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Political Orientation and Moral Values: Examining their Effects on Susceptibility to Misinformation

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INTRODUCTION

Political misinformation is prevalent within social media, where information often goes unchecked (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Both liberals and conservatives may believe misinformation that supports their beliefs (Zmigrod et al., 2020), although conservatives may be more likely to share that misinformation on social media (Mosleh et al., 2023). In addition, liberals and conservatives tend to differentially endorse moral values (Haidt, 2012), with liberals more concerned with issues of harm, fairness, and universalism, and conservatives more concerned with issues of loyalty, authority, purity, and self-reliance (Graham et al., 2009; Wetherell et al., 2013).

Hypotheses:

- We hypothesized that liberals would be more susceptible to believing misinformation that appeals to the moral values of harm, fairness, and universalism, whereas conservatives will be more susceptible to believing misinformation that appeals to the moral values of loyalty, authority, purity, and self-reliance.
- We also hypothesize that conservatives will be more likely to share misinformation priming their endorsed moral values.

METHOD

Participants:

137 online participants (69.3% White; $M_{age} = 41.89$, $SD = 14.7$; 66.2% female, 33.1% male; 50.4% liberal)

Design & Procedure:

- 2 (liberal, conservative; between) x 2 (favorability of threads towards liberals versus conservatives; between) x 7 (values; within) design
- Participants read several threads as part of an online questionnaire that were designed to activate 1 of 7 values (Fairness, Authority, Universalism, Harm/Care, Loyalty, Purity, or Self-Reliance) and were either positive towards liberals or conservatives and rated them on whether they were true, how confidence they were in that assessment, how likely they would be to share them, and how much they agreed with them.

Pre-registration Link:

<https://osf.io/94sva>

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FIGURES

Figure 1:

