

# How Consumers' Political Ideology and Status-Maintenance Goals Interact to Shape Their Desire for Luxury Goods

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## Abstract

This research distinguishes between the goal of maintaining status and advancing status and investigates how consumers' political ideology triggers sensitivity to a status-maintenance (vs. status-advancement) goal, subsequently altering luxury consumption. Because conservative political ideology increases the preference for social stability, the authors propose that conservatives (vs. liberals) are more sensitive to status maintenance (but not status advancement) and thus exhibit a greater desire for luxury goods when the status-maintenance goal is activated. Six studies assessing status maintenance using sociodemographic characteristics (Studies 1, 2, and 3a) and controlled manipulations, including ad framing (Study 3b) and semantic priming (Studies 4 and 5), provide support for this proposition. The studies show that the effect is specific to status maintenance and does not occur (1) in the absence of a status goal or (2) when the status-advancement goal (a focus on increasing status) is activated. Overall, the findings reveal that conservatives' desire for luxury goods stems from the goal of maintaining status and offer insights into how luxury brands can effectively tailor their communications to audiences with a conservative ideology.

## Keywords

social status, status maintenance, status advancement, luxury goods, political ideology

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A key function of luxury goods—a €262 billion market in 2017 (D'Arpizio et al. 2017)—is to signal consumer status (Frank 1999; Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010; Veblen 1899). Status, broadly defined as the respect and admiration received from others (Magee and Galinsky 2008), is a fundamental human goal (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015) that drives consumers' desire for luxury goods (Berger and Ward 2010; Frank 1985). This research formally distinguishes between two goals related to status, one reflecting the desire to maintain one's status (hereinafter the "status-maintenance goal") and one reflecting the desire to advance one's status (hereinafter the "status-advancement goal"). In practice, the notion of status maintenance frequently permeates luxury brand communications. Consider, for example, a watchmaker's famous slogan, "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation." Similarly, DAMAC Properties, a Dubai-based luxury real-estate company, informs prospective buyers that its properties will "complement [their] stature," and Rolex reminds potential buyers that "Class is forever" (Web Appendix A). When will consumers be more sensitive to messages emphasizing such status maintenance and subsequently desire luxury goods more?

One answer to this question begins with the idea that people's views on status often stem from their broader social beliefs (e.g., Blader and Chen 2014; Hays and Bendersky 2015), the core of which is political ideology (Ball and Dagger 2006). Building on the finding that conservative (vs. liberal) ideology emphasizes the need to sustain the current social order (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004), we posit that conservative political ideology (hereinafter "political conservatism") increases the importance of status maintenance but not status advancement or a general sensitivity to status (i.e., the value put on status in general). Because consumers tend to act on goals that are both important (i.e., valuable and prioritized; Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010) and activated (i.e., cognitively salient and accessible; Kruglanski et al. 2002), we predict that political conservatism increases the desire for luxury goods when the status-maintenance goal is activated. We also propose that activating the status-

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maintenance goal among conservatives heightens their preference for social stability, increasing their desire for goods viewed as helping to maintain the social order, such as luxury goods. We probe whether this effect (1) stems from consumers' preference for social stability and (2) occurs when the status-advancement goal is activated or in the absence of a status goal.

This research contributes to the literature in two ways. First, we contribute to the status literature by distinguishing between status-maintenance and status-advancement goals. Whereas the bulk of the work tends to treat status as a single construct and focuses on how the presence or absence of a status goal affects luxury consumption (e.g., Rucker and Galinsky 2008; Sivathanan and Pettit 2010), our research reveals how status goals with different foci (status maintenance vs. status advancement) differentially affect luxury consumption. Notably, our work empirically demonstrates the importance of this conceptual distinction by showing that political conservatism increases sensitivity to the status-maintenance goal but not the status-advancement goal, subsequently inducing a greater desire for luxury goods.

Second, we contribute to the nascent literature on political ideology and luxury consumption (Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018) by going beyond previous efforts tied to sociopolitical views and marketing, particularly the areas of political consumerism (Zhao and Belk 2008), political campaigns (Hoegg and Lewis 2011), and prosocial or environmental behaviors (Kidwell, Farmer, and Hardesty 2013; Winterich, Zhang, and Mittal 2012). Ordabayeva and Fernandes (2018) find that conservatives differentiate themselves through products that signal that they are better than others (vertical signaling) while liberals differentiate themselves through products that signal their uniqueness (horizontal signaling). In contrast with their study, which explores the different types of signaling strategies people employ through luxury goods, our approach examines how different status goals may lead consumers to engage in vertical signaling (i.e., desire for luxury products) or not (i.e., desire for nonluxury products). In doing so, we complement previous work by shedding light on the motivations of conservatives when purchasing luxury goods. By demonstrating that conservatives desire luxury goods more than liberals under the status-maintenance goal, we reveal that their aspiration for vertical signaling stems from their desire to keep their current status as it is.

Finally, our findings also hold several practical managerial implications by offering a more sophisticated approach to luxury market segmentation. Because luxury products appeal to specific audiences, knowing how to segment and target them has long been central to the management of luxury brands (Dubois and Duquesne 1993). In practice, however, luxury brands often use vertical segmentation (e.g., by income), resulting in increasingly complex submarkets (e.g., "true luxury, masstige, premium, ultrapremium, opuluxe, hyperluxe, affordable luxury"; Kapferer and Bastien 2009). Our study pinpoints an accessible, easy-to-measure variable—namely, political ideology—and identifies how and when it predicts consumers' appetite for luxury goods. Indeed, political ideology is

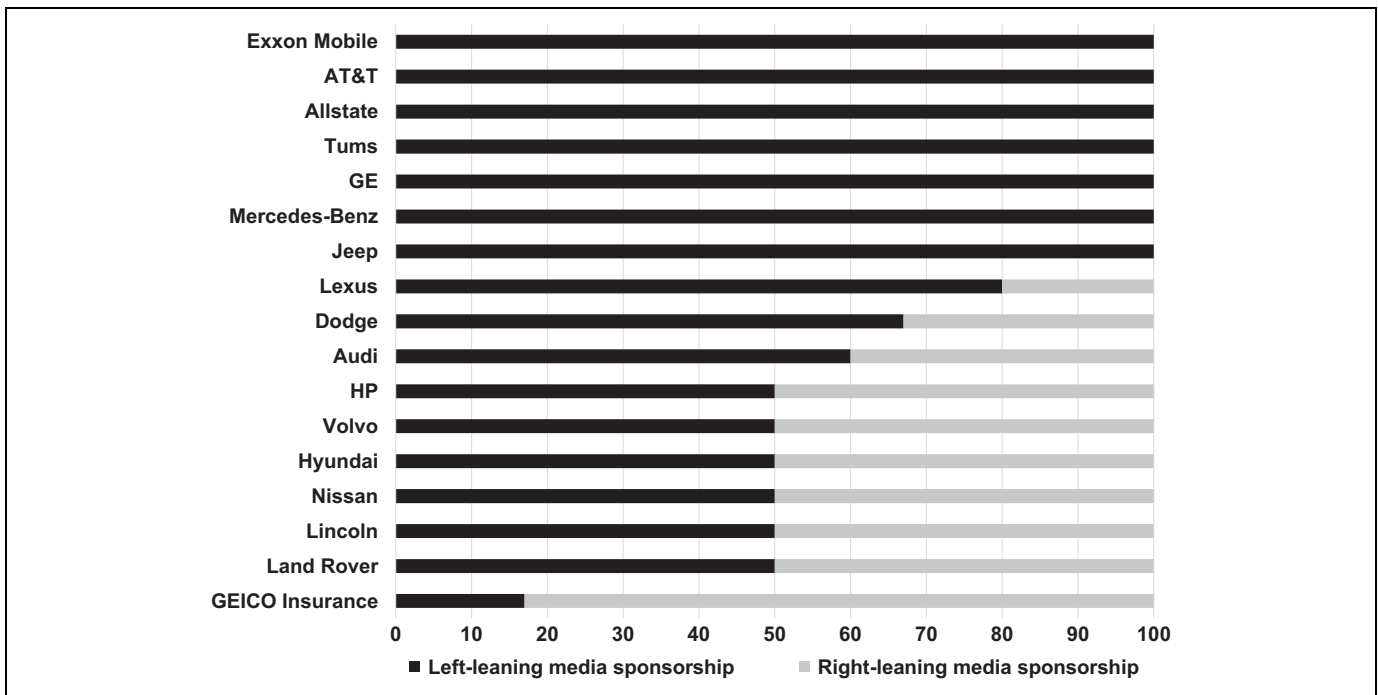
regularly assessed through opinion polls (e.g., Pew Research Center, Gallup), is easily identifiable along a geographic map (Bishop 2009) and media outlets (Iyengar and Hahn 2009), and offers more granular consumer insights (e.g., town level; for examples of available data sources, see Web Appendix B).

Overall, our findings imply that rather than targeting a segment on the basis of mere wealth or even status, a luxury brand that emphasizes status maintenance (e.g., Patek Philippe) may be more successful when targeting a wealthy conservative segment. This goal may be achieved by running targeted marketing and communications campaigns (1) on media platforms patronized by conservatives (e.g., Fox), (2) in conservative geographic areas (e.g., Texas), or (3) online, particularly on social media, by leveraging digital footprints indicative of conservatism (e.g., Boutyline and Willer 2017) (e.g., of how brands match the media used to their consumers' political orientations, see Figure 1; for managerial guidelines, see Figure 2).

