There recently has been much discussion of “fake news” and “alternative facts”, suggesting an increasingly important role for media and promotional devices in influencing voter and consumer behavior. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) draw on multiple data sources and observe that social media is the most important source of news for 14% of Americans, and “...of the known false news stories that appeared in the three months before the election, those favoring Trump were shared a total of 30 million times on Facebook, while those favoring Clinton were shared 8 million times” (p. 1). Additionally, Americans were exposed to several fake news stories prior to the election, and over half believed them, particularly those stories that favored their preferred candidate, because their social networks were ideologically segregated. In light of conservatives’ heightened bovine manure receptivity, the relatively high sharing of fake news stories favoring Trump is not surprising. Under what circumstances do such false narratives work, and perhaps most importantly, how can they be defanged? Jun, Meng, and Johar (2017) highlight the role of vigilance in correcting for the impact of fake news.

Specifically, in a series of experiments employing incentivized real-effort tasks, they found that the felt presence of others (on social media platforms such as Facebook) resulted in less fact-checking of ambiguous claims, and that inducing accountability and vigilance (heightening a prevention focus) prior to the evaluation of information increased fact-checking.

The issue of fake news (akin to false advertising) is particularly relevant in light of recent concerns that Russian actors might have planted false narratives via social media in targeted electoral districts during the 2016 election season. Specifically, although the current administration, legislators and media commentators have emphasized the conclusion that potential Russian skullduggery in the U. S. Presidential election did not change vote counts (i.e., election machines were not successfully hacked), this commentary and Jost (2017) demonstrate that false narratives (akin to false advertising) might have influenced attitudes and behaviors prior to Election Day. That is, advertising works; voters' beliefs about a candidate's position on an issue may be at odds with the objective reality because of their exposure to false narratives. For instance, a recent survey indicates that 28% of voters and 47% of Republican voters (a plurality) believe that Donald Trump won the popular vote in the 2016 Presidential election, despite objective evidence to the contrary (<https://morningconsult.com/2017/07/26/many-republicans-think-trump-won-2016-popular-vote-didnt/>), perhaps because of motivated reasoning (Lichtman, 2016). Because of the alleged planting of fake, negative (and seemingly credible) stories about a candidate, turnout amongst her base might have been depressed, and switching might have occurred amongst persuadable voters, due to the attitude change that followed exposure to fake news. Strategies to counter such false narratives that draw on research on inoculation theory (Compton & Pfau, 2004) are an obvious area for collaboration between political and consumer psychology.

Clearly, there are other promotion related topics worthy of inquiry. For instance, conservatives tend to be independent and progressives tend to be interdependent. Consequently, the former tend to have a lower “need to belong” than the latter, implying that progressives are more likely to respond to nostalgic appeals. However, conservatives are traditionalists who prefer the *status quo*, whereas progressives are more future oriented, implying that conservatives ought to be more responsive to nostalgic appeals. In preliminary work, we find support for the latter claim, because conservatives do have a high need-to-belong; it is just that they wish to belong to like-minded conservative-oriented groups and organizations (Lasaleta, Rao, & Kondaveeti, 2017). In other preliminary work, we find that, in the real world as well as in laboratory settings, the comparative mind-set that political campaigns elicit yields enhanced spending (Xu, Moorman, Qin, & Rao, 2017). In a managerial setting, we observe that U. S. firms spend more on advertising and discretionary items, and MBA students participating in classroom simulations spend more on marketing, during Presidential election years relative to off-years.

Pricing: reference price effects on fundraising

Marketing scholars, particularly those interested in behavioral pricing, have long recognized the role of reference prices on price perceptions (Rao & Sieben, 1992). Consumers tend to anchor on the first price encountered (which then serves as a reference price) and subsequent prices are evaluated relative to this first price. Therefore, it would potentially be valuable for fundraising appeals to feature a declining series of dollar values (“Please consider donating \$100, or \$50, or \$25...”) rather than an increasing series of dollar values, so that the second and subsequent series of values appear as a better deal relative to the first price encountered.

Additionally, other fund-raising mechanisms have employed lotteries (e.g., winning a chance to have dinner with the candidate, a tactic pioneered by the Obama for President Campaign in 2008). Drawing on the probability weighting function literature (cf. Prelec, 1998), campaigns leverage the idea that people overweight small probabilities. So, a donation of \$5 to win a chance at having dinner with the candidate ignores the infinitesimally low probability of success (in fact, the donor does not know the denominator in the probability calculation), and the donor overweights the chance of winning, thus yielding large fund-raising success for the candidate. Clearly, these and other behavioral principles from pricing research ought to be tested in the political fundraising realm.

Place: voting booth location

Environmental primes are known to affect behavior in a multitude of settings. In particular, Berger, Meredith, and Wheeler (2008) demonstrate that the nature of the polling location (a church versus a school) has a demonstrable impact on support for initiatives. Specifically, voting in a school elevates support for school funding initiatives due to priming that “...can occur outside of consciousness” (p. 8846). Again, consumer psychologists are likely to have much to say about the impact of cues embedded in locations. Such cues might influence persuadable voters, perhaps on particular referenda if not on the choice of a particular candidate.

Final thoughts

Perhaps at no time in history has the issue of political persuasion been as central and important to our lives as citizens, as the present. In contemporary America, threats to democracy due to the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election, to civic discourse based on name calling and demonstrable falsehoods by those in power (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/23/opinion/trumps-lies.html?_r=0&login=email&auth=login-email), and to national and international security due to saber rattling by hostile foreign governments, suggest that the need for an informed and politically astute citizenry has probably never been greater. Yet, it appears that rhetoric trumps reason in political contests. As of this writing, the approval ratings for President Trump appear to be standing steady at a stubborn 36% ~ 39%, suggesting that evidence of poor management and governance ability are relatively inconsequential to political preferences. As others (cf. Frank, 2005) have noted,

people often vote against their self-interest and construct post-hoc rationalizations for their arguably questionable positions. But, this is not news to consumer psychologists.

Those of us who are interested in the topic of political persuasion because it is intellectually appealing, as well as those of us who are interested because of the potential impact, ought to be grateful that the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* has taken the lead on beginning a dialog on the topic. One hopes that the ideas presented in the target article and associated commentaries will spur research on the political marketplace, which attracts enormous expenditures (\$2 billion dollars per Presidential candidate in the 2016 cycle; Stamm, 2015). It is clearly as important an area of research as understanding consumer choice in other contexts, such as the choice of carbonated soft drinks (Kim et al., 2009). Finally, and consistent with a rich econometric and analytical modeling tradition in political science (Lovett & Peress, 2015), it would be immensely useful if those schooled in other methods and techniques, such as our quantitatively oriented marketing colleagues, were to join in this endeavor, as some have begun to do (cf. Gordon et al., 2012; Zhu & Dukes, 2015).

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