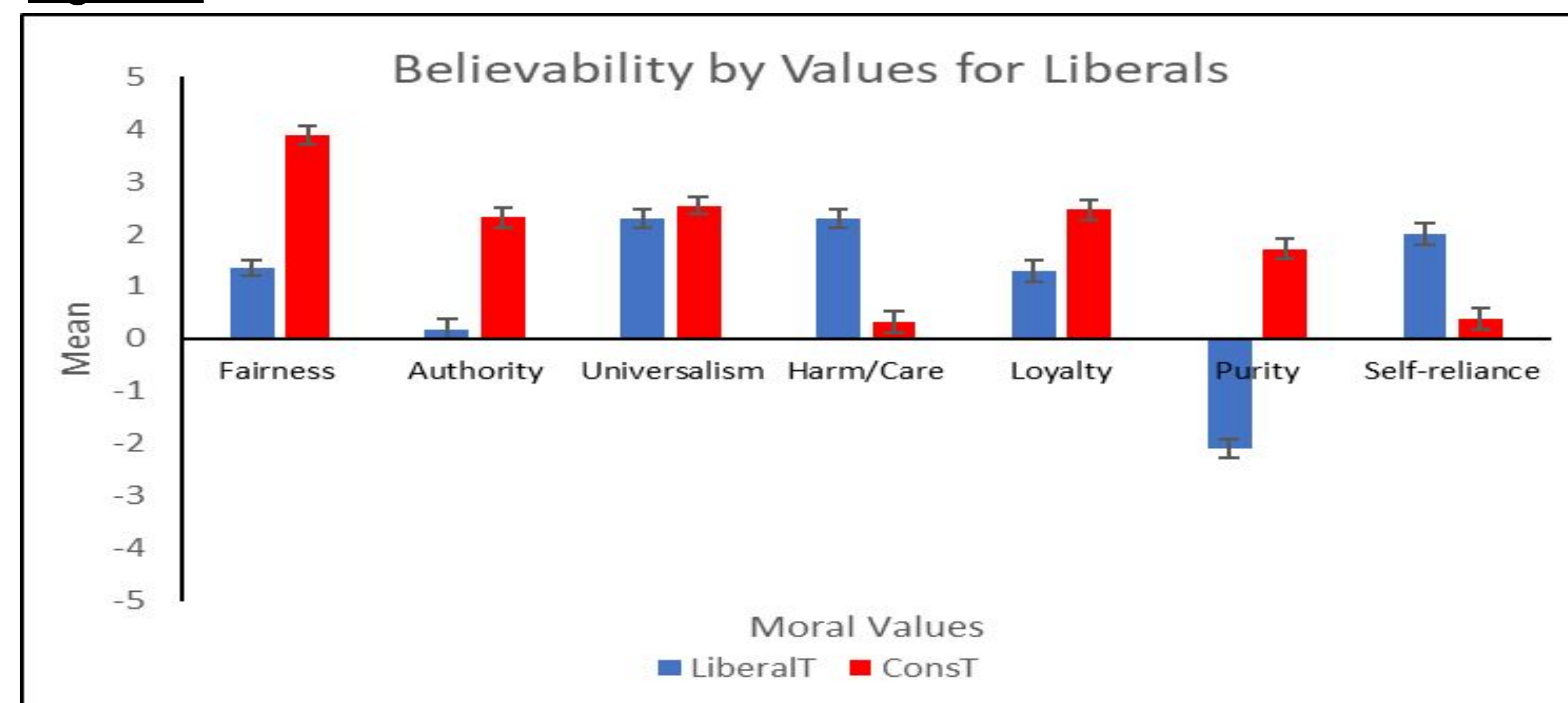


Figure 2:

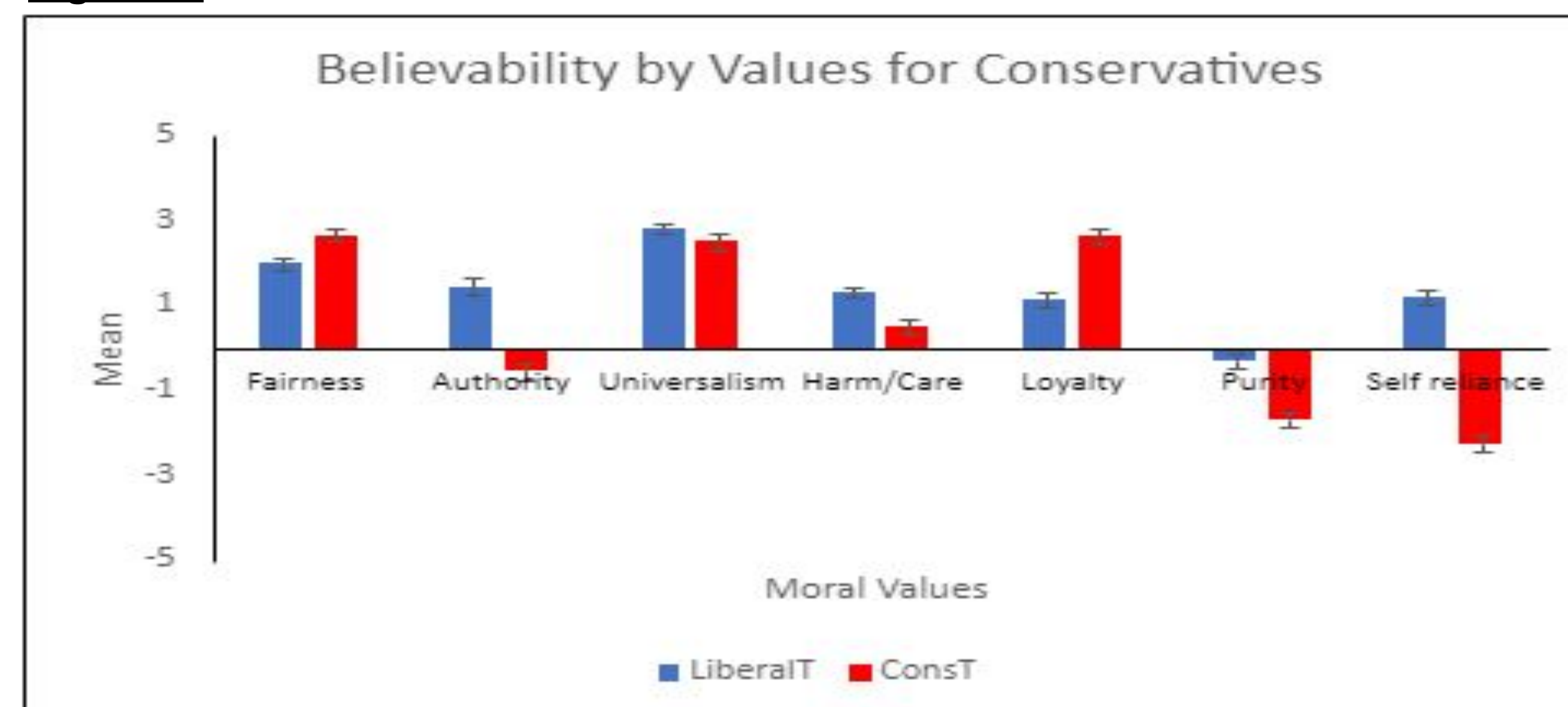


Figure 3:

