

THE EFFECT OF POLITICAL AFFILIATION ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING MESSAGES

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ABSTRACT

As issues like climate change begin to worsen, sustainability initiatives are becoming increasingly important to counteract negative impacts on our planet. However, not everyone places the same importance on sustainability. When looking at political ideology, most research suggests that liberals and Democrats display higher levels of sustainability values than Republicans and conservatives. In order to transition to a more sustainable society, it is important to determine the types of messages that appeal to each party. To assess this, I conducted a study using a survey that asked respondents to assign a fair price to either toothpaste or scissors that were sustainably made in nine different ways. Using fair price as the dependent variable, I found that Republicans consistently preferred environmental and local initiatives. The results are more mixed for Democrats and Independents, whose preferences vary based on product, but overall, Democrats assigned the highest price for every initiative.

BACKGROUND

As it becomes increasingly important to transition to a sustainable society, it is essential to learn how to best market sustainable products and habits to different demographic groups, especially political groups, given the politicization of sustainability.

There were **three main findings** from literature on sustainability and marketing sustainable products.

1. SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT A UNIFORM CONCEPT

Sustainability does not just equate to environmental sustainability—it includes social dimensions, and also involves local and global dimensions.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS

An individual's political affiliation is a good predictor of their likelihood to engage in sustainability habits. Surprisingly, age is not a good indicator.

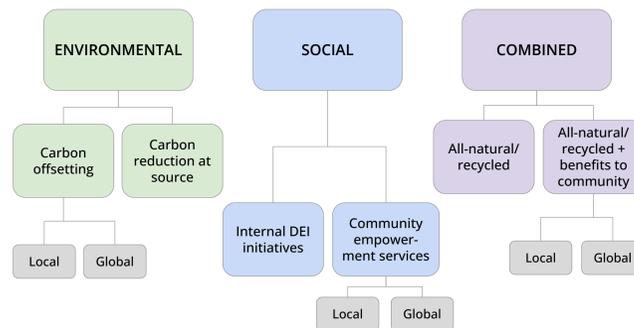
3. CONSUMER PREFERENCES

Individuals currently place more importance on environmental sustainability over social sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

In order to record individual's perceptions and valuations of different sustainability messages, I created a survey where consumers assigned a fair price to products made sustainably in nine different ways.

I first created nine different sustainability scenarios that stemmed from broad categories of environmental, social, and combined sustainability. Six of nine scenarios included a local or global dimension.



These sustainable scenarios were then applied to two different products (toothpaste and scissors) in order to create a mechanism for individuals to assign a fair price to the different situations. Each product included a base case that was priced at \$3.50 and had a 5 lb carbon footprint. Each sustainable scenario had a carbon footprint of 2.5 lbs (with the exception of the all-natural/all-recycled scenario).

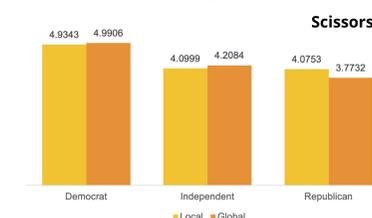
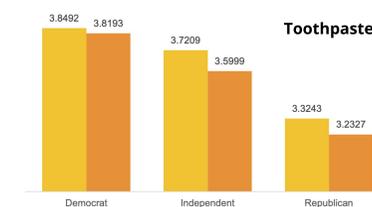
Below is a sample toothpaste stimuli presented to the respondent after the base case.



RESULTS

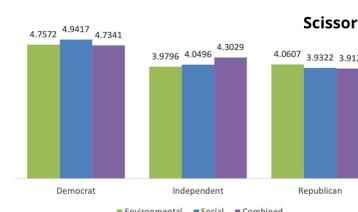
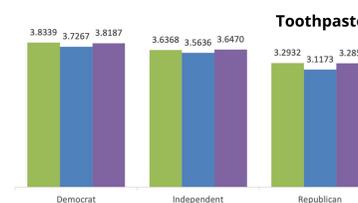
The table below displays the question associated with the highest and lowest average price assigned with each party for both products. Local is indicated with (L) and global with (G). This data reveals the types of initiatives each party most and least values.

Product	Toothpaste		Scissors	
	MIN	MAX	MIN	MAX
Democrat	Low-income community initiatives (G) & all-natural	All-natural benefitting low-income community (G)	All-recycled materials	Low-income community initiatives (L)
Independent	Internal DEI initiatives	Low-income community initiatives (L)	All-recycled materials	All-recycled benefitting low-income community (G)
Republican	Internal DEI initiatives	Carbon offsetting (L)	All-recycled benefitting low-income community (L)	Carbon reduction at source



The graphs on the left display the mean price assigned by each party for aggregated local and global questions. For toothpaste, all parties preferred local initiatives, but for scissors, the results were more mixed.

The graphs on the right display the mean price assigned by each party for aggregated environmental, social, and combined questions. Republicans preferred environmental initiatives, but the differences for each party are not significant.



FINDINGS

DEMOCRATS

- Value sustainability initiatives the most
- Mixed preferences depending on product
- Tended to prefer initiatives with community involvement

INDEPENDENTS

- Mix of Democrat and Republican preferences
- Mixed preferences depending on product
- Tended to prefer initiatives with community involvement

REPUBLICANS

- Consistently value environmental initiatives
- Prefer local over global impacts
- Priced toothpaste below given base price

AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Preferences for sustainability initiatives at the **product category level** and causes of different preferences
2. Consumer valuations for **larger purchases** that are sustainably made (airplane travel, technology, etc.)
3. Effect of **social and fiscal ideology** on preferences (e.g., social conservative vs. fiscal conservative)

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