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## Moral Foundation Theory and Marketing

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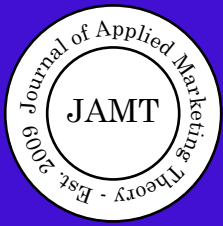
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## Moral Foundation Theory and Marketing

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### ABSTRACT

In setting the stage for Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), Jon Haidt (2004) identified five foundations of intuitive ethics: 1) harm/care; 2) fairness/reciprocity; 3) ingroup/loyalty; 4) authority/respect; 5) and purity/sanctity. Each foundation could have implications for the content of marketing messages, but this research is the first attempt to test those implications in specific markets with specific products. This research explores the practical, promotional uses of John Haidt's Moral Foundation Theory. Haidt's work shows a strong relationship between his moral foundations and political orientation. Since marketers can readily get political data at the county level in the United States, these foundations offer some guidance for crafting promotional messages.

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the trends in 21st century society is sustainability. This is not only an important social issue but also one that is politically charged. As interested parties attempt to persuade stakeholders of their point of view, a deeper understanding of the stakeholders is needed from a theory based perspective. As such, there is a call and a need to build a stronger theoretical base for sustainability in the marketing literature (Carragher 2008). A notable exception to this is the work of Menon and Menon (1997) in developing a theory for entrepreneurial marketing. This was further developed by Bannarjee (2003). However, Connelly, Ketchen and Slater (2011) point out that, while admirable, this work is more of an "introduction of foundational concepts" than a full development of applicable theory. As such, Connelly et. al put forth a "theoretical toolbox" of nine theories and their insights for the development of applicable theory of sustainability research in marketing.

Drawing from the work on market orientation (Deshpande and Webster 1989; Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990), Crittendon, Crittendon, Ferrell, Ferrell, and Pinney (2011) develop a model of market oriented sustainability. The theoretical underpinning for this model is resource advantage theory (Hunt and Morgan 1995). In addition to R-A as the primary theoretical base, they develop a metaphor for three facets of DNA that draw from the organizational behavior, strategy, and branding literatures.

Hunt (2011) further develops R-A for sustainability marketing by looking at seven interactions between sustainability and R-A. The first six can be captured within the context of segments, personal moral codes within consumers and the stakeholders of the organization, and secondary goals of the organization being dependent upon the achievement of the financial goals of the organization. Then Hunt makes a case for the focus of sustainability needing to borrow from economic growth theory (Ellig 2001) rather than neoclassical economic theory (Solow 1956, Solow 1957).

Huang and Rust (2011) also draw from economic theory at the micro and macro analysis level in building a model that intertwines corporate, consumer/societal, and geopolitical variables. They assume that corporations will function primarily as portrayed in neoclassical economics; however, they diverge from the norm in their analysis of consumers. Huang and Rust assert that consumers will be driven more by psychic rewards than materialism and consumption. Thus, “they may be willing to consume less, based on their self interest, to reduce the world’s consumption inequality (Thøgersen and Crompton 2009).”

Also focusing on consumer consumption, Sheth, Sthia, and Srinivas (2011) put forth a call to develop sustainability theory and practices that is based primarily on stakeholder theory (Donaldson and Preston 1995; Freeman 1984; and, Parmar et al. 2010). Sheth et al’s focus is first on the consumer then on the integration of the consumer interests and business interests. They set forth two terms to be developed and understood, customer centric sustainability (CCS) and mindful consumption (MC). Mindful consumption is the cornerstone upon which the CCS approach is built. It centers around two key constructs, mindful mindset and mindful behavior. Mindful mindset rests upon different dimensions of caring whereas mindful behavior depends upon different types of temperance. The integration of the consumer interests and business interests occurs with a return to stakeholder theory and defining the proper view via Iyer and Bhattacharya (2011) as, “to maximize stakeholder welfare which may necessitate promoting responsible consumption and a variety of pro-social and pro-environmental behaviors.” Sheth et al conclude with a call to develop more fully and operationalize the facets of CCS, to create a “Sustainability Satisfaction Index (SSI),” and to identify factors that influence the sense of caring in mindset and temperance in behavior. Lastly, those factors that lend themselves to the use of marketing as an intervention in the evolution of MC need to be identified.