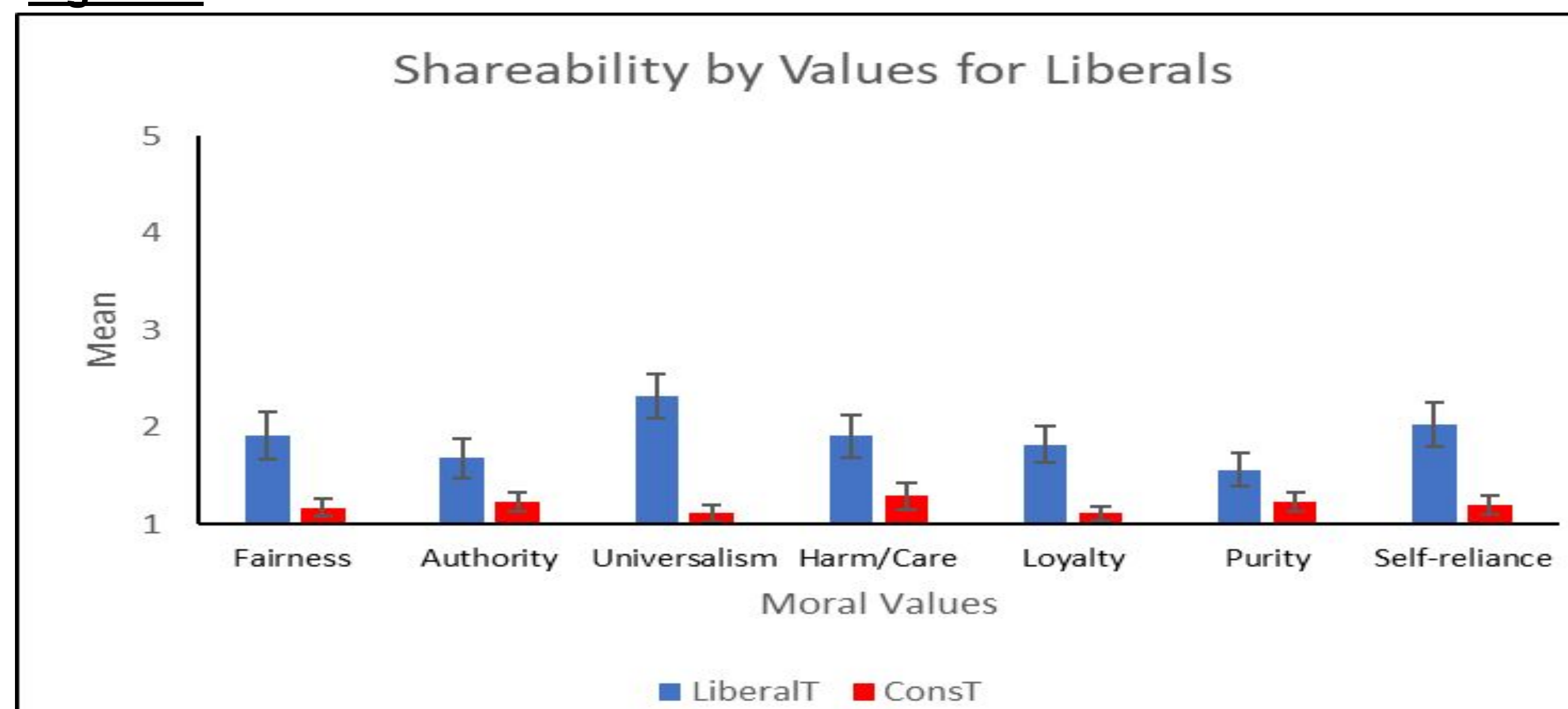
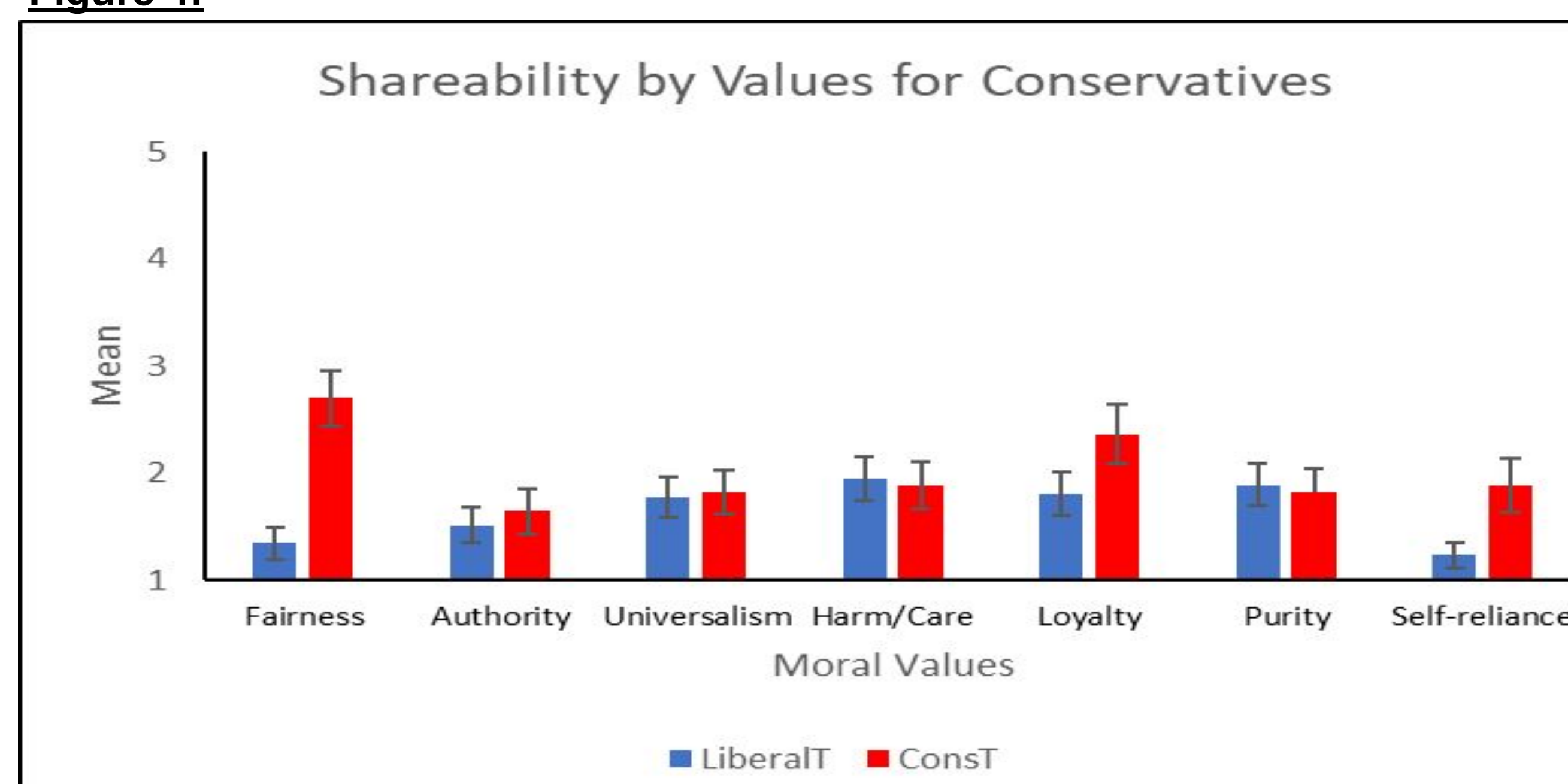