## Status Goals and Luxury Consumption

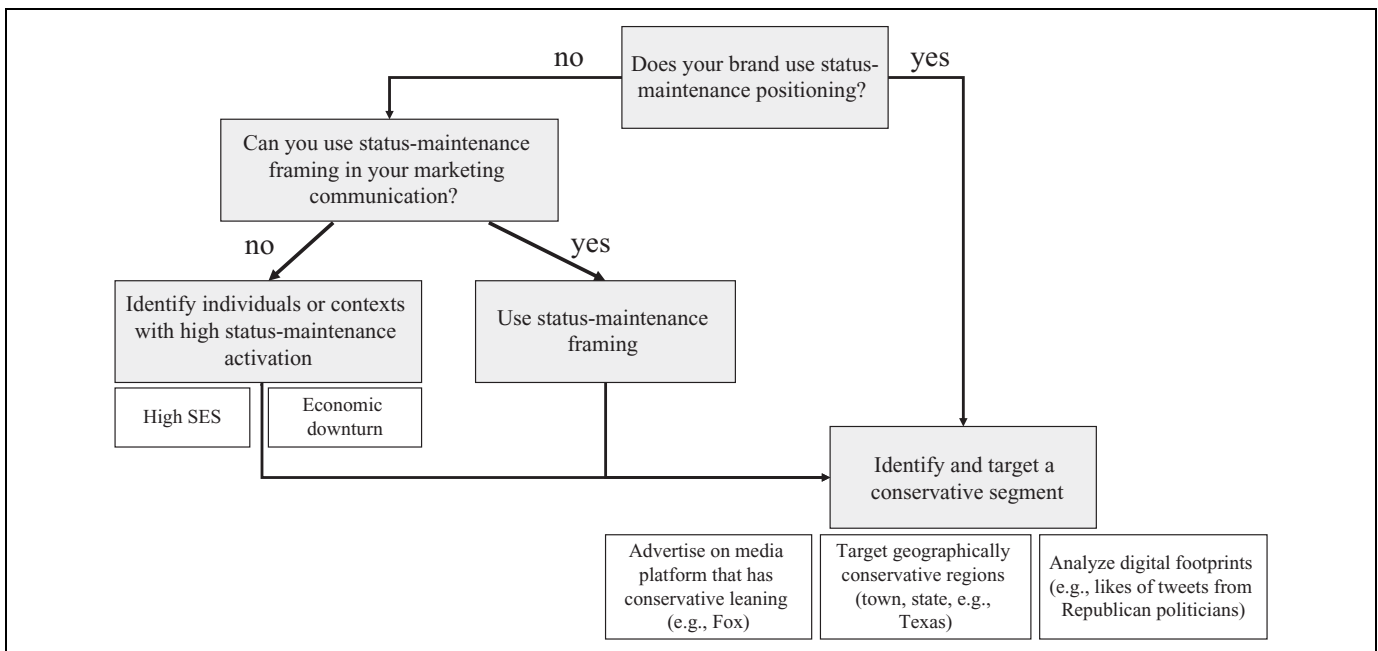
Goals are internal representations of desired states (Austin and Vancouver 1996), be they physical needs (e.g., the need to eat) or self-actualization (Winell 1987). Considered a fundamental human goal (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015; Frank 1985), status confers many psychological and social benefits to consumers (Fiske 2010; Nelissen and Meijers 2011). As such, status is a key factor in marketing because of its important role in shaping consumers' desire for luxury goods (Berger and Ward 2010; Frank 1985; Veblen 1899). Simply making status salient through reminders of successful similar people (Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006) or in the form of power threats (Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012) can increase the desire for luxury options, traditionally defined as high-quality, exclusive, and (often) conspicuous (Dubois and Duquesne 1993; Kapferer and Bastien 2009).

Departing from the view that a single status goal (i.e., status maximizing) underlies consumers' desire for luxury, the current research proposes that the status goal has a dual nature, reflecting a desire to *maintain* or *advance* one's social standing, depending on the extent to which the desired status state is currently being or has yet to be experienced. When consumers believe they are currently experiencing the desired social status they have in mind (e.g., they hold a high position in their community because of their advanced degrees), they may focus on maintaining their social status (i.e., status-maintenance goal). By contrast, when consumers believe they have yet to experience the desired social status they have in mind, they may focus on advancing social status (i.e., status-advancement goal). Although most research has largely ignored this distinction, managers in the luxury industry recognize and appeal to both status goals. That is, while luxury brands' taglines often emphasize status maintenance, luxury marketers also appeal to consumers' desire to "climb the ladder." For example, Audi calls on consumers to "update [their] status," Aston Martin announces that its car will "add value" to consumers' lives, and India-based



**Figure 1.** Examples of media sponsorship by political leaning.

Notes: Information collected from SponsorFeedback.com. Left-leaning platforms include MSNBC, NBC, CNN, CBS, and ABC. Right-leaning platform includes Fox. For each brand, we computed the percentage reflecting media sponsoring on the basis of the number of shows sponsored by each brand across left- and right-leaning media platforms. For example, AT&T sponsors three shows (*The Rachel Maddow Show*, *Andrea Mitchell Reports*, and *Morning Joe*) exclusively on MSNBC. Therefore, 100% of AT&T’s sponsorship goes to left-leaning media.



**Figure 2.** Decision guidelines for luxury brand managers.

tailor High Status Fabrics asserts that its tailor-made suits will “elevate” consumers (Web Appendix A).

Building on this distinction, we investigated how political ideology, a key variable shaping consumers’ view of the social strata, may uniquely influence the importance of retaining

status and ultimately guide the desire for luxury goods. We begin with the idea that luxury goods represent status signals (Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010) that help “conserve” the social hierarchy by reducing uncertainty about consumers’ roles and prerogatives. In other words, consumers “read” others’ statuses

through their consumption, which reinforces the social hierarchy over time (Anderson and Brown 2010) and helps *maintain* consumers' status in relation to others' (Berger and Ward 2010; Bourdieu 1984; Veblen 1899). In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, for example, the so-called sumptuary laws governed the ownership and display of fashion (e.g., gold embroidery) for the purpose of sustaining the existing social order (Currid-Halkett 2017; Veblen 1899). Because consumers' views of status often rest on their broader social beliefs (e.g., Blader and Chen 2014; Hays and Bendersky 2015), we examine how political ideology, which lies at the core of broader social beliefs, systematically predicts the importance consumers put on status maintenance (vs. status advancement). Next, we turn to prior work on political ideology to build our hypotheses.

### Political Conservatism and Status Maintenance

The term "political ideology" refers to beliefs and principles that reflect a person's views on how society should be governed (Ball and Dagger 2006). Political ideology is typically measured on a spectrum ranging from liberal to conservative, a classification that is judged as the most parsimonious (Noël and Thérien 2008) and also predictive of consumers' behavior (Jost 2017). Conservatism emphasizes the importance of keeping things as they are (Conover and Feldman 1981), and as such, conservatives often engage in the same daily routines (Jost et al. 2003). For example, conservatives tend to prefer familiar to unfamiliar music (Glasgow, Cartier, and Wilson 1985) and favor established brands over nameless or new brands (Khan, Misra, and Singh 2013). Conservatism also triggers a greater sensitivity to the existing social structure. For example, conservatives tend to judge others on their position in the social strata rather than question the fairness of the social system. Accordingly, they tend to evaluate those with high status more favorably than those with low status, regardless of their own status, resulting in in-group favoritism among high-status conservatives and out-group favoritism among low-status conservatives (Levin et al. 1998).

Building on these findings, we propose that political conservatism increases the importance of pursuing and satisfying the status-maintenance goal. The more conservative the person is, the more he or she will view the pursuit of status maintenance as important. Given the pervasiveness of people's tendency to "look upward" (Dubois and Ordabayeva 2015; Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011), however, there is no obvious reason to expect that political ideology would affect the status-advancement goal. In other words, we would expect status maintenance to be increasingly important to consumers as their political conservatism increases but status advancement to be invariant in relation to political conservatism. Confirming these predictions, a pilot study (for details, see Web Appendix C) showed that conservatives ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) viewed status maintenance as more important than liberals ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ;  $F(1, 76) = 7.61$ ,  $p = .007$ ) but conservatives

( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ) and liberals ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ) did not differ in how important they viewed status advancement ( $F(1, 76) = .04$ ,  $p = .84$ ).

As consumers typically pursue multiple goals simultaneously (Kruglanski et al. 2002), goal importance alone does not guarantee that a goal will be pursued. Instead, the extent to which a goal guides actual behavior will depend on its motivational (goal importance) and cognitive (goal activation) properties (Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010; Kruglanski et al. 2002). Thus, a goal is most likely to shape consumer behavior when it is both important and activated (Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010; Kruglanski et al. 2002). For example, although impulsive people put more importance than nonimpulsive people on satisfying the pursuit of pleasure, they may not automatically exhibit greater preferences for all pleasurable items (e.g., sweet food) unless that specific goal is activated (Ramanathan and Menon 2006). Similarly, although conservatives put greater importance on status maintenance than liberals, they may not automatically have a greater desire for goods that help maintain the social hierarchy (i.e., luxury goods) if there are other goals (e.g., relationship goals, health goals) that are more salient and cognitively accessible at any given moment. Therefore, we reason that the status-maintenance goal will motivate luxury consumption most when it is both important *and* activated; thus, we predict the following:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Political conservatism increases the desire for luxury goods when the status-maintenance goal is activated, but it does not affect the desire for luxury goods when the status-advancement goal is activated or when there is no status goal.

### The Role of a Preference for Social Stability

We further propose that the effect of political ideology on the desire for luxury goods when the status-maintenance goal is important and activated stems from consumers' increased motivation to keep things as they are—that is, a preference for stability. Prior research suggests that the motivation to keep things as they are permeates both personal (i.e., the desire to keep one's life regular and predictable, namely, preference for personal stability) and social domains (i.e., the desire to keep the social structure as is, namely, preference for social stability; Conover and Feldman 1981; Jost et al. 2003). If conservatives' desire for luxury stems from their aim to keep the social structure as it is by visibly communicating their own status to others, we predict that their preference for social stability (vs. personal stability) will drive the effect. Although it is unclear how purchasing luxury goods may satisfy the desire to stick with the same daily routines (behaviors tied to personal stability), consumers may be keen to turn to visual status symbols that help them keep the social structure as it is. Therefore, we predict that the preference for social stability will underlie conservatives' (vs. liberals') greater desire for luxury goods when the status-maintenance goal is important and activated (Figure 3):

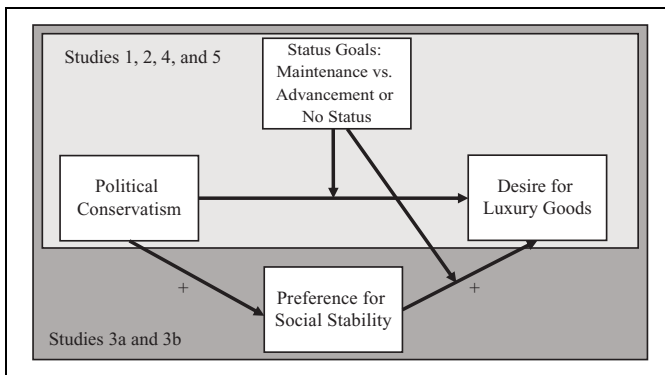


Figure 3. Conceptual map.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** When the status-maintenance goal is activated, increased preference for social stability mediates the effect of political conservatism on the desire for luxury goods.

### Overview of Studies and Methodology

Six studies test the hypotheses by employing different measures of political conservatism and desire for luxury (Table 1). Studies 1–3a measure the role of status-maintenance activation through status position, while Studies 3b–5 use external manipulations. Goal activation may depend on internal chronic factors (i.e., typically stable features such as character traits) or external manipulations (Kruglanski et al. 2002). For example, although an indulgence goal (i.e., focusing on immediate enjoyment, such as spending on luxury goods, over long-term considerations) is typically more strongly activated among people low than high on hyperopia, momentarily activating an indulgence goal through a manipulation (e.g., a writing task asking participants to focus on the role of enjoyment in their lives when deciding how to spend money) raises the desire to indulge for any person regardless of their hyperopia score (Haws and Poynor 2008).

Studies 1 and 2 establish that the desire for luxury goods increases with political conservatism when the degree of status-maintenance activation is high but remains unchanged when it is low. Specifically, Studies 1 and 2 use consumers' current status position in the social strata to infer the degree of status-maintenance activation. Given that consumers tend to protect and maintain favorable conditions (Taylor and Brown 1994), a high-status position should trigger greater activation of status maintenance than a low-status position. Indeed, high-status consumers express greater concerns about maintaining their status than low-status consumers (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Furthermore, a pretest reveals that the degree of status-maintenance activation increases along with status position (Web Appendix D). Study 1 examines 21,999 car purchase decisions and finds that Republicans tend to purchase more luxury cars than Democrats when the status-maintenance goal is positionally activated (i.e., high status position). Study 2 replicates the effect using a different measure of status position.

Subsequent studies aim to rule out a potential alternative explanation for the findings in Studies 1 and 2. That is, Studies 1 and 2 compare a condition when the degree of status-

maintenance activation is high with one when it is low, and thus it could be argued that the effect comes from the difference in the level of status activation (i.e., how much consumers focus on and think about status in general) rather than in the level of *status-maintenance* activation (but see Web Appendix D for the pretest result showing that the level of status activation does not differ across status positions). Studies 3b to 5 further address this account by directly manipulating the status-maintenance goal. In addition, they use a condition in which a status goal is activated, but *without* an emphasis on maintenance (i.e., status-advancement activation condition) as another control condition to strengthen the argument that *maintaining* status (not just any status goal) drives the effect. To this end, we manipulate both status-maintenance and status-advancement goals and show that political conservatism triggers a greater desire for luxury goods when the status-maintenance goal is activated; however, this effect does not occur when the status-advancement goal is activated or in the absence of a status goal.

Studies 3a and 3b provide evidence for the underlying role of preference for social stability. Specifically, these studies show that when the degree of status-maintenance goal activation is high (i.e., high-status position), political conservatism increases the preference for social stability (Study 3a) and that this shift in preference mediates the effect of political conservatism on the desire for luxury goods (Study 3b). Finally, Studies 4 and 5 activate status goals using a manipulation independent of the consumption task and demonstrate how they can spill over to luxury consumption. Study 5 also directly varies the product framing.

Across the studies, we interpret political ideology as a generalized personality orientation along the liberal–conservative spectrum and capture the construct both categorically as a party affiliation (Republican vs. Democrat) and continuously as a degree of political conservatism (Jost et al. 2003; Winterich, Mittal, and Aquino 2016). This approach follows the use in prior research of continuous measures of political ideology ranging from liberal to conservative (e.g., Kidwell, Farmer, and Hardesty 2013; Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018). Thus, we use the terms “conservatives” and “Republicans” (when measured categorically) or “political conservatism” (when measured continuously) interchangeably. Note that though we use the term “political conservatism” for the simplicity of language, we view liberalism and conservatism as the two ends of a single spectrum capturing variation in preference for stability, the mechanism at work in our focal effect. Therefore, although we interpret the results by focusing on political conservatism, the opposite interpretation focusing on political liberalism is also possible. Across all studies, we systematically apply the same sample filtering criteria and include the same set of covariates (i.e., age, gender, and income) in our analyses (Web Appendix E).

### Study 1: How Does Political Conservatism Affect Luxury Car Purchases?

This study tests the main hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) by leveraging a unique secondary data set measuring political ideology, status

**Table 1.** Summary of Study Design and Results.

	IV Measure	DV Measure	Moderator <sup>a</sup>	Key Test	Desire for Luxury	
					Low <sup>a</sup>	High <sup>a</sup>
Study 1 (N = 21,999 purchase data set)	Categorical Republican Democrat	Car purchase (choice)	Measured (continuous) SES	Spotlight analysis	$\beta = -.03$ $z = -.18$ $p > .8$	$\beta = .35$ $z = 9.65$ $p < .001$
Study 2 (N = 194, MTurk)	Conservative Liberal	Desire for real luxury brands	Mc-Arthur scale		$\beta = -.52$ $t = -2.17$	$\beta = .45$ $t = 1.93$
Study 3a (N = 174, MTurk)	Republican Democrat	Preference for social stability <sup>b</sup>			$p = .032$ $\beta = .58$ $t = 1.26$	$p = .055$ $\beta = 1.73$ $t = 4.34$
Study 3b (N = 403, MTurk)	Continuous Two 7-point scales	WTP for a product	Manipulated (categorical) Ad framing	Simple effect of political conservatism	$p = .209$ $\beta = -1.65$ $t = -.70$	$p < .001$ $\beta = 5.45$ $t = 2.33$
Study 4 (N = 264, MTurk)	Mehrabian (1996) Conservatism scale Same as Study 3b	Desire for real luxury brands	Writing task 1		$p = .487$ $\beta = -.14$ $t = -1.76$	$p = .02$ $\beta = .21$ $t = 2.27$
Study 5 (N = 303, college students)	Same as Study 3b	WTP for a luxury-framed product	Writing task 2		$p = .079$ $\beta = -1.20$ $t = -1.40$	$p = .024$ $\beta = 22.33$ $t = 2.93$
NR1 (N = 274, MTurk)	One 7-point scale	Desire for real luxury brands	Writing task 1		$p = .163$ $\beta = -.03$ $t = -.59$	$p = .004$ $\beta = .16$ $t = 2.51$
NR2 (N = 297 French lab)	Same as Study 4	WTP for a luxury-framed product	Writing task 2		$p = .556$ $\beta = 9.86$ $t = 1.02$	$p = .013$ $\beta = -5.75$ $t = -.60$
					$p = .311$	$p = .549$

<sup>a</sup>Status-maintenance goal activation.

<sup>b</sup>Study 3a does not measure desire for luxury, but the process (i.e., preference for social stability); therefore, its results reflect the preference for social stability.

Notes: IV = independent variable; DV = dependent variable; NR1 and NR2 indicate two studies not reported herein but included in the Web Appendix. NR1 is a replication of Study 4 with an American sample (Web Appendix W), and NR2 is a replication of Study 5 with a French sample (Web Appendix V). Spotlight analysis examines the difference between conservative and liberal at one standard deviation above the status position mean (i.e., high) and one standard deviation below the status position mean (i.e., low). Simple effect of political conservatism examines the slope of political conservatism in the status-maintenance goal condition (i.e., high) and in the status-advancement goal condition (i.e., low).

position, and actual car purchases. We assess the degree of status-maintenance activation from a consumer's current status position. We predicted that political conservatism would increase the likelihood of purchasing a luxury car among consumers with high status but not low status.

### Overview and Data Description

We analyzed car purchase data between October 2011 and September 2012 from a survey conducted by a U.S.-based consulting company (Strategic Vision). Specifically, the survey was sent to car buyers across 50 states and the District of Columbia 3 to 4 months after the date of purchase. Consumers voluntarily filled out the survey at their homes or offices. Of the 416,571 consumers in total, 38,939 disclosed their political affiliation. After we accounted for the control variables, the final sample size was 21,999 consumers (35.36% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 53.64$  years). The survey also included other questions not tied to our hypotheses.

**Political conservatism.** Car buyers revealed their political affiliation categorically: Republican, Democrat, Independent, Libertarian, Green, Tea Party, and other. Of those who disclosed their political affiliation, 12,881 (33%) identified themselves as Republicans and 12,000 as Democrats (31%). We excluded 36% of consumers who did not identify themselves as Republican or Democrat (a percentage similar to prior work; e.g., 32% in Morris, Carranza, and Fox 2008) from the main analyses. After we included the control variables, the final sample consisted of 11,324 Republicans and 10,675 Democrats.

**Desire for luxury brands.** We classified the cars in the data set as nonluxury or luxury (for the full list, see Web Appendix F) using the classification published by Luxury Society, a leading Switzerland-based analyst and news publisher for the luxury industry. This classification relies on the volume of luxury-related online queries performed on search engines such as Google in 2011 in the United States. Among all brands, 22% (78%) are classified as luxury (nonluxury).

**Status position.** Education and income are two key foundational facets of status (Bourdieu 1984; Weber, Gerth, and Mills 1958), respectively reflecting focal intangible and tangible positional assets tied to people's rank in the social hierarchy (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015). Following this perspective, we assessed consumers' status position through their socioeconomic status (SES), or the sum of their standardized education and income (Anderson et al. 2012; Kraus, Côté, and Keltner 2010). This approach is similar to that of prior studies in the status literature that combine education and income to measure status position (Adler et al. 2000; Anderson et al. 2012; Kraus, Piff, and Keltner 2009). In our data, education fell into five categories: (1) did not finish high school, (2) high school graduate, (3) did not finish college, (4) college graduate, and (5) postgraduate degree; income included 25 intervals (i.e., less than \$10,000 = 1, over \$500,000 = 25).

**Table 2.** Study 1: Luxury Car Purchase Likelihood.

Effect	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.00*** (.00)	.00*** (.00)
Gender	-.17*** (.04)	-.17*** (.04)
SES	.54*** (.01)	.49*** (.02)
Political conservatism	.38*** (.04)	.31*** (.04)
Political conservatism $\times$ SES		.09*** (.03)
Constant	-1.78*** (.10)	-1.74*** (.10)
Observations	21,999	21,999

\*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. Political conservatism is coded as 1 if Republican and 0 if Democrat. Gender is coded as 1 if male and 0 if female.

### Results

We performed a logistic regression on political conservatism (Republican = 1, Democrat = 0), SES, and their interaction to predict luxury car purchases, with age and gender as covariates. As expected, political conservatism ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $z = 10.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and SES ( $\beta = .54$ ,  $z = 37.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ) increased luxury car purchases. There was also a significant political conservatism  $\times$  SES interaction ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $z = 2.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Table 2, Model 2). To probe the interaction, we conducted a spotlight analysis to examine the effect of political conservatism on luxury car purchases at both high and low levels of SES. As this study measures actual purchases, we used objective indicators of SES based on U.S. Census Data (2012, 2014) to determine high and low levels of SES in our sample (Web Appendix G). As hypothesized, political conservatism significantly increased luxury car purchases among high-SES consumers ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $z = 9.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while it had no significant impact on luxury car purchases among low-SES consumers ( $\beta = -.03$ ,  $z = -.18$ ,  $p > .8$ ).

To probe the robustness of the findings, we conducted additional analyses using education and income separately as single measures of status position. The focal finding that political conservatism increases luxury car purchase among consumers having high-status positions holds regardless of whether the status position is assessed through education ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $z = 7.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ) or income ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $z = 5.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) alone (for details, see Web Appendix H, Robustness Analysis 3). Further tests of robustness entailed (1) employing a different classification of luxury cars (Web Appendix H, Robustness Analysis 1) and (2) widening the political ideology categorization to the Green and Tea parties (Web Appendix H, Robustness Analysis 2). The results from these tests systematically replicate the focal results. In addition, we empirically address the possibility that the effect stems from a greater desire for conventional brands, rather than luxury brands per se. Indeed, conservatives exhibit greater sensitivity to conventions and traditions (Jost et al. 2003), and luxury perceptions often rest on tradition and history (Kapferer and Bastien 2009). Ruling out this possibility, additional analyses (Web Appendix I) show that the effect holds for both luxury brands perceived as

conventional and nonconventional. Overall, Study 1 provides robust evidence for  $H_1$  that political conservatism increases the desire to purchase a luxury car among consumers with high status but not among those with low status, presumably because high status activates the status-maintenance goal.

## Discussion

The results of Study 1 show that high-SES Republicans were 9.8% more likely to purchase a luxury car than high-SES Democrats. To obtain a more specific estimate of the effect, we collected the average price for each car model in the data set. On average, high-SES Democrats spent \$29,022 and high-SES Republicans \$33,216 to purchase a new car. Practically, a luxury car seller may expect to gain a 14.45% increase in sales from high-SES Republicans than from high-SES Democrats.

Of note, we found an unexpected main effect of political conservatism (i.e., the effect of political conservatism at the mean of SES). Given that we did not find a similar main effect in any of the other studies, we conjecture that this effect may stem from the average SES of the sample used in this study being higher than that of (1) the samples used in the other studies and (2) the U.S. population. Specifically, the average education level was college graduate, while less than 40% of Americans between ages 25 and 64 years had at least a 2-year college degree when the study was conducted. The mean income level was \$72,500 (approximately within the 70th percentile of the U.S. population). Therefore, it is likely that the spectrum of SES in Study 1 mostly captured medium- to high-SES consumers. This interpretation is consistent with the survey participants being actual buyers of *new* cars. Study 2 aims to address this concern by using a different sample and measure of status position. While Study 1 shows real-life evidence of the effect, its nonexperimental nature makes assessing causality difficult. In addition, given that Study 1 contains only buyers of new cars willingly volunteering to take the survey, there is a potential for sample selection bias (i.e., a focus on wealthy customers). We address these issues in the following studies by replicating the effect in a more controlled setting (Studies 2 to 5) and directly manipulating status goals (Studies 3b to 5).

## Study 2: Assessing Consumers' Status-Maintenance Goal Activation Through Perceived Status Position

### Method

One hundred ninety-four participants (56% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 38$  years) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) completed the survey for a small monetary compensation. They responded to measures of political conservatism, desire for luxury brands, status position, and demographics (i.e., age, gender and income), in that order.

**Table 3.** Study 2: Preference for Luxury Brands Relative to Nonluxury Brands.

Effect	Model 1	Model 2
Status position	.010 (.053)	.016 (.054)
Political conservatism	-.051 (.153)	-.036 (.154)
Political conservatism × status position	.329*** (.110)	.302*** (.111)
Age		.007 (.005)
Gender		-.142 (.154)
Income		-.026 (.043)

\*\*\* $p < .01$

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. Status position varies from 1 (bottom) to 10 (top) and are mean centered. Political conservatism is coded as 1 if conservative and 0 if liberal. Gender is coded as 1 if male and 0 if female.

**Political conservatism.** Participants chose between one of three options: “conservative,” “liberal,” or “neither” (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). In line with Morris, Carranza, and Fox (2008), our analyses focused on 136 participants (57% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 38$  years) who reported being either Republican ( $N = 51$ ) or Democrat ( $N = 85$ ).

**Desire for luxury brands.** Participants indicated their desire for seven luxury and seven nonluxury U.S. fashion and car brands, which we pretested to vary the extent of perceived luxury and high status (Web Appendix J). We included only U.S. brands, as political conservatism can affect perceptions of foreign brands (Basu 1968). We presented the brands sequentially, in random order, and participants indicated how much they liked each brand on a seven-point scale (1 = “not at all,” and 7 = “very much”).

**Status position.** We used the McArthur scale (Web Appendix D; Adler et al. 2000).

## Results

Following prior research (Wänke, Bohner, and Jurkowitsch 1997; White and Dahl 2007), we used a difference score between evaluations of luxury and nonluxury brands as our dependent variable (DV). We first averaged participants' evaluations of luxury ( $E_l$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ) and nonluxury ( $E_{nl}$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ) brands before computing a difference score ( $E_l - E_{nl}$ ) for each participant. Higher values indicated a greater desire for luxury than nonluxury brands.

We regressed participants' desire for luxury brands on political conservatism (conservative = 1, liberal = 0), status position, their interaction, and the three covariates. The results revealed a significant political conservatism × status position interaction ( $\beta = .30$ ,  $t(129) = 2.72$ ,  $p = .007$ ; Table 3). As predicted, a spotlight analysis conducted at one standard deviation above the mean of status position revealed a significantly greater desire for luxury brands among conservatives than liberals ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $t(129) = 1.93$ ,  $p = .055$ ). A spotlight analysis at one standard deviation below the mean of status position revealed that conservatives had a lower desire for luxury brands



than liberals ( $\beta = -.52$ ,  $t(129) = -2.17$ ,  $p = .032$ ). Simple effect analyses revealed that status position significantly predicted the desire for luxury brands among conservatives ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $t(129) = 3.27$ ,  $p = .001$ ) but not among liberals ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(129) = .29$ ,  $p = .77$ ).

Replicating Study 1, Study 2 showed that political conservatism increased the desire for luxury brands among consumers with high but not low status, providing further support for our hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). In contrast with Study 1, there was no main effect of political conservatism at the mean status position. In Studies 3a and 3b, we test the underlying role of preference for social stability.

### Study 3a: Preference for Social Stability as a Function of Political Party and Current Status

Study 3a aims to show that when the status-maintenance goal is important (i.e., when holding conservative political ideology) and activated (i.e., when having a high-status position), preference for social stability increases. That is, we expected conservatives to exhibit greater preference for social stability than liberals at high- but not low-status positions.

#### Method

One hundred seventy-four participants (50% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34$  years) recruited on MTurk completed the survey for a small monetary compensation. They completed measures of political conservatism, preference for social stability, status position (McArthur scale), and demographics (i.e., age, gender and income), in that order.

**Political conservatism.** Participants indicated the political party they identify with by choosing between one of three options: “Republican,” “Democrat,” or “neither” (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). Again in line with Morris, Carranza, and Fox (2008), our analyses focused on 123 participants (51% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34$  years) who reported being either Republican ( $N = 41$ ) or Democrat ( $N = 82$ ).

**Preference for stability.** A series of seven-point scales (1 = “not at all me,” and 7 = “very much me”) assessed preference for social stability. Items are “I don’t like when the social order changes too rapidly around me,” “Seeing too many changes in society tends to make me worry,” and “Too many changes and reforms to the current social structure makes me feel uneasy” ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

#### Results

We regressed participants’ preference for social stability on political conservatism (Republican = 1, Democrat = 0), status position, their interaction, and the three covariates. The results revealed a significant effect of political conservatism ( $\beta = 1.15$ ,  $t(116) = 3.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a marginally significant political conservatism  $\times$  status position interaction ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $t(116) = 1.90$ ,  $p = .059$ ). A spotlight analysis conducted at one standard deviation above the mean status position revealed a

significantly greater preference for social stability among conservatives than liberals ( $\beta = 1.73$ ,  $t(116) = 4.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ). At the mean status position, conservatives exhibited a greater preference for social stability than liberals ( $\beta = 1.16$ ,  $t(116) = 3.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, a spotlight analysis at one standard deviation below the mean status position revealed no difference between conservatives and liberals ( $\beta = .58$ ,  $t(116) = 1.26$ ,  $p = .209$ ). Simple effect analyses showed that status position significantly predicted the preference for social stability among conservatives ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $t(116) = 2.94$ ,  $p = .004$ ) but not liberals ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $t(116) = 1.19$ ,  $p = .235$ ).

Study 3a provides initial evidence that preference for social stability may underlie the effect by showing that conservatives exhibit greater preference for social stability than liberals at high- but not low-status positions. Study 3b provides additional evidence for the role of social stability through moderation and mediation.

### Study 3b: Consumers’ Preference for Social Stability

The objectives of Study 3b were threefold. First, we used two standards of comparison: a condition of status-advancement activation and a condition that does not activate any status goal. Consistent with prior research showing that activating a status goal increases the desire for luxury compared with a no-status goal condition (e.g., Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006), we expected that activating either the status-maintenance goal or the status-advancement goal would increase the desire for luxury compared with a condition without any status goal activation. In addition, we expected that political conservatism would only affect the desire for luxury when the status-maintenance goal was activated, not when the status-advancement goal was activated or in the absence of a status goal. Second, to provide stronger support for the proposed causal relationship, we directly manipulated status goals, rather than inferring goal activation from status position as in Studies 1, 2, and 3a. Third, we provide support for our hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) by examining the mediating role of consumers’ preference for stability. We measured preference for stability in both personal and social domains and expected that the desire to maintain the existing social structure (i.e., preference for social stability) would underlie the effect.

#### Method

We randomly assigned 403 participants (52% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36$  years) recruited on MTurk to one of three conditions (status goal: status-maintenance vs. status-advancement vs. no-status). After indicating their political conservatism as part of an initial survey, participants took a second survey framed as a print ad evaluation task during which they viewed one of three versions of the same eyewear product (our status goal manipulation). Next, they indicated their willingness to pay (WTP) for the eyewear product in U.S. dollars (the main DV) before reporting their age, gender, income, and preference for personal and social stability.

**Political conservatism.** Participants reported their political ideology (1 = “extremely liberal,” and 7 = “extremely conservative”) and political affiliation (1 = “strong Democrat,” and 7 = “strong Republican”) on seven-point scales. We averaged these items to form a measure of political conservatism ( $\alpha = .91$ ;  $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ; Khan, Misra, and Singh 2013).

**Status goal manipulation.** Participants viewed one of three different versions of a print ad for an eyewear product (Web Appendix K). The no-status condition featured the eyewear as an economical line that was functional and affordable, while the status-maintenance and status-advancement conditions both featured the eyewear as a luxury line that was state-of-the-art and in limited supply. All three print ads featured the same image and layout, but the tagline varied according to the status goal condition: “Eyewear for everyone” (no-status), “Update your status with status” (status-advancement), and “Keep your status with status” (status-maintenance). A pretest confirmed that each of the ads successfully activated the target status goal, without varying the extent of emphasis on social status (Web Appendix L).

**Preference for stability.** A series of seven-point scales (1 = “not at all me,” and 7 = “very much me”) assessed preference for personal stability (“I prefer life to be regular and predictable,” “I just want to stick to the same regular routine in my life,” and “I do not like changes in life”;  $\alpha = .91$ ). The same three-item measures as in Study 3a assessed preference for social stability ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

## Results

A mixed general linear model performed on WTP, with status goal as a categorical variable, political conservatism as a continuous variable, and the covariates, revealed a main effect of status goal ( $F(2, 394) = 16.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a status goal  $\times$  political conservatism interaction ( $F(2, 394) = 2.50$ ,  $p = .083$ ). Consistent with the perspective that having a status goal increases consumers’ WTP compared with the absence of a status goal (Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006), participants in both the status-maintenance ( $M = 64.30$ ,  $SD = 58.30$ ;  $F(1, 394) = 33.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and status-advancement ( $M = 50.00$ ,  $SD = 34.54$ ;  $F(1, 394) = 7.61$ ,  $p = .006$ ) conditions were willing to pay significantly more than participants in the no-status condition ( $M = 37.54$ ,  $SD = 19.52$ ) for the eyewear.

To probe the interaction, we examined the slopes of political conservatism in each status goal condition. As expected, political conservatism predicted WTP for the eyewear emphasizing status maintenance ( $\beta = 5.45$ ,  $t(396) = 2.33$ ,  $p = .02$ ). By contrast, there was no effect of political conservatism on WTP for the eyewear emphasizing status advancement ( $\beta = -1.65$ ,  $t < 1$ ,  $p = .487$ ) or the eyewear without a status emphasis ( $\beta = .67$ ,  $t < 1$ ,  $p = .754$ ; Figure 4). Furthermore, spotlight analyses revealed that WTP for the eyewear emphasizing status maintenance was significantly higher than WTP for the eyewear emphasizing status advancement among conservatives (one standard deviation above the mean of political conservatism;  $\beta = -25.21$ ,  $t(256) = -3.00$ ,  $p = .003$ ) than among liberals (one

standard deviation below the mean of political conservatism;  $t < 1$ ,  $p = .627$ ). Conversely, WTP for the eyewear emphasizing status maintenance was significantly higher than WTP for the eyewear without a status emphasis at all levels of political conservatism (all  $ps < .01$ ).

We next examined the mediating role of preference for social stability ( $N = 401$  for this analysis after removing two participants who did not complete these measures). Because status goals moderate the effect of political conservatism on WTP, as reflected in the significant effect of political conservatism in the status-maintenance condition, we expected social stability to mediate the effect only in this condition. Therefore, we coded the status-maintenance condition as 1 and the status-advancement and no-status conditions as  $-1$  and conducted a moderated mediation analysis by using a bootstrapping procedure (Hayes 2012, Model 15) with a generated sample size of 5,000, including the same covariates. This model estimated the effect of political conservatism on WTP directly as well as indirectly through social stability, with both direct and indirect effects moderated by status goals (Table 4). The first part of the model regressed preference for social stability on political conservatism and showed a significant main effect of political conservatism ( $\beta = .50$ ,  $t(396) = 10.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The second part regressed WTP on political conservatism, status goals, preference for social stability, the political conservatism  $\times$  status goals interaction, and the preference for social stability  $\times$  status goals interaction. The results revealed a significant social stability  $\times$  status goals interaction ( $\beta = 4.44$ ,  $t(392) = 3.25$ ,  $p = .001$ ), while the political conservatism  $\times$  status goals interaction was no longer significant ( $\beta = .83$ ,  $t < 1$ ,  $p = .59$ ). Importantly, the bootstrapping analysis showed that the conditional indirect effect of political conservatism on WTP was significantly mediated by preference for social stability in the status-maintenance condition ( $\beta = 4.11$ ,  $SE = 2.28$ ; 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.45, 9.53]) but not in the other two conditions ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $SE = .52$ ; 95% CI = [-1.38, .65]).

As an additional robustness check, we conducted the same analysis by comparing (1) status maintenance with status advancement and (2) status maintenance with no status. All results held at a standard level of significance (Web Appendix M). However, the same bootstrapping analysis using preference for personal stability as a mediator showed that preference for personal stability did *not* mediate the effect of political conservatism on WTP in the status-maintenance condition ( $\beta = 1.50$ ,  $SE = 1.05$ ; 95% CI = [-.05, 4.27]) or in the other two conditions ( $\beta = -.08$ ,  $SE = .25$ ; 95% CI = [-.64, .39]; for details, see Table 3). Overall, the indirect effect of political conservatism on WTP for luxury goods was mediated by preference for social stability and moderated by status goals, providing support for  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ .

## Study 4: Momentary Manipulation of Status Goals

To test the generalizability of our effect, in Study 4 we employed a status goal manipulation independent of the evaluation task—namely, a writing task that induced participants

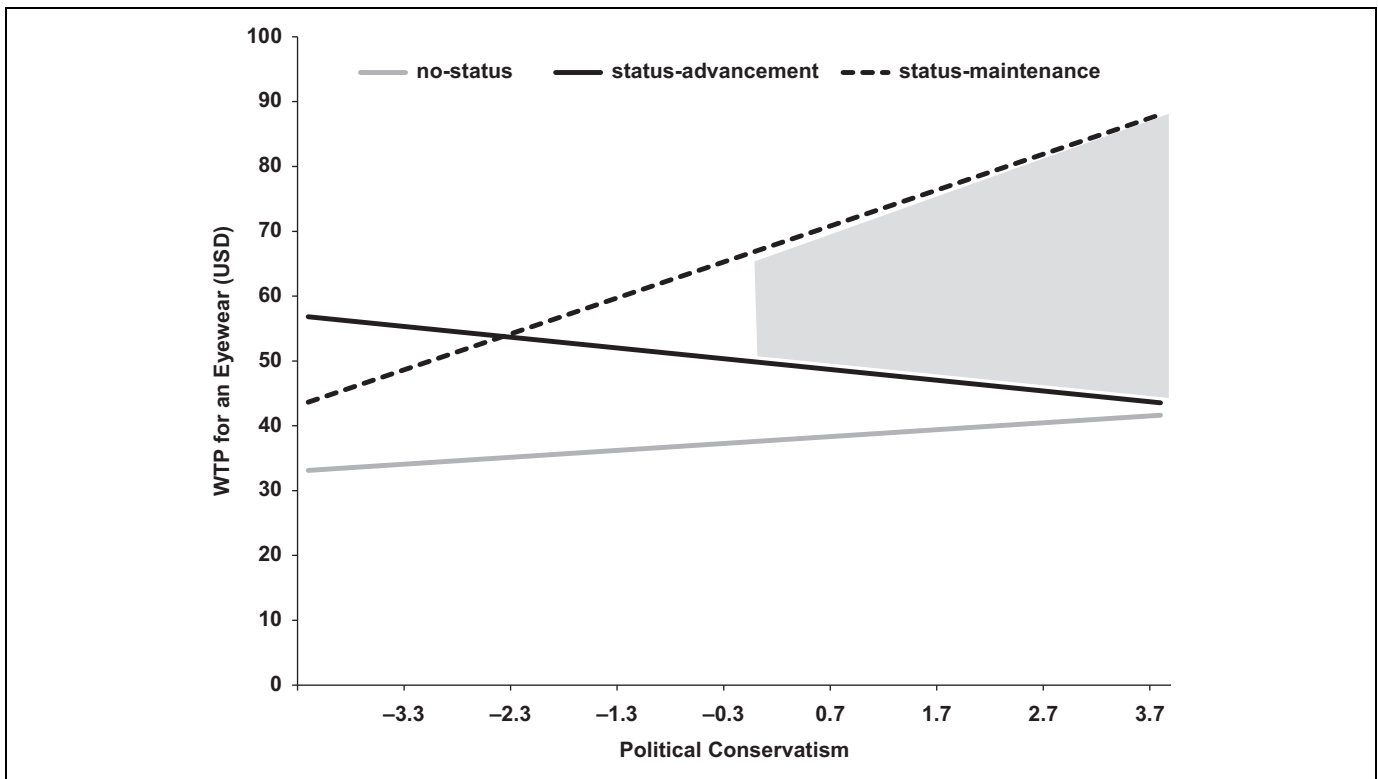


Figure 4. Study 3b: WTP (USD) for an eyewear product.

to focus on status maintenance or status advancement. In addition, we used another well-established measure of political conservatism consisting of multiple items (Mehrabian 1996).

### Method

We randomly assigned 264 participants (48% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 35$  years) recruited on MTurk to one of two status goals conditions (status-maintenance vs. status-advancement). After indicating their political conservatism as part of an initial survey, participants took part in a pretest for a future study on written language (our status goal manipulation). Next, as part of a consumer survey, they indicated their desire for six car brands. Finally, they answered the same demographic questions as in the previous studies.

**Political conservatism.** We assessed political conservatism using a scale (Mehrabian 1996) successfully employed in prior research (e.g., Winterich, Zhang, and Mittal 2012). Sample items include “I am politically more liberal than conservative” and “I cannot see myself ever voting to elect conservative candidates” (1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”;  $\alpha = .88$ ). We averaged these scores to form an overall political conservatism score ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ).

**Status goal manipulation.** Participants engaged in a short writing task. In the status-maintenance (status-advancement) condition, participants read:

A recent analysis of global socioeconomic insight revealed that Americans are expected to experience a decline [improvement] in their status in the next 5 years. This means that relative to citizens of other developed countries, Americans are expected to face more challenges and difficulties in maintaining [more chances and opportunities to improve] their social standing. Now please think about 2–3 ways you may be able to maintain [improve] your social standing in the next few years and list them in the space below.

A pretest confirmed that the status goal manipulation successfully activates different goal foci, while keeping the emphasis on status constant across conditions (Web Appendix N).

**Desire for luxury brands.** The format was the same as in Study 2, except the DV comprised only car brands (for pretest details, see Web Appendix O). Participants indicated the extent to which they wanted a product from six car brands (1 = “not at all,” and 7 = “very much”).

### Results

As in Study 2, our DV was the difference score between participants’ desire for luxury ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ;  $\alpha = .63$ ) and nonluxury ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ;  $\alpha = .82$ ) brands. We regressed the desire for luxury brands on political conservatism, status goal (status-maintenance = 0, status-advancement = 1), and their interaction as well as the three covariates. There was a significant political conservatism  $\times$  status goal interaction ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $t(257) = -2.91$ ,  $p = .004$ ; Web Appendix P). To probe the

**Table 4.** Study 3: Test of Moderated Mediation by Social and Personal Stability.

<b>Social Stability as a Mediator</b>								
<b>Antecedent</b>	<b>Consequent</b>							
	<b>Social Stability</b>				<b>Desire for Luxury (WTP)</b>			
	<b>Coeff.</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Coeff.</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Political conservatism (X)	.502	.048	10.456	<.0001	.719	1.543	.466	.642
Social stability (M)	—	—	—	—	3.750	1.369	2.738	.007
Status goals (V)	—	—	—	—	10.935	2.137	5.118	<.0001
M × V	—	—	—	—	4.442	1.367	3.250	.001
X × V	—	—	—	—	.832	1.528	.545	.586
Age	.008	.007	1.271	.204	-.327	.175	-1.870	.062
Income	-.090	.040	-2.030	.043	2.831	1.174	2.412	.016
Gender	-.022	.153	-.142	.887	5.017	4.066	1.234	.218
Model summary	R <sup>2</sup> = .223 F(4, 396) = 28.334, p < .0001				R <sup>2</sup> = .114 F(8, 392) = 6.336, p < .0001			

<b>Personal Stability as a Mediator</b>								
<b>Antecedent</b>	<b>Consequent</b>							
	<b>Social Stability</b>				<b>Desire for Luxury (WTP)</b>			
	<b>Coeff.</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Coeff.</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Political conservatism (X)	.222	.050	4.518	<.0001	2.191	1.417	1.547	.123
Personal stability (M)	—	—	—	—	3.211	1.397	2.299	.022
Status goals (V)	—	—	—	—	-4.127	6.171	-.669	.504
M × V	—	—	—	—	3.573	1.395	2.562	.011
X × V	—	—	—	—	2.525	1.404	1.798	.073
Age	.006	.007	.945	.345	-.299	.176	-1.699	.090
Income	-.056	.045	-1.249	.212	2.554	1.176	2.172	.031
Gender	-.047	.157	-.297	.767	4.139	4.079	1.015	.311
Model summary	R <sup>2</sup> = .053 F(4, 396) = 5.570, p = .0002				R <sup>2</sup> = .102 F(8, 392) = 5.566, p < .0001			

Notes: Political conservatism is mean centered. Status goal is coded as 1 if status-maintenance and -1 if status-advancement or no-status. Gender is coded as 1 if male and 0 if female.

interaction, we examined the slopes of political conservatism in each condition. In the status-maintenance condition, political conservatism predicted the desire for luxury brands ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $t(257) = 2.27$ ,  $p = .024$ ). Unexpectedly, we observed a marginally significant effect in the status-advancement condition, such that political conservatism negatively predicted the desire for luxury brands ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $t(257) = -1.76$ ,  $p = .079$ ). A spotlight analysis further revealed that the desire for luxury brands among conservatives (one standard deviation above the mean of political conservatism) was higher in the status-maintenance condition than in the status-advancement condition ( $\beta = .58$ ,  $t(260) = 2.21$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Among liberals (one standard deviation below the mean of political conservatism), the desire for luxury brands was higher in the status-advancement condition than in the status-maintenance condition ( $\beta = -.66$ ,  $t(260) = -2.52$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

Overall, Study 4 further demonstrates that political conservatism increases consumers' desire for luxury when the status-maintenance (but not status-advancement) goal is activated

( $H_1$ ) in a context in which the goal is activated independent of the consumption task. One limitation of Study 4 is that the status-maintenance goal condition might have triggered a feeling of loss by prompting participants to think that they may experience a decline in status (unlike in the status-advancement goal manipulation). Although findings on whether losses are more motivating than gains are mixed (Rothman and Salovey 1997), in Study 5 we address this concern by employing a nonloss framed manipulation for the status-maintenance goal.

### Study 5: Framing a Product as Luxury Versus Nonluxury

The objectives of Study 5 were twofold. First, we employed a nonloss-inducing status goal manipulation. Second, we varied the framing of a single product as luxury or nonluxury to demonstrate the luxury-specific nature of the effect. Indeed, if a preference for social stability drives the effect, we should

observe the effect only for goods that act as stabilizers of the social hierarchy (i.e., luxury goods), not for goods that do not typically have this association (i.e., nonluxury goods). Practically, the study offers a vivid example of how luxury managers can leverage the findings by changing their product framing.

### Method

Three hundred three students (45% female) from a large U.S. college on the West Coast were approached on campus by experimenters and voluntarily participated in exchange for a free snack. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions of a 2 (product framing: luxury vs. nonluxury)  $\times$  2 (status goal: status-maintenance vs. status-advancement) between-subjects design with political conservatism as a continuous variable. After assessing political conservatism with the same two-item measure as in Study 3b ( $\alpha = .72$ ;  $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ), we manipulated status goal. Finally, participants indicated their WTP for a set of headphones framed as a luxury or a nonluxury product, which served as our DV. We chose headphones because this product is relevant, status signaling, and accessible to our population (Bernstein 2016).

**Status goal manipulation.** We randomly assigned participants to one of two writing tasks. In the status-maintenance (status-advancement) condition, they read:

Recent research on college well-being has revealed that one key to a satisfying and successful college life is to maintain stable [improve] social status. By “social status,” we mean a relative social standing or the level of respect and admiration received by others in a society. Now, please think about all the respect and admiration you receive [ways you lack respect and admiration] from people around you in various domains of your life. When you’re done reflecting, please think about 2–3 ways you can maintain [enhance] your current social status for next few years and list them in the space below.

A pretest confirmed that our status goal manipulation successfully activates different goal foci, while keeping the emphasis on status constant across conditions (Web Appendix Q).

**Product framing.** We randomly assigned participants to read and evaluate the new headphones framed as luxury or nonluxury. Common to both conditions was the image of the product (Web Appendix R). However, in the luxury condition the tagline read “Top of the Top, the L-Pro line,” and the description used luxury-related words such as “luxurious” and “prestigious.” In the nonluxury condition, the tagline read “Made for comfort, the for-all headphones,” and the description used words such as “convenience” and “handiness.” A pretest confirmed that our product framing manipulation was successful (Web Appendix S).

### Results

A three-way analysis of variance on WTP, with status goal (status-maintenance vs. status-advancement) and product framing (luxury vs. nonluxury) as categorical variables and political

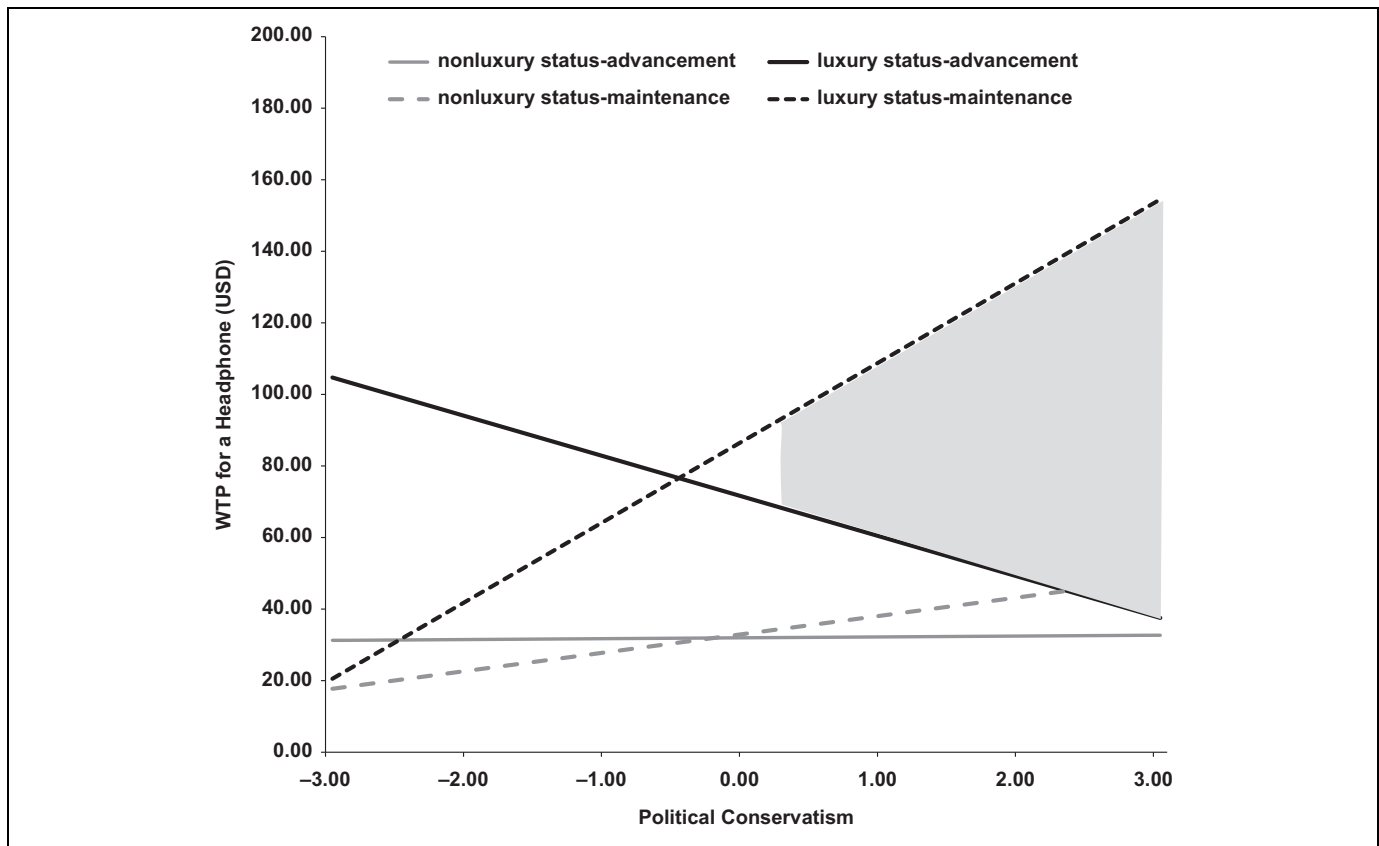
conservatism as a continuous variable, revealed a significant three-way interaction ( $F(1, 295) = 5.66$ ,  $p = .018$ ; Figure 5). There was a main effect of product framing, such that participants were willing to pay more in the luxury condition ( $M = 77.58$ ,  $SD = 74.80$ ) than in the nonluxury condition ( $M = 32.56$ ,  $SD = 29.68$ ;  $F(1, 295) = 54.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but no main effect of status goal ( $M_{\text{maintenance}} = 58.29$ ,  $SD = 62.03$ ;  $M_{\text{advancement}} = 50.83$ ,  $SD = 59.26$ ;  $F(1, 295) = 1.92$ ,  $p = .167$ ).

In addition, the status goal  $\times$  political conservatism interaction was significant only in the luxury condition ( $F(1, 144) = 9.25$ ,  $p = .003$ ; nonluxury condition:  $p = .297$ ). To explore this interaction further, we examined the slopes of political conservatism in each status goal condition. When the status-maintenance goal was activated, political conservatism positively predicted WTP ( $\beta = 22.33$ ,  $t(144) = 2.93$ ,  $p = .004$ ), but when the status-advancement goal was activated, political conservatism did not predict WTP ( $\beta = -.11.20$ ,  $t(144) = -1.40$ ,  $p = .163$ ). A floodlight analysis revealed that the effect of the status-maintenance (vs. status-advancement) goal on WTP turned significant at .3 standard deviation above the mean of political conservatism ( $\beta = 26.45$ ,  $t(144) = 2.13$ ,  $p = .035$ ).

Overall, Study 5 demonstrated that political conservatism increases consumers’ WTP for products framed as luxury when their status-maintenance goal is activated, providing further support for our hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). By contrast, political conservatism did not predict WTP for the product framed as nonluxury ( $\beta = 5.14$ ,  $t(151) = 1.51$ ,  $p = .133$ ), even when the status-maintenance goal was activated. In addition, WTP for the product framed as nonluxury did not differ across status goal conditions among conservatives (at one standard deviation above the mean of political conservatism;  $t < 1$ ,  $p = .356$ ). This finding confirms the proposition that the effect is specific to luxury goods because consumers view these goods as reinforcing the social hierarchy (Dubois and Ordabayeva 2015). By varying the framing of a single product, this study provides vivid evidence of *when* such framing may increase consumers’ responses to advertising depending on the dominant political ideology in the target market.

### General Discussion

Six studies reveal that political conservatism increases the desire for luxury goods when a status-maintenance goal is activated but not when a status-advancement goal is activated or in the absence of a status goal. To increase the generalizability of our findings, we used four different product categories (cars, fashion clothes, eyewear, and headphones). Furthermore, to provide convergence on our effects, we employed multiple measures of political conservatism (Table 1). Finally, a meta-analysis (Viechtbauer 2010) revealed that political conservatism significantly increased the desire for luxury goods across status-maintenance goal conditions ( $d_{\text{maintenance}} = .24$ ,  $z = 3.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but not across status-advancement conditions ( $d_{\text{advancement}} = -.12$ ,  $z = -1.82$ ,  $p = .07$ ; for details, see Web Appendix T). A  $p$ -curve analysis (Simonsohn, Nelson, and Simmons 2014) showed that the studies contain evidential



**Figure 5.** Study 5: WTP (USD) for headphones framed as luxury.

value (significantly right skewed;  $p < .001$ ) and are sufficiently powered, such that the evidential value is not inadequate (not flatter than 33% power,  $p > .999$ ; Web Appendix U).

### Theoretical Contributions

Our research makes two important theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to the literature on social status by providing empirical evidence for when status-maintenance versus status-advancement goals may matter in consumption contexts. Despite the influence of social status on consumption, research has mostly treated status as a single construct (e.g., Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015; Magee and Galinsky 2008). By showing that consumers engage in status-driven consumption in response to different status goals, our work provides first empirical support for the idea that consumers' need for status might be multidimensional.

Second, we contribute to the nascent literature (Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018) that links consumers' views on social hierarchy with their purchases facilitating their expression of status (i.e., luxury goods; Dubois and Ordabayeva 2015). Going beyond the question whether conservatives *may* desire luxury products more than liberals, we investigate *when* this pattern is likely to occur. In doing so, we shed light on the motivational underpinning behind conservatives' desire for luxury goods—that is, their desire to maintain, rather than advance, their status.

### Managerial Contributions

Investigation of political ideology carries important implications for managers because it provides a powerful segmentation tool (e.g., Weinstein 2004). Indeed, people of varying political ideologies differ in the brands they favor and media outlets they follow. As a result, brands tend to match the media used to their consumers' political orientations (Figure 1). For example, Jeep, the most desired car brand among Democrats, only sponsors left-leaning media (e.g., <http://sponsorfeedback.com>), and Apple, another patron of left-leaning media, actually stopped advertising on the Fox Network during the 2012 season because the company judged the broadcasted content as conflicting with its core philosophy (Alter 2013). Apart from one-time surveys mapping political party to brands, however, managers lack both resources giving them a systematic understanding of how political ideology may influence brand choices and guidelines on how to leverage political ideology as a segmentation tool. As luxury products appeal to specific audiences, refining the segmenting and targeting of consumers is central to the management of luxury brands (Dubois and Duquesne 1993).

To this end, we offer a more sophisticated but practical approach to luxury market segmentation. Our findings support an approach that takes into account two factors that together predict consumers' appetite for luxury goods: political ideology and status-maintenance activation. Importantly, data on both factors are accessible and identifiable at granular levels,

making it easy for managers to leverage our findings when designing their segmentation and targeting strategies. First, managers can easily identify political ideology along geographic segmentation (Bishop 2009) or through agencies (e.g., Pew Research Center, Gallup, ICPSR) in great detail (e.g., town level; see Web Appendix B for examples of available data sources). They can also assess political ideology through consumers' preferences for media outlets (Iyengar and Hahn 2009) or recognizable digital footprints on online platforms such as social media (e.g., "likes" for a political issue, following of a political figure; Boutyline and Willer 2017; Kosinski et al. 2016; Rentfrow et al. 2013). Second, they can easily assess status-maintenance activation by (1) using positional metrics such as education, income, and SES, which are often available in survey data (e.g., Consumer Expenditure Survey, U.S. Census); (2) identifying socioeconomic contexts that activate status-maintenance motives (e.g., economic downturns, when consumers may attempt to reassure their standing through luxury consumption; Nunes, Drèze, and Han 2011); or (3) momentarily heightening activation by altering the framing used in brand communications.

We also provide detailed guidelines on how managers of luxury brands can motivate luxury consumption (Figure 2). First, managers should consider whether their brands currently leverage status maintenance. If so, our findings suggest that simply identifying and targeting a conservative segment can increase their effectiveness. To do so, the brand could run targeted marketing campaigns (1) on media platforms patronized by conservatives (see Figure 1; Iyengar and Hahn 2009), (2) in conservative geographic areas (see Web Appendix B; Bishop 2009), or (3) online by targeting individual consumers associated with digital footprints indicative of conservatism (Boutyline and Willer 2017). If the brand does not currently emphasize status maintenance, managers could consider leveraging status-maintenance messages in their communications or targeting individual or situational contexts with high status-maintenance activation (e.g., consumers having high-status positions). In summary, our findings provide insights into how managers can drive luxury brands using political ideology or differential status goals rather than targeting a segment on the basis of wealth or status.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our research is not without limitations, which offer potential avenues for further research. First, our efforts center only on the political spectrum from conservative to liberal; however, a growing number of people are finding it difficult to identify with either mainstream political ideologies or new ones (e.g., Independents). In Study 2, for example, 36% of the consumers who disclosed their political ideology identified themselves as neither Republican nor Democrat. Little is known about how political orientations other than Republican or Democrat might influence the way people construe status and engage in luxury consumption. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018), we treated liberalism and a low degree of

conservatism synonymously, given our focus on conservatism. Furthermore, although research has shown that the single spectrum ranging from liberalism to conservatism can effectively capture variations in personal and sociopolitical perspectives, including a preference for social stability (Noël and Thérien 2008), liberalism and conservatism may differ on other dimensions for which a continuous scale measurement may be ill-suited. Additional research is necessary to further unpack the relationship between liberalism and conservatism and investigate their interplay with consumption practices.

Second, we limited our research to the U.S. context. Given previous findings that political conservatism carries different meanings across different countries (Benoit and Laver 2006; Castles and Mair 1984), the extent to which our results may replicate in a non-U.S. context is unclear. As an initial exploration, we conducted a study using the same design as in Study 5 in France. Although the study did not reveal a significant political conservatism  $\times$  status goal interaction (see Web Appendix V), a crucial difference was that political conservatism was significantly lower in the French sample ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) than the U.S. sample ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ,  $t(296) = -7.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). While average political conservatism did not differ from the scale midpoint in the U.S. sample ( $t(263) = -1.07$ ,  $p = .287$ ), this difference was significant in the French sample ( $t(296) = -9.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, the reliability of the Mehrabian scale was much lower in France ( $\alpha = .52$ ) than in the United States ( $\alpha = .88$ ), indicating that assessing political conservatism in France may involve different processes. Thus, an important boundary condition for the effect may lie in the characteristics of the distribution of political conservatism among the population of interest.

Third, future studies could investigate the conditions that may lead liberals to desire luxury goods more than conservatives. Across two of our studies, liberals showed a greater desire for luxury than conservatives when their current status position was low (Study 2) and when the status-advancement goal was activated (Study 4). These mixed results suggest that there are conditions in which political liberalism triggers luxury consumption. Of note, this effect was significant only in the studies employing real brands as the DV (Studies 2 and 4). Although we pretested brands on key dimensions tied to our investigation (e.g., luxurious, liking; Web Appendix J), the luxury brands may also differ from nonluxury brands on other dimensions not captured by the pretest. For example, consumers may perceive these brands as more horizontally differentiating (e.g., unique, innovative, creative) than nonluxury brands, leading to the observed effect (Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018).

A fourth potential avenue, equally appealing to managers and researchers, would be investigating contexts that activate status maintenance. As an initial attempt, we used the high-status position to activate status maintenance when testing our hypotheses in Studies 1 and 2. Beyond consumers' current status—a broad construct that may influence factors other than the degree of status-maintenance activation—researchers could try to identify individual or group variables that naturally

induce changes in status-maintenance activation. As status-maintenance goal activation stems from a person's current status state overlapping with his or her desired status state, situations that increase the overlap between states may foster status-maintenance activation. For example, a person who just obtained a promotion and was given new positional assets such as a company car may be more likely to focus on maintaining his or her current position than a person who was not promoted. In addition, among those holding a desired status position, increases in the instability of their current status position may activate status maintenance (Sligte, De Dreu, and Nijstad 2011). Thus, making salient the prospect of sliding back from a current status position (e.g., an elected official unsure about being reelected, an executive manager approaching the end of a contract term) may help activate the status-maintenance goal.

Finally, our work reflects a resurgence of interest in political ideology in the social sciences (Jost et al. 2003) and is a response to the emerging interest in political ideology in marketing (Jost 2017; Shavitt 2017). As Shavitt (2017, p. 500) notes with regard to political ideology, "understanding the psychology of liberals and conservatives can inform a range of managerial decisions." In this spirit, we hope our initial steps will pave the way for new efforts that increase understanding of the role of political ideology in marketing.

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