Hult (2011) also looks at stakeholder theory as well as agency theory. However, in putting forward his model of market orientation plus, he believes that institutional theory and systems theory may have the most promise in developing the theoretical underpinnings for developing sustainability theory.

Cronin, Smith, Gleim, Ramirez, and Martinez (2011) also focus on the stakeholders and the 3P approach (people, planet, profit). Similar to Sheth et al., they are concerned with marketing lagging behind the other disciplines in this area of research. They review the work from the fields of marketing, management, operations, and human resources to develop eleven research opportunities for marketers. In addition, they suggest the key research questions for each research opportunity in terms of consumer stakeholders and alternative stakeholders.

We add to the discussion by exploring the applicability of Moral Foundation Theory in not only answering the first part of research opportunity ten (Are there innate forces within consumers that drive environmentally friendly behaviors?) from Cronin et al. (2011) but also answering the call of Sheth et al. (2011) to identify those factors that lend themselves to the use of marketing in the evolution of MC.

We begin by giving an overview of Moral Foundation Theory. We then show how it can be applied to answer part one of research opportunity ten from Cronin et al and how it answers the call of Sheth et al. We then explain our methodology of using different messaging for similar projects to determine if this messaging impacts the affect of the individual toward the project. We conclude with the implications of the results and avenues for future research.

## **MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY (MFT)**

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), on the face of it, seems to have clear marketing implications. MFT was created to probe how morality can vary across cultures, yet still show so many common themes ([www.Moralfoundations.org](http://www.Moralfoundations.org)). MFT suggests that there are common foundations for “intuitive ethics” ([Moralfoundations.org](http://Moralfoundations.org)). Cultures build unique structures on top of these intuitions, but the intuitions transcend national and cultural boundaries ([Moralfoundations.org](http://Moralfoundations.org)). The philosophical roots of this theory’s proposal that human morality is composed of moral modules which can be profitably studied as distinct, evolutionary driven components has been thoroughly discussed by Flanagan and Williams (2010), who conclude “SIM [or Social Intuitionist Modularity, which the authors use to describe MFT and other similar approaches]...is an empirically plausible modularity hypothesis” (p.445). They add that MFT and similar approaches “fleshes out an idea that was anticipated, on various interpretations, in Aristotle, Mencius, and Darwin, and which in its current form is supported by interdisciplinary work in anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, primatology, and economics (Brown, 1991; Cosmides & Tooby, 1992; Fiske, 1991, 1992, 2004; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; Shweder & Haidt, 1993; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997; de Waal, 1991, 1996). Of these similar approaches, MFT has been shown to empirically outperform competing models through comparative model fitting of confirmatory factor analysis (Graham, et al, 2011).

Even recent critics of MFT admit that it “is an influential scientific account of morality incorporating psychological, developmental, and evolutionary perspectives” while offering three arguments concerning MFT’s validity (Suhler and Churchland, 2011). The criticism most directly relevant to our research methodology, “the theory’s proposed number of moral foundations and its taxonomy of the moral domain appear contrived, ignoring equally good candidate foundations” (Suhler and Churchland, 2011), will be addressed here. Haidt and Joseph (2011), provide a convincing response to all three criticisms. Their position regarding the taxonomy question is clear: “We have said from the beginning (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) that our list of proposed foundations was a starting point, not an exhaustive list. MFT was an attempt to specify the best candidates” (Haidt and Joseph, 2011). They indicate that several revisions have been proposed as a result of the challenge at [MoralFoundations.org](http://MoralFoundations.org), and that some modifications are forthcoming. However, at present and at the time of our data collection, the five original foundations represent the most thoroughly examined and substantiated taxonomy of MFT available.

Thus, since significant evidence supports the assumption that MFT is valid, it should be possible to use its foundations to represent the innate forces within consumers which drive environmental behaviors, as called for by Cronin et al. (2011). In addition, it should be possible to apply these foundations to create messages to suit a specific product or service and the ecology of its market as implied by Sheth et al. (2011). That is, it should be useful in promoting products and ideas.

In setting the stage for MFT, Jon Haidt (2004) identified five foundations of intuitive ethics: 1) harm/care; 2) fairness/reciprocity; 3) ingroup/loyalty; 4) authority/respect; and 5) purity/sanctity. Each of these could have implications for the content of marketing messages, but so far no one has attempted to test those implications in specific markets with specific products. In this research, we tested the application of the concept. We view the five foundations as influencing the potential content for marketing messages not only on subjects with moral and political content, but on subjects that lack that content in and of themselves.

Specifically, we dealt with a hypothetical sustainable business project and how the moral outlook of respondents varied according to self-identified political orientation, which is important to this research since MFT suggests that moral foundations vary across the political spectrum. The results have implications for varying the content of marketing messages according to the political orientation of the audience. They also have implications for developing more parsimonious methods for identifying the moral foundations of a target market.

In the sections that follow, we discuss Haidt's theory, the methods used to gather and analyze the data, and the research results. We look at specific applications of MFT to marketing messages and at ways to 'wrap messages in the flag'—ways to introduce that moral content even when none is present. We end with conclusions about the usefulness of MFT for marketing and about the potential for developing better ways to reach similar results. We also suggest directions for future research.

MFT is based on the five foundations Haidt (2004) describes as follows:

- 1) **Harm/care**, related to our long evolution as mammals with attachment systems and an ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. This foundation underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance.
- 2) **Fairness/reciprocity**, related to the evolutionary process of reciprocal altruism. This foundation generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy.
- 3) **Ingroup/loyalty**, related to our long history as tribal creatures able to form shifting coalitions. This foundation underlies virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the group. It is active anytime people feel that it's "one for all, and all for one."
- 4) **Authority/respect**, shaped by our long primate history of hierarchical social interactions. This foundation underlies virtues of leadership and followership, including deference to legitimate authority and respect for traditions.
- 5) **Purity/sanctity**, shaped by the psychology of disgust and contamination. This foundation underlies religious notions of striving to live in an elevated, less carnal, more noble way. It underlies the widespread idea that the body is a temple which can be desecrated by immoral activities and contaminants (an idea not unique to religious traditions). (<http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/mft/index.php>)

Haidt (2004) related these foundations to self-described political orientation. He found self-identified liberals tend to stress harm/care and fairness/reciprocity more than the other three, while self-identified conservatives stress harm/care and fairness/reciprocity slightly less than liberals, but stressed the other three much more, giving the self-identified conservative a much more 'balanced' score card.

In subsequent research, Haidt and Graham (2007) found the relationship held fast across national boundaries and cultures. Haidt and Graham (2007) chide social liberals for judging social conservatives too quickly on issues of harm, rights, and justice. They argue that liberal judgment is based on only one or two of the five foundations. Their research shows that self-described extreme conservatives care about fairness and justice and about care and harm, just not quite as much as do people who describe themselves as extreme liberals. These relationships are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Haidt's 2004 Graph on Moral Foundations' Relevance to Moral Decisions**  
**By Extremes of Political Orientation**

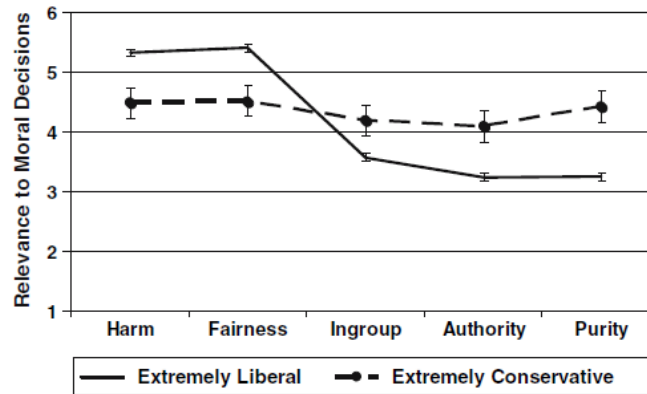


Fig. 1. Moral relevance by foundation for extreme liberals and conservatives. 1 = not relevant at all, 6 = always relevant.

## METHODS

We approached this research with two distinct ideas in mind: 1) to convert Haidt's ideas into product- or idea-specific messages for sustainable marketing, and 2) to study whether we could develop idea-specific messages related to sustainable marketing that would relate to self-identified political orientation in the same way as Haidt's scales.

### Measures

#### *Political Orientation.*

Single-item scales have long been used to measure political orientation (Kroh 2007). They include 10, 11, and 101 item scales, as well as 6- and 7-item scales. People have little difficulty, according to the research, in assigning themselves to specific categories on the shorter scales, although most respondents find the 101 item scale problematic (Kroh 2007). One controversy associated with the scales is whether to include a midpoint, the primary difference between the 6-point scale and the 7-scale, and the 10-point and 11-point scales (Kroh 2007).

However, for our purposes, Haidt and Graham (2007) used a single item, 6-point scales to measure political orientation with these categories: very liberal, somewhat liberal, slightly liberal, slightly conservative, somewhat conservative, and very conservative. Since we were basing our research on their work, we chose to follow their lead.

#### *Moral Foundations.*

Haidt and Graham (2007 and Moral Foundations.org) use a thirty item scale to measure the five moral foundations. Their scale has been used in multiple studies and has been validated across cultures with data from thousands of responses. From an academic standpoint, the scale has been tested and found reliable and valid. However, the thirty items do not convert into marketing messages. They could not be readily used in a thirty-second television commercial or radio spot, for example.

In this work, we were trying to determine if the moral foundations would also be foundations for product- or idea-specific messages that might be included in media campaigns. We also sought to

develop messages about a product or idea with significant political content, so sustainability fit the profile.

We developed descriptions of two hypothetical, sustainable projects, A and B. We described the two projects with five statements designed to match the five foundations identified in Haidt's work (Haidt 2004). The statements and the foundation they represent in each project are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Project Descriptive Statements and Foundations**

<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Statements for Project A</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Statements for Project B</b>
Harm/care	Would reduce the cost of electricity sufficiently to reduce deaths due to freezing and extreme heat	Harm/care	Would reduce the cost of electricity sufficiently to reduce deaths due to freezing and extreme heat
Fairness/Justice	Would make the cost of electricity closer to equal across the country	Fairness/Justice	Would make the cost of electricity closer to equal across the country
Harm/care	Could be deployed globally to ease the suffering of underdeveloped populations	Ingroup/Loyalty	Would provide American companies an advantage over foreign
Fairness/Justice	Would provide comparable opportunities for existing companies and new companies	Authority	Is viewed favorably by companies that currently lead the industry
Harm/care	Would protect endangered species of plants and animals	Purity/Sanctity	Provides a clean and pure process for electricity generation

For Project A, we devised five descriptive statements focused solely on the two foundations which MFT indicates are most important to liberals (harm/care, fairness/justice). For Project B, we devised five descriptive statements reflecting all five foundations. The first two of the statements were identical for the two projects. One should note that the two projects could be viewed as the same project. The three descriptors that differentiate the two projects are not mutually exclusive, nor were they intended to be. The differences were intended to focus only on the moral foundations emphasized.

These were subjectively developed, but that is the way such messages are developed in designing promotional campaigns. There are arguable foundations for developing such messages— for example, propaganda techniques ( Shabo 2008) and influences (Cialdini 2009); part of our goal was simply to determine if Moral Foundation Theory offered such a foundation for content.

### **Survey Methodology**

We asked respondents to do four things in an on-line survey questionnaire: 1) allocate \$10 million between two projects, A and B; 2) tell which project they preferred, and the intensity of their preference; 3) describe their political leanings; and 4) describe themselves in selected demographic terms.



## Data Collection

We collected data by posting the questionnaire on SurveyMonkey.com, an on-line questionnaire and survey service. We encouraged respondents to complete the survey by sending them the link in an email. The email explained the survey questionnaire and asked them to participate. The emails were sent to selected undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff at three institutions: the University of Cincinnati, Pepperdine University, and Dalton State College. We also asked for respondents by posting the link on social networks, including Facebook. This was by no means a comprehensive survey of the faculty, staff, and students at these institutions. We received 200 usable responses to the questionnaire.

We have no reliable way of calculating non-response bias or response rate, but the results provide sufficient data to make some claims about the respondents. On-line survey methods raise questions about respondent identity, self-selection, response bias, and response rate. All of these questions are legitimate, but do not necessarily debase the results of an on-line data collection method. In fact, experimental results have shown that on-line data collection provides a respondent profile similar to more controlled studies (Koch and Emery 2001). At one time, access to the internet was a major source of sampling bias for on-line surveys (Walsh et al. 1992), but it has become less of an issue as computers and internet access have become more widespread.

Research now justifies the use of on-line data collection, particularly for opinion research related to political activity (Van Ryzin 2008). Still, problems remain. For example, respondents are more likely to choose 'unsure' or 'don't know' in self-administered Web surveys than in live interview surveys (Smith, Li, & Pulliam, 2005). (We avoided this problem by using scales with no neutral point.) But many of these problems affect non-probability samples, on-line or not (Kalton 1983). While our sample was non-probability, it was adequate for the rigor required for this research (Ryzin 2008).

In this case, the most important variable was political orientation, not demographic profile. Demographic profiles have been associated with political orientation, but for the purposes of this research, those associations mattered little.

## Hypotheses

We sought to test three hypotheses using the data we collected:

**H1: Choice of Project A or Project B is related to self-identified political orientation.**

**H2: Self identified liberals will show preferences skewed toward Project A.**

**H3: Self identified conservatives will show no significant skew in their preferences for Project A or Project B.**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Description of Sample

The sample is composed of 92 males and 106 females. The average educational level is higher than the average of the U.S. population. This is explained by the source of the data being gathered through three university networks. However, the distribution of respondents across generations (Boomers, Xers, and Yers) is approximately that of the general population with Yers having the greatest number, followed slightly by the Boomers, and the Xers being a distant third. The income tracked with education as is the general trend in the population. Our sample has slightly more people above 100k per year (14%) as opposed to 11% in the general population.

**Table 2**  
**Respondent Demographics**

Education		Income		Age		Gender	
High School	4	<\$25k	49	<18	0	Male	92
Some College	24	\$25-\$50k	56	18-24	39	Female	106
Current undergraduate	70	\$51k-\$75k	41	25-34	45		
Four-year degree	20	\$76k-\$100k	22	35-44	44		
Current graduate student	13	\$101k-\$150k	19	45-54	42		
Master's degree	33	\$151k-\$200k	5	55-64	26		
Terminal degree	35	>\$200k	5	>64	2		

### Political Leanings

Table 3 shows the frequencies of responses for the item on self-described political leanings. The distribution is bimodal, with peaks at Somewhat Liberal and Somewhat Conservative. Coincidentally, there was an exact match between the number of respondents who described themselves as Very Liberal and the number who described themselves as Very Conservative. There was also a close match between the number of people who described themselves as Slightly Liberal and Slightly Conservative.

**Table 3**  
**Political Leanings of Respondents**

Very Liberal	Somewhat Liberal	Slightly Liberal	Slightly Conservative	Somewhat Conservative	Very Conservative
19	50	30	33	46	19

In this research we hoped for a range of political leanings. Table 3 shows that we got a broad range of perspectives, enough to give us the variation we needed to test our hypotheses. We show the results for hypothesis testing in the next section.

### Hypothesis Testing

We tested H1 using the Chi-squared test. This test is appropriate to the level of measurement in the data and to the hypothesis.

***H1: Choice of Project A or Project B is related to self-identified political orientation.***

Table 4 shows the results of the Chi-squared test on the variables included in this hypothesis.

**Table 4**

**Chi-squared Test for Hypothesis 1**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	58.132	24	.000
Likelihood Ratio	62.091	24	.000
N of valid cases	199		

We performed a Chi-square test of goodness of fit to determine whether the projects were equally preferred across self-identified political orientation. The preference for the two projects was not equally distributed across political orientation,  $X^2(24, N = 199) = 58.132, p < .000$ . This suggests a strong relationship between the way the projects were described and political orientation.

***H2: Self identified liberals will show preferences skewed toward Project A.***

To test this hypothesis, we analyzed the data for those who identified themselves as very liberal, somewhat liberal, and slightly liberal. We calculated the moment coefficient of skewness for these data, finding  $G_i(N=99, \text{std. error } .243) = 1.101$ . For this test statistic, values greater than +1 or less than -1 are considered very skewed (Bulmer 1979). From this result, we concluded that the self-identified liberal respondents had preferences that were strongly skewed toward Project A.

We also calculated the standard error of skewness for this population,  $Z_{g_i}$ , which measures the number of standard deviations the skewness measure is from 0. This statistic suggests the likelihood that the sample skewness shows the skewness of the population (Cramer and Duncan 1997). It should not be interpreted as showing the amount of skewness in the population.

For this statistic, numbers between -2 and +2 mean that the skewness of the sample offers no guidance about the skewness of the general population. Numbers less than -2 suggest that the general population is negatively skewed; the larger the negative number, the greater the likelihood of negative skewness in the general population. Numbers greater than +2 suggest that the general population is positively skewed; the larger the positive number, the greater the likelihood of positive skewness in the general population.

For the self-identified liberal respondents in this study, the results were  $Z_{g_i}(N= 99) = 4.54$ . This shows that the skewness of the sample is unlikely to be the result of randomness, so the population of self-identified liberals is likely to show the same skewness as this sample. We recognize the limitations of our sample, and so offer this statistic only within the context of those limitations.

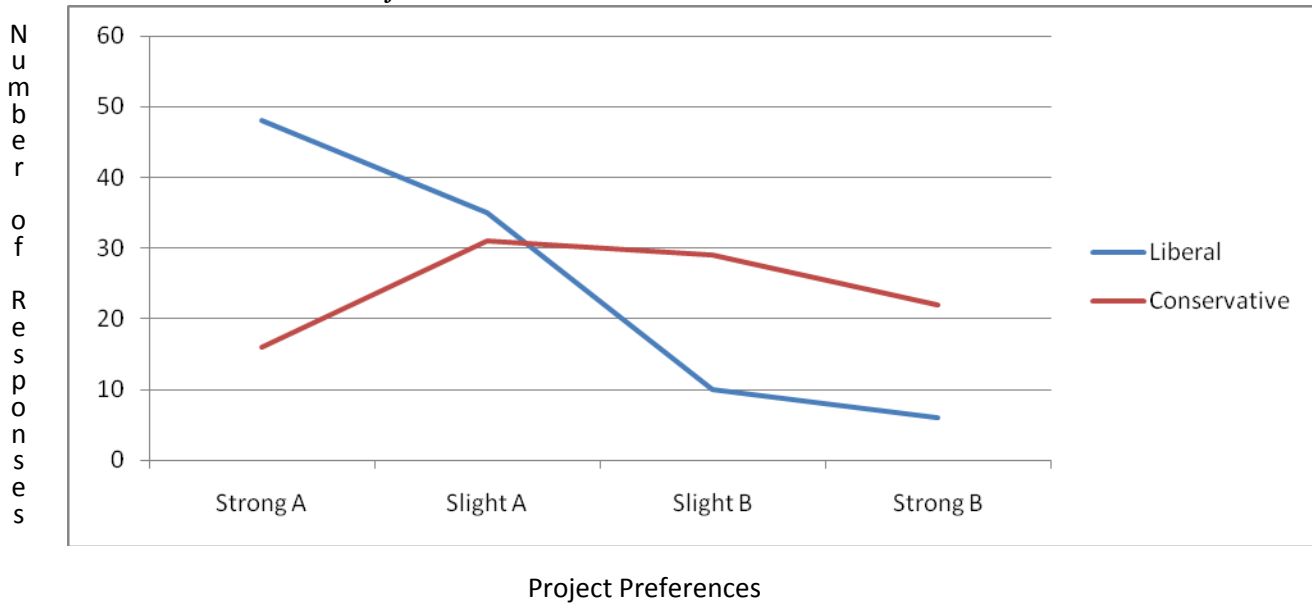
***H3: Self identified conservatives will show no significant skew in their preferences for Project A or Project B.***

To test this hypothesis, we used the same technique we used to test H2, the moment coefficient of skewness. We found a  $G_i(N=100, \text{std. error } .241) = -.019$ . For this statistic, values between -.5 and +.5 are considered not skewed, with 0 showing no skewness at all. This finding was as close to 0 as is likely to be found in real world data. From this, we concluded that the hypothesis was supported.

We also calculated the standard error of skewness for this population, finding  $Z_{g_i}(N= 100) = -.078$ . For values on this statistics between -2 and +2, no conclusions may be drawn about skewness in the

general population. Again, we recognize the limits of our sample, but suggest that further research is likely to come to similar conclusions.

**Figure 2**  
**Project Preferences for Liberals and Conservatives**



In Figure 2, we show the preferences of self-identified liberals and self-identified conservatives for the projects. While the measures are not the same, the patterns look much like the results from Haidt's work as illustrated in Figure 1. For our research, Project A represented only two of the moral foundations, harm/care and fairness/justice. Far more liberals preferred this project. Project B represented all five moral foundations. The preferences of conservatives leaned toward Project B, but Project B did not dominate their preferences in the same way that Project A dominated liberal preferences.

## CONCLUSIONS AND CALL FOR RESEARCH

In the broad and narrow senses, the questionnaire we used in this research worked. In the broad sense, the pattern we found fit the results that Haidt has found in tens of thousands of responses to his questionnaires. In the narrow sense, we show that the MFT can suggest how to shape content to promote sustainable programs to target markets with identifiable political leanings.

We intended to study these two statements:

- 1) If our method works consistently with Haidt's findings, self-identified liberals will show a strong bias toward Project A; that is, noticeably more in this group will prefer Project A. Based on the results shown in Figure 2 and Tables 4 and 5, self-identified liberals showed a strong bias toward Project A.
- 2) If our method works consistently with Haidt's findings, self-identified conservatives will show only a slight bias toward Project B; that is, they will have a more even frequency distribution across the choices. Based on the results shown in Figure 2 and Tables 4 and 5, self-identified conservatives showed a slight bias toward Project B and a relatively even distribution across the choices.

In short, we found that our results were consistent with the pattern of Haidt's findings (compare Figures 1 and 2). These results provide progress toward the goal of determining the innate forces within consumers that drive environmentally friendly behavior (Cronin 2011) and identify factors that lend themselves to the use of marketing in the evolution of mindful consumption (Sheth 2011).

The results also suggested that the moral foundations can be uncovered with even more parsimonious questionnaires than the MFT20, the shortest of Haidt's questionnaires currently available. We were able to shadow his results with only twelve content (non-demographic) items in our survey, modified to suit the ecology we wanted to study.

While these results are preliminary, we expect that this research can be extended to useful effect. It seems likely that MFT offers similar approaches to a broad spectrum of research on similar products and ideas. For example, with the increasing emphasis on environmental awareness on the part of consumers and businesses, this form of research can be used to determine the most effective messaging strategies to persuade various stakeholders of a business. The application of this approach to political campaign messages seems obvious. Also, many non-profits could benefit by applying this methodology in their appeals to contributors.

Extensions of this research are needed to determine what other types of products or services are most susceptible to adoption of communication strategy incorporating an MFT basis. For practitioners, more effective promotional messages can be designed once they understand the political preferences of their target markets.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING PRACTITIONERS**

At this point, the results may produce a simple question from a marketing practitioner: So what? In this section, we put the results in context.

Under what circumstances would our results help a marketer to communicate with his/her audience? First, the marketer needs access to the right kind of information about potential customers. Second, the marketer needs a product that fits promotional schemes based on one or more of the five moral foundations. Third, the marketer needs to understand how to interpret the moral foundation for the potential customers.

### **The Right Information**

In this instance, the right kind of information is political. That is, the marketer needs to know the political leanings of target customers and the degree to which the customers hold these leanings. Such political information is widely available on the internet, at least in gross terms. Consider the example of a company intending to advertise its product on Fox News and MSNBC. Based on our results, they would be well served to customize the ads based on the predominant political views of the audience.

Political analysts and consultants use geographical information systems to show which states lean toward the Democratic or Republican parties in the U.S. The internet has many such maps. Good examples may be found at <http://politicalmaps.org/maps-of-the-2008-us-presidential-election/>, and many other websites. They vary in the degree of shading and the precision of their information, but many offer useful information to marketers. The connection between these displays and marketing are transparent when the product is a political candidate.

If the product is something other than a political candidate, the information in these maps can still be useful. The degree to which it is useful depends in part on the degree to which people perceive a product or company as having moral content.

Information with even greater specificity regarding consumer political leanings is readily available from most social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Google +. Marketers can directly obtain the political attitudes of potential customers from the pages of those who choose to share that

information. When that is not shared publicly, differing versions of product ads can be delivered to the social media platform, which can then deliver them to the specified target market using demographic and other social data that is highly correlated with political preferences.

Consequently, these readily available, inexpensive, even free databases can help even small companies build segmented strategies in politically diverse local areas. If someone with the 'wrong' political orientation sees promotions intended for another, the message is unlikely to offend. Rather, it will simply not appeal. As the stylized example in this research shows, minor differences in wording change the appeal. Of course, it still depends on the product and the promotional method.

### **The Right Product**

It might seem that some products have greater moral content than others. In this research, we used green or sustainable projects. Such ideas have been the source of political controversy in the U.S. for decades, with both sides raising moral objections to one project or another. Haidt would argue that these disagreements hearken back to the five moral foundations.

But companies often add the moral content. American flags often drape the backgrounds in billboards for products that have nothing to do with patriotism or national loyalty. What does the American flag really have to do with selling Toyotas? But the flag appeals to many, as does national identity. We used "American Companies" to characterize Project B in this research. While Project B appealed most strongly to self-identified conservatives, it also appealed to some self-identified liberals. 'American' appears to be one reason for that greater appeal to conservatives, but there is no reason to assume that it repels liberals.

In short, with the right design, a moral foundation may be found to promote most products, services, brands, or companies. The product itself matters in these appeals to only a limited extent.

A nail has no moral foundation, but the company that sells the nail may develop an appeal based on a moral foundation. The company might 'wrap itself in the flag,' and, in doing so, wrap the nail in the flag as well. However, should they desire to sell nails to liberals, a 'fair trade' label may work better than the flag.

### **The Right Interpretation**

Up to this point, we have used an example that relies on little interpretation: the American flag as having strong appeal to conservative groups, some appeal to others, and little likely repellent effect. In this research, we would argue the same thing for the word "American" as a code word for in-group or loyalty as a moral foundation.

If an appeal rests on avoiding harm or promoting fairness, it should have broad appeal based on Haidt and on the findings in this research. Some commercials seek donations to the humane society based on avoiding harm to animals. These appeals seem to cross political lines with no difficulty.

But what do politics mean to a customer who wants to buy glasses or get a haircut? Little, perhaps, but the right words and the right images can influence a buyer's decision. Therefore, since political affiliation is a widely available characteristic for consumers, it can be used to craft targeted appeals based upon the core moral foundations of human beings. Any product, idea or cause would be wise to emphasize the harm/care and fairness/justice concepts when developing messages for liberal audiences, while applying a more balanced messaging strategy for messages delivered to more conservative consumers.

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