Figure 4:



RESULTS

- There was a 3-way interaction between political orientation of the participant, political orientation of the thread, and moral values on believability, $\eta_p^2 = 0.166$, $p < .001$.
- Both liberal and conservative participants found misinformation that appealed to the moral values of fairness, universalism, and loyalty to be the most believable (Figures 1 and 2).
- There was also a 3-way interaction between political orientation of the participant, political orientation of the thread, and moral values on shareability, $\eta_p^2 = 0.154$, $p = 0.001$.
- Liberal participants were more likely to share liberal misinformation over conservative misinformation regardless of the moral value, whereas conservative participants were more likely to share misinformation that appealed to the moral values of fairness, harm/care, loyalty, and purity regardless of the political orientation of the threads (Figures 3 and 4).

DISCUSSION

- We initially hypothesized that liberals and conservatives would be more susceptible to believing misinformation based on the moral values it appealed to, with liberals being more concerned with harm, fairness, and universalism and conservatives with loyalty, authority, purity, and self-reliance. Contrary to our hypothesis, we found that liberals and conservatives were both more likely to believe misinformation appealing to the values of fairness, universalism, and loyalty.
- We believe this may be due to inconsistent topics between liberal and conservative threads for each moral value. For future research, we would want to hold the topic between the different threads consistent for each of the seven moral values.
- We also hypothesized the conservatives would be more likely to share misinformation priming their endorsed moral values. Contrary to our hypothesis, liberals shared more liberal threads on average, regardless of moral values, and conservatives were more likely to share misinformation based on values priming fairness, harm, loyalty, and purity while placing less emphasis on the thread version.
- Liberals and conservatives were both more likely to believe misinformation appealing to the values of fairness, universalism, and loyalty.

SAMPLE THREADS

Liberal Thread (Harm/Care) Example:

Conservative Thread (Harm/Care) Example: