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The political divide: consumers' political ideology influences the effectiveness of global brand positioning strategies

Abstract

To investigate the impact of political ideology on the effectiveness of global brand positioning strategies, the current study draws on longitudinal sales data from 200 brands across 1,661 U.S. counties, combined with county-level presidential election data, and tests whether the dominant political ideology in local markets affects the relationship of perceived brand globalness (PBG) with brand equity. In line with social identity theory, the results demonstrate that political ideology is a crucial contingency of PBG's value-enhancing effect, such that PBG exerts more potent effects in ideologically liberal than in conservative markets (based on Democratic vs. Republican voting patterns). Two critical boundary conditions also arise: Brands' cultural symbolism reinforces this differential effect, but products' functionality diminishes it. Promotional activities, such as feature advertising, in-store displays, and price discounts, represent managerial levers for amplifying the identified value-enhancing effects of PBG in liberal markets or preserving them in conservative markets. Firms can gauge the ideological composition of local markets from publicly available voting records and adjust promotional support accordingly. These findings extend international business knowledge by offering novel insights into the role of political ideology in international marketing strategies and provide guidance for brand managers navigating ideologically divided markets.

Keywords: political ideology, global brand positioning strategies, perceived brand globalness, brand equity

Introduction

People's *political ideology*—their beliefs about how society should be organized and governed, which form a coherent view of political, economic, and social issues (Erikson & Tedin, 2003)—varies along a spectrum from liberal to conservative (Jost, 2006). In recent years, political polarization has deepened the divide between the two ends of this spectrum (Weber et al., 2021), a trend observed in major economies worldwide (for empirical evidence, see Web Appendix A). A recent survey indicates that two-thirds of respondents in both developed (e.g., United States, Germany, South Korea) and developing (e.g., Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria) countries believe that their societies are more divided today than in the past (Statista, 2023). This growing ideological divide poses a societal challenge of global concern, as people's political worldview becomes a social identity that shapes their relationships, lifestyle choices, and consumption behaviors (Boxell et al., 2024; Fernandes & Mandel, 2014; Khan et al., 2013), which in turn reinforces the divide (Richardson, 2025).

Political ideology likewise divides attitudes toward globalization: whereas liberals tend to view it favorably, conservatives are more skeptical, viewing it as a threat to local identity, tradition, and domestic industry (Jost, 2006; Margalit, 2012; Walter, 2021). These differences could be consequential for global brand positioning strategies that use symbols, themes, and imagery to signal brands' worldwide availability and associations with global consumer culture (Alden et al., 1999, 2006; Özsomer & Altaras, 2008; Westjohn et al., 2012), such as globally renowned spokespeople, English slogans, or themes of universal appeal.^[1] Yet research offers little insight into whether consumers' political ideology shapes how they respond to globally positioned brands, even as international marketers must increasingly navigate ideologically fragmented markets (Beugelsdijk & Luo, 2024; Luo & Tung, 2025).

To address this void, we investigate the implications of political ideology for global brand positioning strategies. Such strategies have contributed to the success of some of the world's most valuable brands and attracted considerable scholarly interest (Liu et al., 2021). For consumers, a global brand positioning may manifest in their *perceived brand globalness* (PBG), or belief that a “brand is marketed in multiple countries and is generally recognized as global in these countries” (Steenkamp et

al., 2003, p. 54). Because it is associated with increased perceptions of quality, prestige (Steenkamp et al., 2003), credibility (Özsomer & Altaras, 2008), and identity expressiveness (Xie et al., 2015), PBG can lead to more favorable brand attitudes (Winit et al., 2014), stronger purchase intentions (Diamantopoulos et al., 2019), and higher willingness to pay (Davvetas et al., 2015), though these benefits might vary across markets and consumer segments (Alden et al., 2006; Özsomer, 2012).

Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986)—which suggests that people derive their self-concepts from group memberships and favor objects and symbols associated with in-groups while distancing themselves from out-group associations—we argue that the value-generating potential of PBG depends on the ideological composition of the consumer base. Because global brand positioning explicitly ties a brand to globalization, PBG constitutes an ideologically charged brand association whose meaning shifts with consumers' political leanings: liberals may read the same globalness cue as a favorable in-group signal, conservatives as an unfavorable out-group signal. Markets predominantly characterized by conservative ideologies might therefore exhibit weaker or negative returns on PBG, whereas markets predominantly characterized by liberal ideologies likely exhibit stronger positive returns.

To investigate these propositions, we set our research in the United States, one of the most politically divided countries in the world (Boxell et al., 2024). Furthermore, it is the world's largest consumer market (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025), with significant influence on global consumer trends (Goedde, 2022), and is characterized by intense competition among homegrown global and local brands and foreign rivals (Gupta & Wright, 2019).^[2] We compile and analyze a unique dataset of longitudinal retail sales (2006–2020) by 200 brands across 1,661 counties in 49 U.S. states, combined with official presidential election voting records and consumer survey data. We leverage these data in two complementary studies. To test the theoretical model, Study 1 investigates the value-enhancing effect of PBG, the moderating role of political ideology, and boundary conditions related to cultural symbolism (i.e., degree to which a brand is viewed as symbolic of local culture; Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012) and product functionality (i.e., extent to which a product offers functional versus hedonic benefits; Batra & Ahtola, 1991). Moving beyond formal hypothesis tests, Study 2

explores several promotional variables as potential managerial levers to amplify or buffer the effects of political ideology.

This research makes three contributions. First, we contribute to international business literature by identifying political ideology as a crucial contingency of the effectiveness of global brand positioning strategies. We establish this with longitudinal, real-world sales data. To our knowledge, this is the first demonstration of the value-enhancing effect of PBG using such data. Our results challenge the prevailing assumption that global brand positioning produces uniformly positive outcomes: in distinctly conservative markets, its value-generating potential can vanish. Second, in a contextualization of the focal effect, we demonstrate that cultural symbolism and product functionality act as critical boundary conditions. Cultural symbolism reinforces the moderating effect of political ideology; product functionality diminishes it. Third, we identify three actionable promotional levers that managers can manipulate to optimize the effectiveness of their global brand positioning strategies in both liberal and conservative markets.

Theoretical foundation

Social identity theory

According to social identity theory (SIT), people define their self-concept according to two related components: personal identity and social identity. Personal identity relates to people's sense of their unique individual characteristics and life experiences, while social identity refers to how they define themselves through their social group memberships (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identities enable people to categorize both themselves and others into in-groups (similar to the self) and out-groups (different from the self) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Because people are inherently motivated to achieve and maintain a positive social identity, they favorably differentiate their in-groups from relevant out-groups through social comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity has been identified as a key factor shaping people's attitudes and behaviors. People seek consistency between their social identities and their actions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), so their behavior becomes a means of reinforcing and expressing their group memberships. Consequently, in-group favoritism prompts more favorable evaluations of people, objects, and

symbols that represent the in-group, along with skepticism toward or avoidance of out-group associations. For instance, consumers exhibit preferences for products and brands whose meanings align with their self-concepts (Sirgy, 1982), and they leverage these consumption preferences both to express their own identities and to assess others' identities (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Accordingly, we draw on SIT to predict behavioral patterns at the aggregate market level, where consumers' political identities are reflected collectively in the market's predominant political ideology.

Political identity as a social identity

In international marketing research, SIT has been applied predominantly to explain how consumers' sense of belonging to, or attitudes toward, specific nations or cultures influences their preferences for domestic versus foreign consumption alternatives (e.g., Fischer et al., 2022; Sharma, 2015; Verlegh, 2007; Westjohn et al., 2012; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015). Most constructs studied in this context—such as consumer ethnocentrism, xenocentrism, and national identity—share a premise: the boundary governing consumption runs along national or cultural lines. Yet social identity is not inherently confined to individuals' identification or disidentification with specific nations or cultures. In recent years, political identity, a person's sense of self derived from alignment with a political group and its worldview (Erikson & Tedin, 2003), has become a chronically salient basis for self-categorization among consumers (Bankert et al., 2017; Weber et al., 2021; West & Iyengar, 2022). We therefore relocate the basis of consumers' in-group/out-group categorization from national or cultural to ideological group membership, extending SIT in international marketing beyond nation-related constructs to political identity.

As a social identity, political identity partitions individuals into in- and out-groups and activates in-group favoritism and out-group differentiation (West & Iyengar, 2022); the same processes that underlie previously studied nation-related constructs, such as consumer ethnocentrism (e.g., Sharma, 2015; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015) or national identity (e.g., Fischer et al., 2022; Westjohn et al., 2012). However, it differs from them in two respects. First, ideological group membership divides consumers *within* countries rather than *between* them. Conservatives' views on tradition, order, and local attachment converge across countries; so do liberals' views on universalism and openness (Jost et al., 2003; Piurko et al., 2011). The relevant in-group is therefore defined by

shared worldview rather than nationality. Second, political identity operates at a higher level of abstraction. Consumer ethnocentrism, for example, is a domain-specific tendency to evaluate foreign products unfavorably (Sharma, 2015; Shimp & Sharma, 1987), whereas political ideology is a broad worldview that conditions attitudes across domains, including consumption (Fernandes & Mandel, 2014; Jung et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2013).

These worldviews rest on distinct values, motivations, and cognitive orientations that shape how conservatives and liberals process identity-relevant information. Conservatives show stronger needs for order, structure, and control (Jost et al., 2003); a lower tolerance for ambiguity and a corresponding motivation to reduce uncertainty (Jost, 2006); a lower openness to experience (Carney et al., 2008); and stronger in-group orientations (Brewer et al., 2023), relative to liberals. Moreover, due to their stronger local (cf. global) orientation, conservatives are more likely to advocate for nationalist or protectionist policies to avert potential threats to national sovereignty, identity, culture, and local industries (Al-Kire et al., 2022; Walter, 2021). In contrast, liberals' global orientation and stronger sense of identification with the world as a whole (Romano et al., 2021) may lead them to express greater interest in issues that transcend local boundaries and more positive beliefs about the capacity for global cooperation to solve them.

Brands as identity signals

Political identity is increasingly enacted through consumption (Weber et al., 2021). Because conservatives and liberals view each other as out-groups, they buy in ways that affirm their political in-group while setting them apart from the other. Since brands carry symbolic meanings, they become an important vehicle for consumers to construct, reinforce, and express their identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reed et al., 2012). In the context of this research, global brand positioning strategies aim to create and reinforce consumers' belief that a brand is marketed, recognized, and accepted in many countries (Steenkamp et al., 2003). Apart from signaling quality and prestige (Steenkamp et al., 2003), PBG evokes associations with globalization, cosmopolitanism, and cross-cultural integration (Steenkamp, 2019; Strizhakova et al., 2008), linked to values such as modernity, universalism, and diversity (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019; Holt et al., 2004; Steenkamp, 2019). These associations are not

evaluatively neutral; they elicit favorable or unfavorable responses, depending on how consumers regard globalization-related symbols, relative to their chosen social identities (Westjohn et al., 2012).

For consumers holding liberal views, brand globalness associations may signal in-group affiliation (or at least fail to elicit out-group perceptions), leading them to view the brand as congruent with their universalist values and favorable stance toward globalization and global citizenship (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019; Romano et al., 2021; Westjohn et al., 2012). In contrast, for conservatives, whose political worldview is anchored in local and national attachment, brand globalness associations may signal out-group affiliation, linking the brand to cosmopolitan elites, foreign influences, or an erosion of local identity (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019; Margalit, 2012; Walter, 2021). Web Appendix B offers individual-level empirical evidence supporting this assertion: Political conservatism is associated with less favorable attitudes toward globalization, stronger local cultural connections, and greater ethnocentrism. In short, consumers interpret brands' globalness according to their political worldview: what one political group perceives as an attractive signal of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and global connectivity (Holt et al., 2004; Steenkamp, 2019), another group may perceive as a threatening symbol of cultural erosion and foreign influence (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019; Mandler et al., 2021a).

Political ideology as collective political identity

The preceding discussion suggests that consumers' political identities shape their responses to PBG through in-group/out-group categorization that determines how they interpret and evaluate brand associations. This in turn should have implications for how PBG affects brand performance at the market level. To reflect the collective political identities of consumers within a market, we use the term "political ideology," which we conceptualize as a unidimensional continuum, on which liberals are positioned on the left and conservatives on the right (Jost, 2006; Muratova et al., 2025). If consumers in a market predominantly hold conservative (liberal) political identities, this is often reflected in aggregate indicators such as voting for Republican (Democratic) candidates. Therefore, voting records provide good proxies for prevailing political ideologies (Fernandes et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2013).

With this theoretical foundation, we predict that the value-enhancing potential of PBG depends on the political composition of local markets. In markets with a predominantly conservative ideology, a larger proportion of consumers will view global brands as out-group representations, resulting in weaker (or negative) returns to PBG at the aggregate level. In markets with a predominantly liberal ideology, a larger proportion of consumers will view global brands as identity-congruent, resulting in stronger positive returns.

Hypotheses development

Figure 1 illustrates the focal relationships in our proposed conceptual model, as we detail next.

[Figure 1]

Value-enhancing effect of perceived brand globalness

As noted previously, many studies have identified the association of PBG with positive consumer responses (for a review, see Liu et al., 2021). PBG can generate such value through two pathways, based on quality signaling or identity signaling (Strizhakova et al., 2011; Strizhakova & Coulter, 2015; Xie et al., 2015). On the quality pathway, globalness serves as a heuristic cue that signals competence, reliability, and reduced purchase risk (Özsomer & Altaras, 2008; Steenkamp et al., 2003). On the identity pathway, globalness carries symbolic meanings that allow consumers to express their values, affiliations, and sense of self (Strizhakova et al., 2008, 2011). Both pathways contribute to brand equity by positively influencing consumers' consideration of the focal brand, thereby helping sustain its long-term cash flows and profits (Datta et al., 2017; Keller, 2003).

Although this prediction aligns with prior conceptual and survey-based work, it has not been verified with real-world sales data. Along these lines, we formally hypothesize the following baseline effect:

Hypothesis 1 Perceived brand globalness increases brand equity.

Moderating effect of political ideology

As established in our theoretical foundation, we argue that political ideology moderates the effect of PBG on brand equity. PBG represents an identity-relevant brand association that evokes different interpretations and evaluations among conservatives versus liberals, due to their divergent

attitudes toward globalization. Put differently, we posit that the moderating effect of political ideology operates through the identity pathway, rather than the quality pathway (which likely applies across the political spectrum). For conservatives, whose political worldview is anchored in local and national attachment (Margalit, 2012; Walter, 2021), globalness associations are incongruent with their identity. For liberals, whose political worldview values cultural diversity and global community (Rogers & Jost, 2022; Romano et al., 2021), these associations signal identity congruence. Therefore, conservatives may be more critical of global brands and inclined to distance themselves from them, whereas liberals are more likely to embrace and affiliate with them through their consumption behaviors. We expect these dynamics to manifest in aggregate brand performance patterns at the market level. That is, in markets where a conservative political ideology dominates, PBG should generate weaker or negative returns to brand equity, but in markets where a liberal political ideology dominates, PBG should generate stronger positive returns.

Hypothesis 2 Conservative (liberal) political ideology weakens (strengthens) the value-enhancing effect of perceived brand globalness.

Boundary conditions: Cultural symbolism and product functionality

The moderating effect of political ideology on the value-enhancing effect of PBG could be conditioned by a brand's cultural symbolism, or its capacity to function as a symbolic representation that signals group membership and activates identity-based processing (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reed et al., 2012). *Cultural symbolism* refers to the degree to which a brand is perceived as representative of and associated with a specific culture (Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012; Torelli et al., 2010), so culturally symbolic brands are imbued with meaning that connects them to particular groups and their values, traditions, and ways of life. For example, consumers consensually associate brands like Budweiser (American), Corona (Mexican), and Burberry (British) with specific cultural schemas (Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012). For this research, we focus on local cultural symbolism, or the degree to which a brand is perceived as representative of and associated with consumers' own national culture.

Importantly, cultural symbolism is conceptually distinct from other brand attributes studied in localness literature, such as geographic presence (whether brands operate in one or multiple countries;

Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004), ownership (whether brands are domestically or foreign-owned; Winit et al., 2014), or origin (where brands are headquartered; Samiee et al., 2005). As Swoboda et al. (2012, p. 74) clarify, cultural symbolism “does not focus on reach as a local brand dimension; rather it focuses on the brand’s cultural component.” A brand may be foreign-owned and globally distributed but still acquire strong local cultural symbolism through sustained engagement with local consumers or cultural practices (Sichtmann et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2015). Conversely, a domestically owned brand may carry little cultural meaning. Our focus is specifically on the symbolic, identity-relevant dimension of cultural association, not legal ownership or distribution footprints.

According to SIT, local cultural symbolism should heighten a brand’s identity relevance by strengthening its connection to consumers’ cultural in-group. A brand that evokes strong own-culture associations offers a more potent marker of in-group status (Sichtmann et al., 2019), so culturally symbolic brands should elicit stronger identity-based processing and make consumers’ political worldviews more salient in their brand evaluations. We therefore expect cultural symbolism to amplify the influences of political ideology on PBG’s value-enhancing effect. Brands with strong local cultural symbolism and perceived globalness conjoin local cultural meaning with global associations. Liberals, who embrace cultural diversity and global connectivity, likely evaluate these two elements positively and see them as mutually reinforcing: Local cultural symbolism provides authentic cultural resonance, while globalness signals worldwide reach and success (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019; Özsomer, 2012). For conservatives, these elements pull in opposite directions: they value local cultural symbolism as an expression of in-group identity but reject globalization (Web Appendix B). As cultural symbolism increases, this asymmetry between liberal and conservative responses to PBG should become more pronounced.

Hypothesis 3 Cultural symbolism strengthens the moderating effect of political ideology on the relationship between perceived brand globalness and brand equity.

Finally, not all product categories are equally appropriate for global brand positioning strategies (Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2016). For example, functional products satisfy basic needs or help accomplish practical tasks, so their consumption tends to be cognitively driven and goal-

oriented, linked to effectiveness, usefulness, or necessity (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). In contrast, hedonic products provide affective and sensory experiences, such that their consumption is more affect-driven and not considered a strict necessity, evoking associations with pleasure, fun, enjoyment, and emotional satisfaction (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

From an SIT perspective, we predict that product functionality is inversely related to the relevance of identity-based processing, which might condition the moderating effect of political ideology on the value-enhancing effect of PBG. Because hedonic products tend to be more symbolic and identity-expressive, and their discretionary consumption is often socially visible, they appear more suitable for communicating about who the consumer is and what they value (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Consistent with this reasoning, research shows that identity signaling is stronger in more symbolic product categories (Strizhakova & Coulter, 2015). Thus, we anticipate that hedonic products, by evoking identity-based processing, should heighten the differential responses to PBG between conservatives and liberals. Because functional products primarily address basic needs, they are less suitable for constructing, reinforcing, or expressing consumers' self-concepts (Huber et al., 2018). Instead, consumers focus on objective performance criteria and practical outcomes, and this utilitarian focus attenuates the relevance of social identities in shaping responses to brand globalness. Thus, differences in conservatives' and liberals' responses to PBG should be less pronounced for functional products.^[3]

Hypothesis 4 Product functionality weakens the moderating effect of political ideology on the relationship between perceived brand globalness and brand equity.

Study 1

Data sources and variables

To test our hypotheses, we compiled a unique data set from proprietary retail scanner data, publicly available election data, and two consumer surveys. Table 1 provides an overview of all variables and data sources.

[Table 1]

Retail scanner data. We obtained retail scanner data through the NielsenIQ Datasets at the Kilts Center for Marketing Data Center at The University of Chicago Booth School of Business. The initial data comprise weekly product unit sales, pricing, and store-environment information generated by point-of-sale systems across more than 60,000 stores in 2,762 U.S. counties between 2006 and 2020 (Kilts Center, 2022). These product–store–week-level data span 10 diverse product categories: beer, non-alcoholic beverages, coffee & tea appliances, confectionery, laundry care, condiments & sauces, cosmetics, hair care, nutritional supplements, and olive oil. We manually matched products (e.g., Dr Pepper Berries & Cream, Dr Pepper Cherry Vanilla) with brands (Dr Pepper) to facilitate our aggregation of sales to the brand level. We also aggregated these data by county and year, to identify all brand sales across all stores within the same county in a given year. The number of stores varies across counties, so we recorded this variable during the aggregation process and included it as a control in our estimations. Our focus on the county level matches the most granular level of electoral voting data. By tracing longitudinal variations in brand equity and political ideology at the county level, we can isolate the relationship better than would be possible if we aggregated observations to the state or country level. Those approaches would likely conceal significant intra-state variance, as suggested by the intra-class correlation of 0.46.

Following Ailawadi et al.’s (2003) well-established approach (e.g., Gielens et al., 2018; Slotegraaf & Pauwels, 2008), we operationalized brand equity as the difference between the revenue of the focal brand and the average revenue of (non-branded) private labels in the same category, such that^[4]

$$(1) BEquity_{nct} = Revenue_{nct} - \frac{1}{M} \sum_{m=1}^M Revenue_{mct},$$

where n indicates the brand, m indicates the private label, M equals the total number of private labels, c reflects the county, and t is the year.

Brand perception survey. We conducted a large-scale online survey on Prolific Academic to obtain information about consumers’ perceptions of the 747 brands in the retail data. Web Appendix C provides a detailed description of the data collection and cleaning procedures. The final sample comprised 1,988 U.S. respondents ($M_{age} = 35.9$ years, $SD = 13.9$, $Min = 18$, $Max = 84$; 70.1%

women).^[5] Each respondent received a randomly selected set of 10 brands from a single product category. To measure PBG and cultural symbolism, we adopted seven-point Likert-scale items from Steenkamp et al. (2003), such that PBG includes two items (“I think consumers overseas buy [brand]” and “[Brand] is sold all over the world”; see the scale adaptation by Mandler, 2019), and cultural symbolism relies on a single item (“I associate this brand with things that are American”). We also captured the extent to which respondents are familiar with each brand (“I am very unfamiliar/familiar with [brand]”; adapted from Klink & Smith, 2001). Because reliable brand ratings require a basic level of familiarity, the final PBG and cultural symbolism scores solely reflect ratings from respondents who were at least moderately familiar (at or above the scale midpoint) with the respective brand. We eliminated any brands that supported fewer than 10 observations. These restrictions led to a sample of 279 brands. Because sample reduction based on brand familiarity introduces an imbalance in favor of brands in heavily advertised product categories, we constrained the analysis to a more balanced set of 200 brands, for which we had access to 5,128 unique ratings. To account for potential confounding effects (e.g., more global brands tend to prompt greater awareness), we also included brand familiarity as a control variable.

The cross-sectional nature of the brand perception survey prevents us from accounting directly for potential temporal changes in PBG due to shifts in brands’ positioning strategies. To enhance confidence in our results, we developed a web-scanning script to identify rebranding activities across all sampled brands during the observation period. We document this complementary research effort in Web Appendix D. The web scanning indicated that 32 brands in our sample engaged in rebranding activities, though most of these activities did not involve shifts in brand globalness. Nonetheless, in a conservative robustness check, we excluded these 32 brands from our sample; the substantive findings remained unchanged.

Election data. From MIT Election Data, we obtained detailed, county-level election results for the U.S. presidential elections in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. Then we merged these data with the retail scanner data, using unique county identifiers. In line with previous studies (e.g., Fernandes et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2013), we used voting behavior as a proxy for residents’ political ideology and

captured the predominant political ideology in each county as the difference between the percentage of Republican votes and Democratic votes:

$$(2) PIdeology_{ct} = \frac{(Votes_{Republican_{ct}} - Votes_{Democratic_{ct}})}{Total\,Votes_{ct}},$$

where c denotes the county, and t indicates the year. For non-election years, we apply forward filling until more recent voting data become available, while controlling for the number of years since the most recent election.

Product category survey. We conducted a second survey with 251 U.S. consumers to assess the perceived functionality of the products in our data set. After excluding 28 outliers, based on survey completion times, the final sample comprised responses from 223 consumers, heterogeneous in age ($M = 32.9$ years, $SD = 11.4$) and balanced in gender (52.5% women, 47.5% men). All respondents had earned high approval rates on Prolific Academic, from 96% to 100% ($M = 99.6\%$). To measure product functionality, we used a bipolar scale adopted from Melnyk et al. (2012), ranging from 1 = “Definitely hedonic (enjoyable, fun)” to 7 = “Definitely utilitarian (functional, useful).” In addition, we measured perceived category risk (two items; e.g., “A poor choice of a [product category] would be upsetting”; Batra et al., 2000), which we included as a control, as suggested by prior global branding studies (Batra et al., 2000; Mandler, 2019; Steenkamp et al., 2003).

County controls. Finally, we obtained information from multiple public sources to account for county differences (see Table 1). These controls comprise income per capita, the unemployment rate (%), population density (population/area), population (in 10,000), Caucasian/White population (%), net international migration, the share of citizens aged 65 and older (%), and the Rural-Urban Continuum Code (1 = metropolitan, 9 = nonmetropolitan).

The resulting data set comprises 1,843,578 observations related to 200 brands competing in 10 distinct product categories (see Web Appendix E for a full list), sold in more than 32,000 stores across 1,661 U.S. counties and 49 states between 2006 and 2020. Table 2 summarizes the number of brands and observations for each product category. Web Appendix F documents the descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables.

[Table 2]

Analytical procedure

To test our hypotheses, we estimate the following regression equation:

$$(3) BEquity_{nct} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PBG_n + \beta_2 PIdeology_{ct} + \beta_3 CSymbolism_n + \beta_4 PFunctionality_n + \beta_5 PBG_n \times PIdeology_{ct} + \beta_6 PBG_n \times CSymbolism_n + \beta_7 PBG_n \times PFunctionality_n + \beta_8 PIdeology_{ct} \times CSymbolism_n + \beta_9 PIdeology_{ct} \times PFunctionality_n + \beta_{10} PBG_n \times PIdeology_{ct} \times CSymbolism_n + \beta_{11} PBG_n \times PIdeology_{ct} \times PFunctionality_n + \beta_{12} ElectionDist_t + \Gamma' Controls_{nct} + \alpha_c + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{nct},$$

where n indicates the brand, c is the county, and t denotes the year. We rescale the dependent variable *BEquity* by a factor of 10,000 and mean-center *PBG*, *CSymbolism*, and *PFunctionality* to ease interpretation. With *ElectionDist*, we capture the temporal gap between a given year t and the previous election (0–3 years). The vector $\Gamma'Controls$ includes all brand, category, and county-related control variables; we log-transformed income per capita and population density to address their non-normality. Finally, county (α_c) and year (γ_t) fixed effects help account for any remaining unobserved heterogeneity in location or time.

Results

In Table 3, we report non-standardized beta coefficients, allowing direct interpretation of brand equity changes (in \$10,000) per one-unit increase in *PBG*. The Model 1 results indicate a positive association between *PBG* and brand equity ($b = 9.70$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$, 95% confidence interval $[CI] = [9.45, 9.95]$), in support of Hypothesis 1. When we test the moderating effect of political ideology on this relationship, Model 2 reveals a negative coefficient for the interaction between *PBG* and political ideology ($b = -14.60$, $SE = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$, 95% $CI = [-15.39, -13.81]$), such that conservative ideology weakens the relationship, and liberal ideology strengthens it, as we predicted in Hypothesis 2.

[Table 3]

To facilitate interpretation of the interaction effect, we plotted predicted brand equity as a function of *PBG* for liberal and conservative counties. Figure 2 shows the results of 300 predictions (50 levels of *PBG* [evenly spaced between 5th and 95th percentiles] $\times$ 3 levels of political ideology

[5th, 50th, 95th percentiles] $\times$ 2 groups), with all other covariates held at their observed values (i.e., predictive margins). The solid lines show the predicted brand equity for typical (median) liberal and conservative counties, and the boundaries of the surrounding ribbons indicate the predicted brand equity at the 5th (lower) and 95th (upper) percentiles of political ideology for each group. Both slopes are positive but differ in their steepness: At high levels of PBG, predicted brand equity is approximately 60% higher in liberal counties than in conservative counties.

[Figure 2]

With Model 3, we test whether the moderating role of political ideology depends on cultural symbolism. The coefficient for the three-way interaction among PBG, political ideology, and cultural symbolism is negative and statistically significant ($b = -11.40$, $SE = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = $[-12.57, -10.23]$), such that the negative moderating effect of political ideology appears stronger for more culturally symbolic brands, in line with Hypothesis 3. Finally, Model 4 affirms the role of product functionality as a boundary condition. The positive coefficient of the three-way interaction among PBG, political ideology, and product functionality is significant ($b = 6.45$, $SE = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = $[5.93, 6.97]$), in support of Hypothesis 4. Thus, the negative moderating effect of political ideology weakens for more functional products.

With the model estimates, we also predict brand equity as a function of PBG in different conditions, marked by weak versus strong cultural symbolism (5th and 95th percentiles), low versus high product functionality (5th and 95th percentiles), and liberal versus conservative counties (5th, 50th, and 95th percentiles for each group). Figure 3 plots the results. Regarding the role of cultural symbolism (Panel A), the positive association between PBG and predicted brand equity arises only for culturally symbolic brands. At high levels of PBG and cultural symbolism, predicted brand equity is approximately 90% greater in typical liberal counties than in typical conservative counties. At low levels of cultural symbolism, the value-enhancing effect of PBG vanishes; the slope even inverts, such that greater PBG can harm brands, regardless of the market's predominant political ideology. Turning to the role of product functionality (Panel B), the plot shows a positive relationship between PBG and brand equity only for hedonic products with low functionality. At high PBG levels, predicted brand

equity is approximately 80% higher in typical liberal counties than in typical conservative counties.

For utilitarian products with high functionality, we observe no such positive slope, and increasing PBG levels have either no influence (conservative counties) or a slightly negative influence (liberal counties) on brand equity.

[Figure 3]

Additional analyses

To enhance confidence in our findings, we conducted several additional analyses, documented in detail in Web Appendix G. To address potential endogeneity arising from non-random global positioning decisions, we implemented a two-stage control-function approach using a peer-based instrument and an instrument-free copula approach. To assess robustness to alternative operationalizations, we included sales revenue as an alternative dependent variable and adjusted the political ideology measure by weighting voting data by total county population to account for variations in voter turnout. Finally, we aggregated the data to the state level and replaced county-level with state-level controls. The results remained substantively unchanged across all these tests.

Study 2

The Study 1 findings establish that political ideology moderates the value-enhancing effect of PBG on brand equity, and cultural symbolism and product functionality serve as important boundary conditions. From a managerial perspective, a natural follow-up question thus arises: How should brand managers respond to ideology-induced differences in consumer responses to globally positioned brands? To answer this, we adopt an exploratory perspective in Study 2 and investigate whether and how managers might use promotional tools to manage political ideology effects. We focus on three frequently studied retail promotional variables: feature advertising, in-store displays, and price discounts (e.g., Blattberg et al., 1995; Slotegraaf & Pauwels, 2008; Van Heerde et al., 2000). *Feature advertising* by retailers appears in local newspapers, free-standing inserts, circulars, and on the retailer's website, aiming to draw attention to specific branded products. *In-store displays* are special (non-permanent) presentations, such as end-aisle displays, special racks, or prominent shelf positions,

that increase a brand's physical visibility within the retail setting. *Price discounts* are temporary reductions in price that lower financial barriers to purchase (Kilts Center, 2022).

We propose that these promotional tools operate through a signal amplification logic. By drawing consumers' attention to a brand, they increase the salience of its perceived globalness in consumers' evaluations. Feature advertising and in-store displays, as communication-based mechanisms, highlight the brand and its attributes ("reason to buy"); price discounts draw attention through incentive-based mechanisms that lower purchase barriers and prompt brand consideration ("incentive to buy") (Keller, 2003). Across these different pathways, all three promotional tools may increase the likelihood that consumers notice, process, and evaluate a brand, thereby making PBG associations more accessible and amplifying consumers' ideologically driven responses. Because political ideology shapes how consumers respond to PBG (as established in Study 1), this amplification may widen the gap in outcomes across liberal and conservative markets.

Data sources and variables

Study 2 draws on the data set we gathered for Study 1, combined with promotional activity data from more than 26,000 stores across 1,108 counties and 49 states. To obtain these detailed promotional data, we relied on NielsenIQ's weekly indicators of whether a product is being promoted in feature advertising, in-store displays, or price discounts (Kilts Center, 2022). Through aggregation, we constructed three annual intensity measures. *Feature intensity* captures the number of weeks per year that a brand's products are promoted in feature advertising. *Display intensity* measures the number of weeks per year its products appear in temporary in-store display locations. *Discount intensity* measures the number of weeks per year during which the brand's products are offered at a price at least 10% below the brand's annual mode price. Because NielsenIQ tracks promotional activities for a subset of stores, the resulting data set is more restricted than the one we used in Study 1; we address the potential selection bias in the "Additional analyses" section. Web Appendix H reports the descriptive statistics and correlations for Study 2.

Analytical procedure

To examine whether promotional tools can amplify the moderating effect of political ideology, we estimate the following regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned}
(4) \text{BEquity}_{nct} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PBG}_n + \beta_2 \text{PIdeology}_{ct} + \beta_3 \text{CSymbolism}_n + \\
& \beta_4 \text{PFunctionality}_n + \beta_5 \text{PromoIntensity}_{nct} + \beta_6 \text{PBG}_n \times \text{PIdeology}_{ct} + \beta_7 \text{PBG}_n \times \\
& \text{PromoIntensity}_{nct} + \beta_8 \text{PIdeology}_{ct} \times \text{PromoIntensity}_{nct} + \beta_9 \text{PBG}_n \times \text{PIdeology}_{ct} \times \\
& \text{PromoIntensity}_{nct} + \beta_{10} \text{ElectionDist}_t + \Gamma' \text{Controls}_{nct} + \alpha_c + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{nct},
\end{aligned}$$

where n is the brand, c indicates the county, and t indicates the year; *PromoIntensity* refers to feature, display, or discount intensity, respectively. We estimate Equation 4 separately for each promotion (Models 5–7). As in Study 1, we rescale *BEquity* by a factor of 10,000; mean-center *PBG* and all moderators (except *PIdeology*, whose zero point is already interpretable); *ElectionDist* captures the temporal distance of year t from the previous election; $\Gamma' \text{Controls}$ includes all brand, category, and county-related control variables, along with the two promotional variables that are not focal in each moderator model^[6]; and α_c and γ_t represent county and year fixed effects, respectively. The specification mirrors Study 1, augmented with relevant three-way interaction terms involving promotional intensity variables.

Results

Table 4 contains the estimation results. Consistent with Study 1, *PBG* positively affects brand equity, and political ideology weakens this positive association. All three-way interactions are negative and statistically significant. Thus, all three promotional tools amplify the moderating effect of political ideology on the *PBG*–brand equity relationship, though feature advertising and in-store displays exhibit stronger amplification effects than price discounts.

[Table 4]

Figure 4 illustrates these results in three-dimensional surface plots. We depict the predictions of brand equity as a function of *PBG*, together with feature intensity (upper panels), display intensity (middle panels), and discount intensity (lower panels), across liberal and conservative counties (5th and 95th percentiles of political ideology). The control variables are held at sample means, and we add the mean county fixed effect to each predicted value.

[Figure 4]

The plots reveal that in liberal counties the positive relationship between PBG and predicted brand equity becomes increasingly pronounced with greater promotional intensity. For brands with high PBG, intensified promotional support unlocks substantial additional brand equity. Conversely, increasing promotional support for brands with low PBG diminishes their equity in liberal markets. Both patterns are more pronounced for the visibility-based promotional tools (feature advertising and in-store displays) than for price discounts.

In conservative counties, the effect patterns differ in important ways. More in-store displays pose the greatest risk for globally positioned brands, with a negative effect that is substantially more pronounced at high versus low levels of PBG. It produces the steepest decline in brand equity among all three promotional tools. Feature advertising shows a similar, though less differentiated pattern, such that its intensified use reduces brand equity across PBG levels. Price discounts exhibit the weakest amplification effect.

Additional analyses

We conducted several additional analyses to address potential endogeneity concerns and demonstrate the robustness of our findings (for details, see Web Appendix I). As noted, NielsenIQ records feature, display, and discount intensity only in selected stores. Its selection criteria are unknown and likely non-random, so we applied a Heckman two-stage selection model to correct for potential selection bias. The results remained consistent with our main analysis. Furthermore, we retested H1–H4 with the restricted Study 2 sample ($N = 929,051$), while controlling for promotional activities. All focal relationships held, providing confidence in the robustness of our main findings.

Because promotional decisions can have compensatory or synergistic effects, we also estimated models that account for interdependencies among the three promotional tools. First, we included two-way interactions between each promotional variable and the other two. Because the interaction effects are consistently positive across all models, they suggest pairwise synergies rather than compensatory effects. Second, we estimated a model that includes the three-way interaction among feature, display, and discount intensity ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.001$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [0.01, 0.04]$). It is positive and statistically significant, such that the simultaneous deployment of the three promotional tools appears to produce synergistic direct effects on brand equity beyond what pairwise

combinations achieve. Our focal findings regarding the moderating role of political ideology remain unchanged across all these specifications.

Discussion and implications

Does the political ideology that dominates in local markets influence the effectiveness of global brand positioning strategies? According to our research, the answer is yes. Drawing on SIT, we hypothesize that the relationship between perceived brand globalness (a manifestation of global brand positioning strategies) and brand equity is contingent on prevailing political ideologies, which underlie diverging views on the desirability of globalization, and further that the impact of political ideology varies with boundary conditions that influence the relevance of identity cues. We tested these propositions using a unique data set that combines proprietary retail scanner data, presidential election voting records, and survey-based consumer perceptions of brands and product categories. Consistent with our expectations, PBG exerts a stronger, value-enhancing effect in liberal markets than in conservative markets. Cultural symbolism reinforces the differential effect of political ideology, whereas product functionality diminishes it. In an exploratory investigation, we add that feature advertising, in-store displays, and price discounts amplify the differential effects of political ideology; the nature and magnitude of this amplification vary across the three tools. An auxiliary study at the individual level (Web Appendix B) validates the appropriateness of using voting behavior as a proxy for political ideology and also provides novel insights into how political ideology relates to an array of constructs relevant to global branding research and practice.

Theoretical implications

First, this research extends social identity theory in international marketing from nation-related constructs, such as consumer ethnocentrism and national identity (e.g., Fischer et al., 2022; Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Verlegh, 2007; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015), to political identity as a social identity. In doing so, we relocate the basis of in-group/out-group categorization from national or cultural to ideological group membership. Brand globalness associations carry symbolic meanings that conservatives and liberals interpret and evaluate differently due to diverging attitudes toward globalization. Consumers accordingly embrace or discount globally positioned brands depending on

whether perceived globalness signals in-group affiliation or an out-group association. Consistent with this reasoning, PBG increases brand equity more in liberal than in conservative markets, which establishes that ideological composition conditions the returns to global brand positioning strategies. Political ideology thereby joins the array of established moderators of global brand effects (Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Diamantopoulos et al., 2019; Mandler et al., 2021a) and extends previously documented links between political ideology and consumption (Fernandes & Mandel, 2014; Khan et al., 2013) to international business contexts.

Second, our findings verify and refine the current understanding of when PBG creates value: the value-enhancing effect of PBG, so far established with self-reported perceptions and intentions (Liu et al., 2021), is confirmed on a sales-based measure of brand equity, yet is bounded by identity relevance. In specific circumstances, such as weak cultural symbolism or high product functionality, PBG might not be conducive to brand value, which challenges some findings of research based on self-reported measures (e.g., Diamantopoulos et al., 2019; Steenkamp et al., 2003). At very low levels of cultural symbolism, the relationship between PBG and brand equity can even become negative, suggesting that global brands that lack local associations suffer a disadvantage. Furthermore, the value-enhancing effects of PBG concentrate among hedonic products, whereas these effects disappear or even turn negative for functional products. This indication of the relevance of product categories is consistent with the notion that identity-based processing is more common during hedonic consumption, in which setting products can serve as vehicles for self-expression, than during functional consumption, when utilitarian considerations dominate. This conditioning effect establishes an important extension of the relatively limited understanding of product category effects for global branding (Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2016). In sum, identity relevance—strengthened by cultural symbolism and weakened by product functionality—determines when the identity pathway of PBG operates.

Third, our exploratory investigation of promotional activities extends the standardization–adaptation discourse in international marketing (e.g., Dow, 2006; Katsikeas et al., 2006; Mandler et al., 2021b). Although prior work has investigated the performance consequences of aligning a firm’s marketing activities with macro- and micro-environmental conditions, it mostly focuses on strategic

decisions related to product, pricing, distribution, and promotion (e.g., Katsikeas et al., 2006; Lages et al., 2008; Shi et al., 2010). This strategic nature also applies to brand positioning decisions: A brand's perceived positioning cannot be changed instantaneously, and adapting to the unique idiosyncrasies of diverse local markets is prohibitive from both a brand consistency and a cost standpoint. Hence, we shift the focus to tactical, locally deployable promotional tools that can modulate the effectiveness of global brand positioning strategies. By identifying promotional variables that reinforce the desired effects of global brand positioning in favorable markets and attenuate the undesired effects in less favorable ones, we demonstrate that the effectiveness of marketing strategies, which can be rigid in temporal and geographical terms, depends on the tactical support they receive in a given market. Specifically, we find that global brand positioning strategies contribute most to brand equity when combined with promotional activities in ideologically favorable markets, whereas intensified promotional activity in unfavorable markets can backfire. The three promotional tools further differ in their amplification capabilities, with brand visibility efforts (feature advertising and in-store displays) exhibiting stronger effects than price discounts. Thus, signal amplification grows more potent when promotional activities increase the salience of identity-relevant brand cues than when they reduce financial barriers, as discounts direct attention to the transaction rather than to brand attributes.

Managerial implications

Because of how we operationalize brand equity, we can derive concrete monetary consequences of changes in a brand's perceived globalness. To establish the magnitude of the identified effects, we re-estimate our models from Study 1 in log-log form, which yields conventional elasticities. On average, a 10% increase in PBG leads to a 4.6% increase in brand equity. However, this average conceals a significant difference in the effectiveness of global brand positioning strategies between liberal and conservative markets: the same increase in PBG leads to 8.7% more brand equity in liberal counties (50th percentile of this political ideology) versus 2.8% more brand equity in conservative counties (also 50th percentile). That is, responsiveness to changes in brand globalness appears roughly three times greater in liberal markets than in conservative markets. The predictive results from Study 2 concur that predicted brand equity in liberal counties spans approximately $\pm\$10$ million, whereas in conservative counties it spans approximately $\pm\$600,000$ (Figure 4). This scale

difference underscores the substantially greater economic results of global brand positioning strategies in liberal markets, reinforcing the notion that returns to PBG tend to be concentrated in ideologically favorable environments.

These differences raise the question of how brands should respond to consumer preferences that vary with local political ideology. From a practical standpoint, mass-market brands are unlikely to segment markets along partisan lines; even in strongly conservative counties, highly visible global brands can sell substantial volumes or command a significant price premium. Instead, our findings support the regional calibration of promotional effort. Publicly available voting records at the county or state level allow firms to characterize the ideological composition of the markets they serve and to adjust promotional support accordingly. Study 1 identifies where such calibration pays off most: the ideological gap in returns to global branding strategies is widest for culturally symbolic brands in hedonic categories. For non-symbolic brands in functional categories, ideological considerations weigh less heavily, and the costs of regional calibration might outweigh the returns.

Our results further indicate that which tools to calibrate, and in which direction, depends on the ideological composition of the market. In liberal markets, brands with a moderate to strong global positioning should invest heavily in promotional visibility through feature advertising and in-store displays (feature advertising promises a slightly greater impact). Price discounts also amplify returns for high PBG brands in these markets, though to a lesser extent. Managers working with low-PBG brands should instead exercise caution in liberal markets, because intensified promotional support will diminish the equity of brands that lack globalness associations. When competing in conservative markets, managers should define distinct approaches for each promotional tool. In-store displays pose the greatest risk for globally positioned brands, in that intensified display activity produces the steepest decline in brand equity at high levels of PBG. Feature advertising also reduces brand equity, though its negative effect is less pronounced for high-PBG brands. Price discounts exhibit the weakest amplification effect, making them a comparatively safer promotional option in conservative environments. Globally positioned brands should therefore use visibility-based promotional tools sparingly in conservative markets. Naturally, these recommendations are not costless. Because

promotional activities are expensive and regionally differentiated plans add coordination effort, managers should weigh the incremental equity gain against the incremental spend before calibrating.

These insights are not confined to the U.S. context. In any market with a discernible ideological divide, brand managers can assess the local ideological landscape before committing to a global positioning strategy and calibrate promotional support to it.

Limitations and research directions

This research is not without limitations. First, we focus on international marketing strategies but limit the empirical analyses to the U.S. context, suggesting valuable research opportunities in other countries. In particular, examining the role of political ideology in countries with multiparty systems might support more nuanced operationalizations, compared with the unidimensional spectrum implied by the two-party system in the United States. Some methodological challenges arise with cross-national differences in data availability (e.g., scanner data, public election records), administrative structures (e.g., states, districts, provinces, municipalities), and election cycles (term length, timing), but research that overcomes such challenges could illuminate potential differences across political systems and cultural contexts.

Second, the retail scanner data we rely on are restricted to relatively affordable consumer packaged goods. This design allows us to observe actual buying behavior across a very large population, which self-report designs cannot match. However, whether the identified patterns extend to shopping and specialty goods is an open question. For upscale and luxury brands in particular, ideological differences in buying behavior may be muted, because such brands are typically positioned as global and thus offer little variation in PBG for political ideology to condition. Conversely, the pronounced identity relevance of such goods could amplify the patterns we document. We therefore encourage replication studies with shopping- and specialty-good brands to delineate when the identity-signaling function of globally positioned brands is most and least consequential.

Third, we investigate feature advertising, in-store displays, and price discounts, some of the most commonly studied promotional tools in retailing research. These tools differ in the extent to

which they amplify responses to PBG. The comparatively weak amplification through price discounts admits two interpretations that we cannot separate: discounts may direct attention to the transaction rather than to identity-relevant brand attributes, or monetary savings may partially offset identity-based resistance, such that consumers trade identity expression against economic incentives. We therefore encourage experimental designs that systematically vary discount depth and identity salience to distinguish these attention- and compensation-based accounts. Beyond the tools we observe, any marketing mix encompasses a broader set of strategic decisions that interact with point-of-sale promotions in ways our data cannot capture. In particular, NielsenIQ retail data capture retailer feature and display advertising but not manufacturers' national media advertising, which conveys brand-level content rather than transaction-proximate incentives. Whether such activities interact with political ideology in similar ways, and whether they complement or substitute for point-of-sale tools, remain open questions. Thus, we recommend research into whether advertising content, not just intensity, interacts with the effects of political ideology, and into how brands might tailor communication strategies to ideologically diverse markets.

Fourth, political ideology is inherently difficult for firms to observe and measure. Despite questions about whether a liberal–conservative continuum sufficiently captures the complexity of political beliefs, it effectively predicts related outcomes (Jost, 2006), which informed our choice to rely on electoral vote percentages in this study. Still, such a measure of aggregate ideological dominance cannot capture the distributional structure of ideological dispersion or political polarization (Thurner et al., 2025). Research into polarization could leverage measures of variance or tail concentration (Rigoli, 2025) or use indicators of the heterogeneity of pairwise agreement across individual ideological profiles or trends over time (Thurner et al., 2025). Such efforts might provide deeper insights into how changing political environments can or should shape firm strategies and market outcomes.

Finally, the auxiliary study in Web Appendix B reveals that political ideology is systematically intertwined with constructs central to international marketing research: political conservatism (cf. liberalism) is associated with a stronger connection to local than global culture, lower cultural openness, and higher ethnocentrism. Omitting political ideology from research designs

involving such constructs may therefore introduce endogeneity, and experimental research could help isolate the causal pathways through which political ideology influences consumers' responses to global brand cues, thereby complementing the ecological validity of our field data with greater internal validity. More broadly, our findings suggest that consumers' political ideology belongs in the core theoretical vocabulary of international marketing. Theory that formally incorporates political ideology is needed to explain how consumers respond to international marketing strategies and how firms should configure those strategies across ideologically heterogeneous markets.

Endnotes

[1] Global brand positioning strategies differ from standardized marketing approaches (Mandler, 2019). Marketers may emphasize a brand's globalness but communicate it in different ways, depending on local market requirements (Alden et al., 1999).

[2] Global brands may or may not originate from consumers' home country. In our U.S. empirical context, many global brands are homegrown. Our findings do not suggest that conservative consumers outright avoid such homegrown global brands; rather, they are broadly less enthusiastic about them, as reflected in the weaker value-enhancing effect of PBG, *ceteris paribus*.

[3] This hypothesis pertains to whether product functionality influences the moderating role of political ideology, not whether product functionality affects PBG's value-enhancing effect *per se*. In functional categories, where quality considerations and risk reduction predominate (Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2016), PBG still can create value through the quality-based pathway, but this quality-based advantage arguably applies across the political spectrum.

[4] Brand equity can be operationalized through consumer-based approaches that rely on consumer mindset metrics (often measured using multi-item scales) or sales-based approaches that capture marketplace manifestations of brand equity (Datta et al., 2017). We adopt the latter approach, which enables uniform operationalizations across the broad set of brands and categories in our data set, ensures comparability with other retail data-based research, and aligns with our goal to rely on real-world sales data rather than self-reported measures.

[5] Web Appendix C contains a robustness check that rules out the possibility that the gender imbalance in the sample biases the measurement of PBG or the overall results.

[6] Promotional activity varies across product categories. Hence, all Study 2 models simultaneously include the three promotional variables, along with category-related controls. Descriptively, product functionality correlates at $r = -0.15$ with feature intensity, $r = -0.27$ with display intensity, and $r = -0.37$ with discount intensity.

Disclaimer: Researcher(s)' own analyses calculated (or derived) based in part on data from Nielsen Consumer LLC and marketing databases provided through the NielsenIQ Datasets at the Kilts Center for Marketing Data Center at The University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

The conclusions drawn from the NielsenIQ data are those of the researcher(s) and do not reflect the views of NielsenIQ. NielsenIQ is not responsible for, and had no role in, analyzing or preparing the results reported here.

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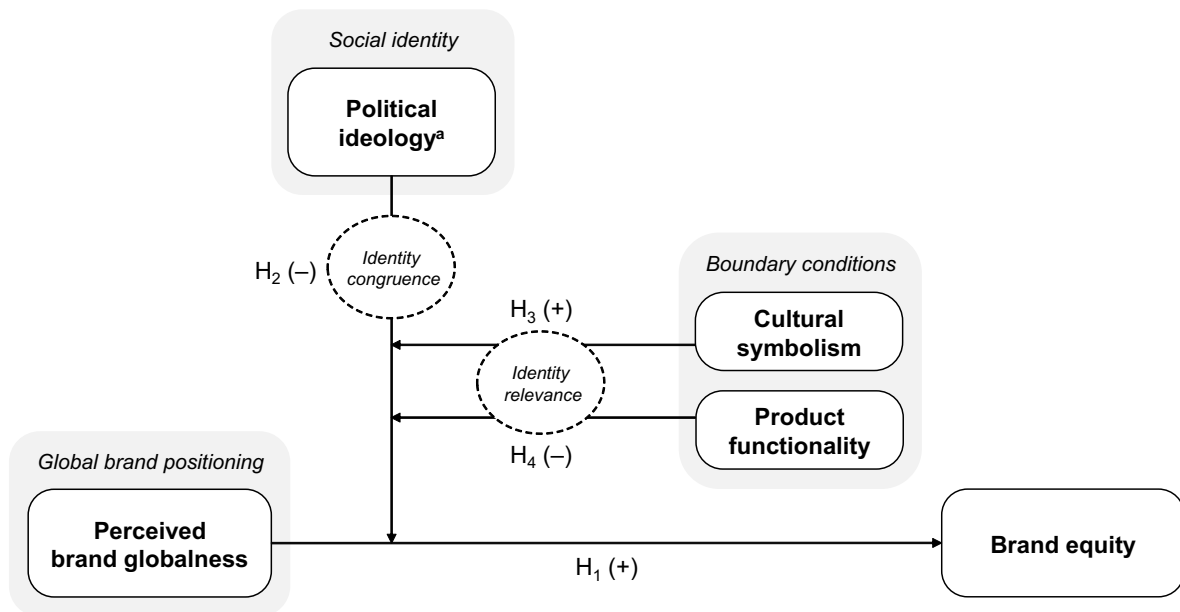
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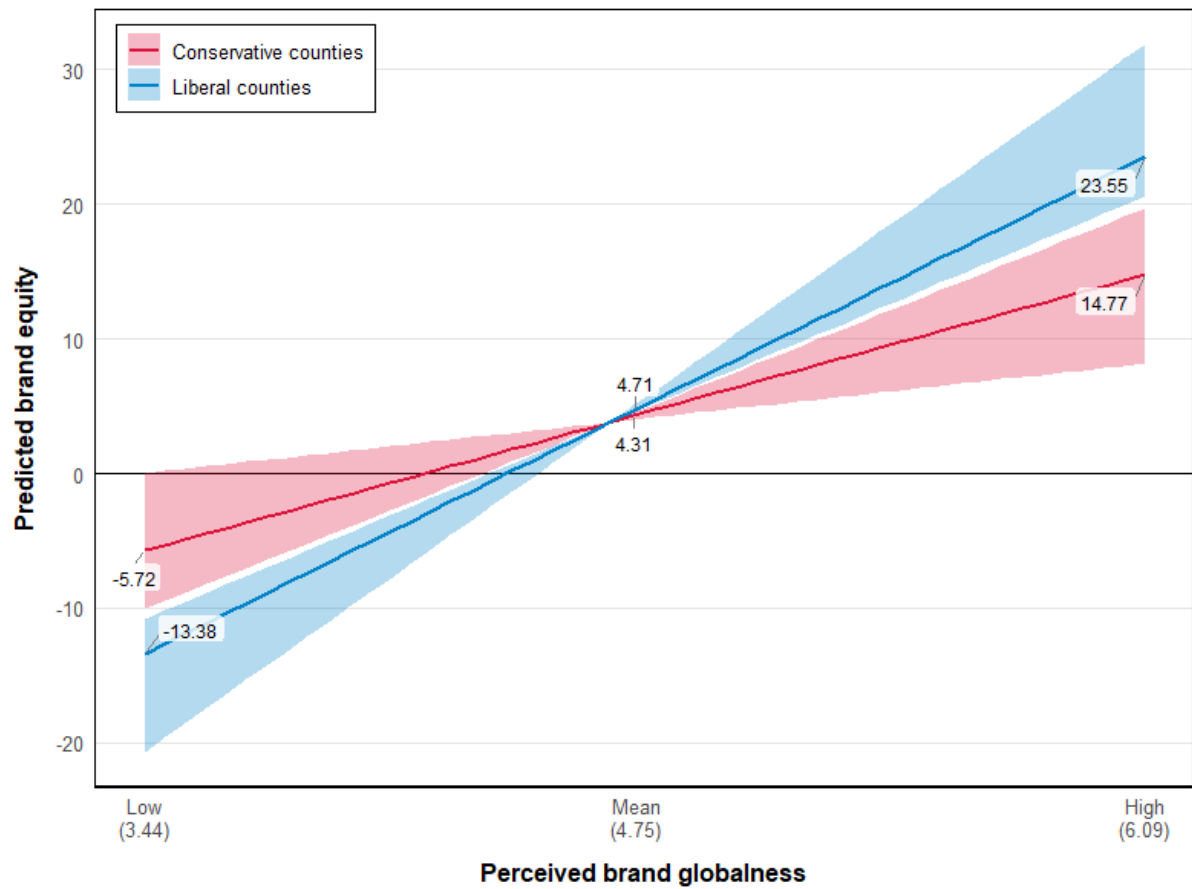
Figure 1
Conceptual model



^a Higher (lower) political ideology levels indicate a predominantly conservative (liberal) political ideology in a given county (according to citizens' voting behavior).

Figure 2

Relationship between PBG and brand equity, depending on political ideology

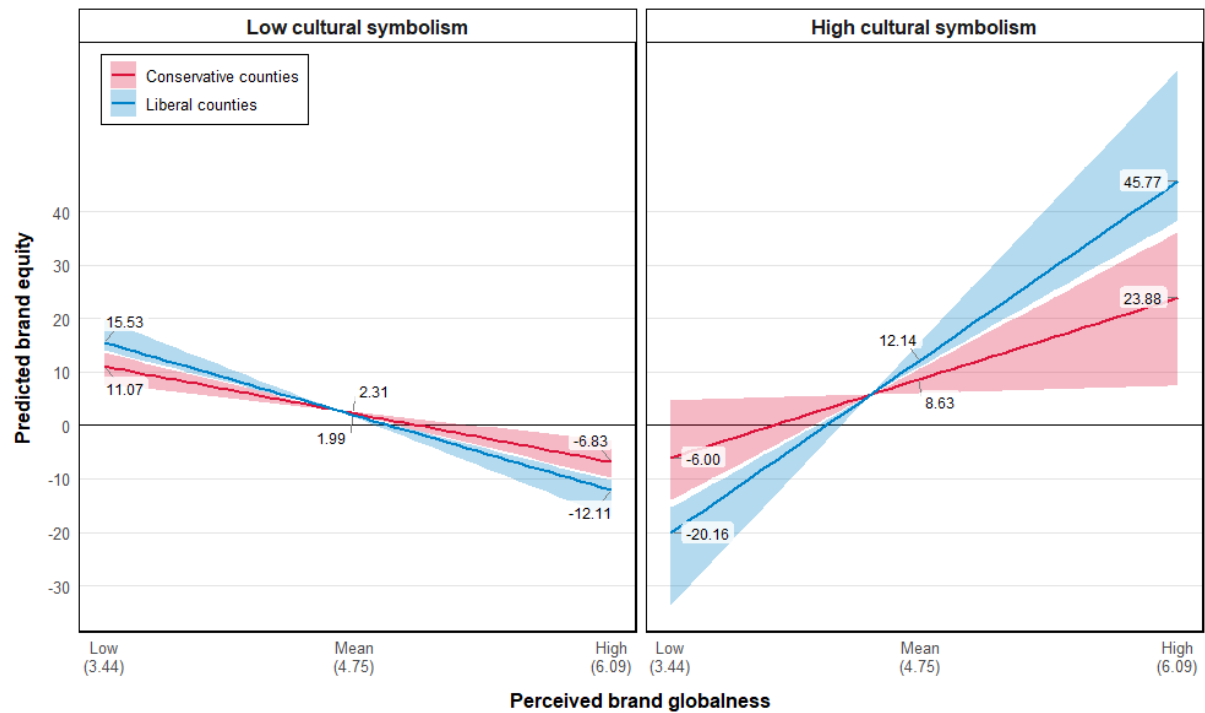


Notes: “Low” and “high” perceived brand globalness correspond to the 5th and 95th percentiles, respectively. Solid lines plot predicted brand equity (in \$10,000) at the median ideology score (within each group); shaded ribbons span the 5th–95th percentiles of political ideology within each group.

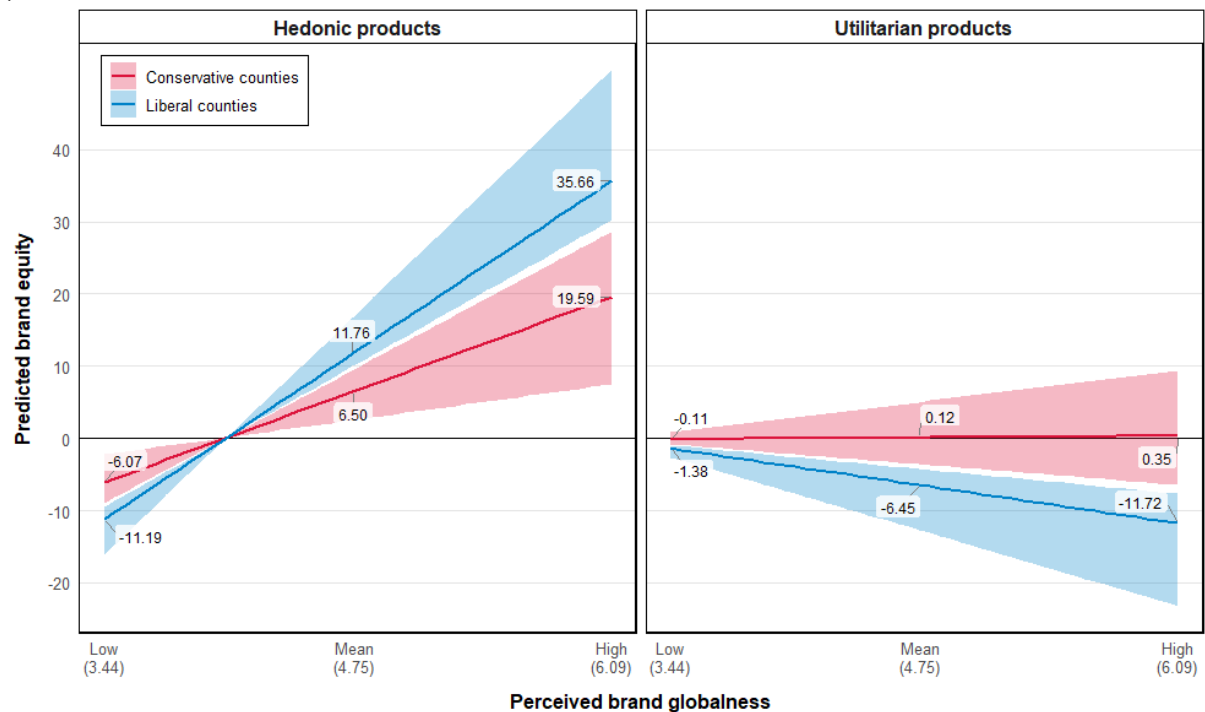
Figure 3

Boundary conditions of the relationship between PBG and brand equity, depending on political ideology

A)



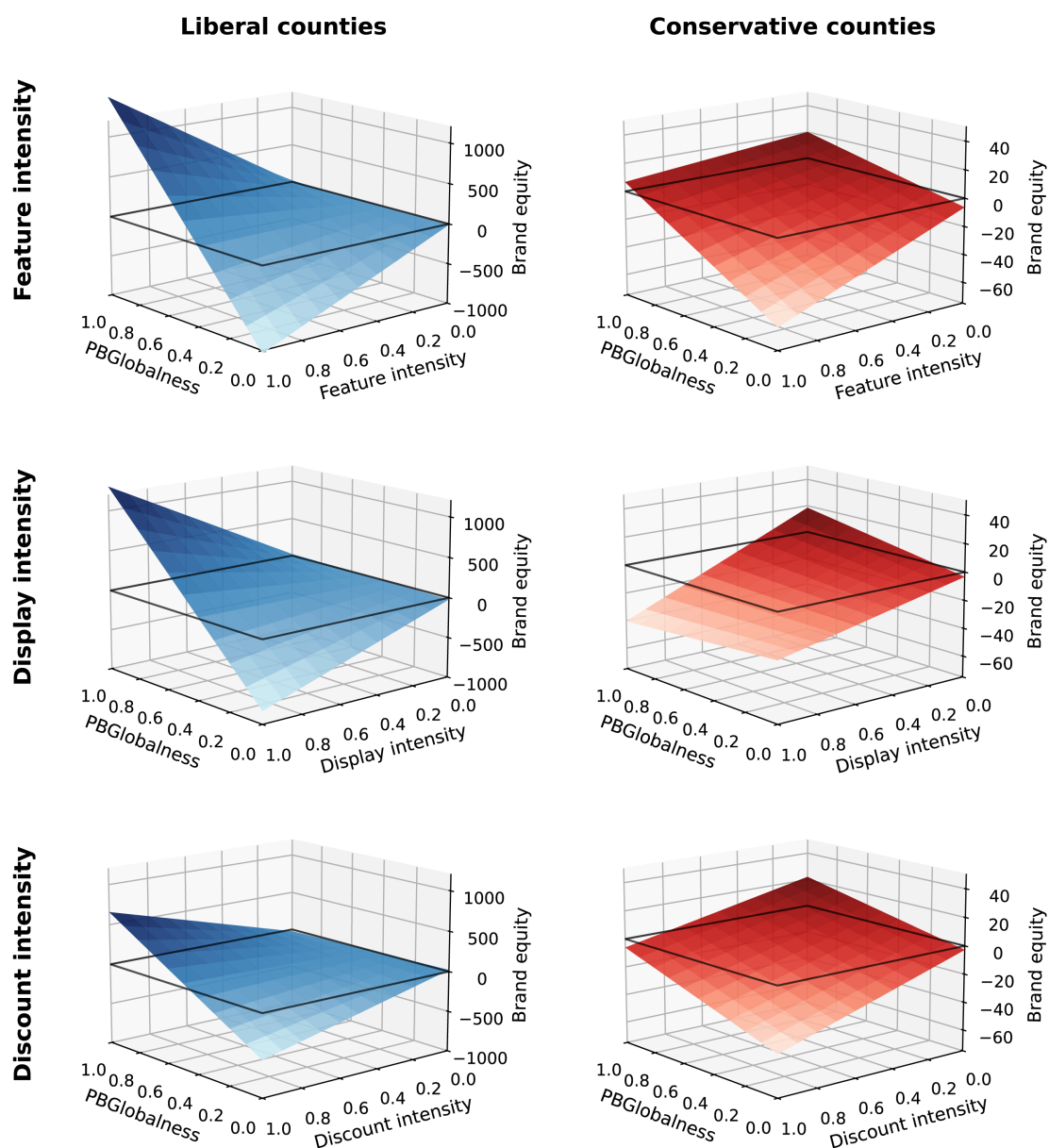
B)



Notes: Panel A plots predicted brand equity (in \$10,000) as a function of PBG at low versus high cultural symbolism (5th vs. 95th percentile); Panel B does so for hedonic versus utilitarian products, i.e., low versus high product functionality (5th vs. 95th percentile). “Low” and “high” perceived brand globalness correspond to the 5th and 95th percentiles, respectively. Solid lines plot predicted brand equity at the median ideology score (within each group); shaded ribbons span the 5th–95th percentiles of political ideology within each group.

Figure 4

Brand equity as a function of PBG and promotional variables, depending on political ideology



Notes: Each row plots predicted brand equity (in \$10,000) as a function of PBG and one promotional variable. The left column shows liberal counties, evaluated at the 5th percentile of the political ideology distribution; the right column shows conservative counties, evaluated at the 95th percentile. The specification of the prediction model matches that of the main model, except that PBGlobalness, feature intensity, display intensity, and discount intensity are min-max normalized to a 0–1 range to enhance interpretability.

Table 1

Variable measures and data sources, Study 1

Variable	Measure	Data Source
<i>Dependent variable</i>		
Brand equity	Difference in revenue between the focal brand and private label(s) in the same category (in \$10,000)	NielsenIQ retail scanner data
<i>Independent variable</i>		
Perceived brand globalness	“I think consumers overseas buy [brand]” and “[Brand] is sold all over the world”; seven-point Likert scales; adopted from Steenkamp et al. (2003)	Consumer survey
<i>Moderating variables</i>		
Political ideology	Difference between the percentage of Republican votes and Democratic votes	MIT election data
Cultural symbolism	“I associate this brand with things that are American”; seven-point Likert scale; adopted from Steenkamp et al. (2003)	Consumer survey
Product functionality	“Definitely hedonic (enjoyable, fun)/definitely utilitarian (functional, useful)”; seven-point bipolar scale; adopted from Melnyk et al. (2012)	Consumer survey
<i>Control variables</i>		
Perceived category risk	“It is a big deal if I make a mistake in choosing a [product category]” and “A poor choice of a [product category] would be upsetting”; seven-point Likert scale; adopted from Batra et al. (2000)	Consumer survey
Brand familiarity	“I am very unfamiliar/familiar with this brand”; seven-point bipolar scale; adapted from Klink and Smith (2001)	Consumer survey
Number of stores	Total number of stores per county	NielsenIQ retail scanner data
Income per capita (logged)	Average individual income per capita in a county	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Unemployment rate (in %)	Unemployment rate in a county	Bureau of Labor Statistics
Population density (logged)	Number of people per unit of land area, logged	U.S. Census Bureau
Population (in 10,000)	Total population, in 10,000	U.S. Census Bureau
Caucasian population (in %)	Percentage of Caucasian/White residents in a county	U.S. Census Bureau
International migration (net)	International migration over emigration in a county	U.S. Census Bureau
Age over 65 years (in %)	Percentage of elderly residents in a county	U.S. Census Bureau
Urban–rural continuum	1–9 continuum codes, ranking counties from most urban (1 = metropolitan; > 1 million people) to most rural (9 = nonmetropolitan; < 5,000 people and not adjacent to a metropolitan area)	USDA-ERS
Distance to last election	Number of years since the last election	MIT election data

Table 2

Product categories, number of brands, and observations (Study 1)

Product Category	Product Functionality ^a	Brands	Examples	N
Beer	1.85	48	Budweiser, Löwenbräu, Milwaukee's Best	331,888
Beverages (non-alc.)	1.77	39	Canada Dry, Coca-Cola, Perrier	184,000
Coffee & tea appliances	4.98	5	Black & Decker, Mr. Coffee, Proctor-Silex	80,221
Condiments & sauces	3.88	8	Colman's, Grey Poupon, Heinz	100,965
Confectionery	2.23	25	Cadbury, Hershey's, Lindt	399,947
Cosmetics	2.56	16	Bonne Belle, L.A. Splash, Milani	104,062
Hair care	5.96	26	Daisy Fuentes, Kiehl's, Tresemme	380,993
Laundry care	6.50	12	Ajax, Purex, Tide	9,890
Nutritional supplements	6.18	15	Centrum, Nature Made, One A Day	180,700
Olive oil	5.20	6	Botticelli, Crisco, Bertolli	70,912
Total		200		1,843,578

Notes: Web Appendix E lists all the brands.

^a Measured as "Definitely hedonic (enjoyable, fun)"/"Definitely utilitarian (functional, useful)" on a seven-point bipolar scale (adopted from Melnyk et al., 2012).

Table 3
Estimation results, Study 1

DV: Brand Equity	Model 1: Main Effect of PBGlobalness					Model 2: Moderating Role of PIdeology				
	b	SE	p	CI _{LL}	CI _{UL}	b	SE	p	CI _{LL}	CI _{UL}
<i>Main effect</i>										
PBGlobalness (H ₁)	9.696	0.128	< 0.001	9.446	9.946	11.696	0.168	< 0.001	11.366	12.025
<i>Moderating effects</i>										
PIdeology	−0.581	0.791	0.463	−2.131	0.970	−1.034	0.792	0.192	−2.586	0.519
CSymbolism	7.056	0.101	< 0.001	6.859	7.254	7.141	0.102	< 0.001	6.942	7.341
PFunctionality	−2.123	0.021	< 0.001	−2.164	−2.083	−2.131	0.021	< 0.001	−2.171	−2.090
PBGlobalness × PIdeology (H ₂)			—			−14.600	0.404	< 0.001	−15.392	−13.809
<i>Controls</i>										
Perceived category risk	7.378	0.123	< 0.001	7.136	7.619	7.571	0.122	< 0.001	7.332	7.811
Brand familiarity	−6.026	0.266	< 0.001	−6.548	−5.505	−5.937	0.265	< 0.001	−6.456	−5.419
Number of stores	0.967	0.027	< 0.001	0.914	1.020	0.949	0.027	< 0.001	0.897	1.002
Income per capita (logged)	5.225	1.136	< 0.001	2.999	7.450	4.958	1.132	< 0.001	2.739	7.176
Unemployment rate (in %)	−0.071	0.051	0.161	−0.170	0.028	−0.068	0.051	0.180	−0.167	0.031
Population density (logged)	−3.286	2.537	0.195	−8.259	1.687	−4.234	2.536	0.095	−9.205	0.736
Population (in 10,000)	−0.030	0.127	0.816	−0.278	0.219	−0.009	0.127	0.946	−0.257	0.240
Caucasian population (in %)	11.011	7.764	0.156	−4.206	26.228	10.678	7.747	0.168	−4.506	25.863
International migration (net)	0.052	0.474	0.913	−0.877	0.980	0.033	0.473	0.945	−0.895	0.960
Age over 65 years (in %)	2.565	4.554	0.573	−6.360	11.491	1.189	4.559	0.794	−7.747	10.124
Urban-rural continuum	−0.172	0.034	< 0.001	−0.239	−0.106	−0.135	0.034	< 0.001	−0.202	−0.069
Distance to last election	0.654	0.313	0.037	0.040	1.268	0.510	0.312	0.102	−0.102	1.122
<i>Constant</i>	−44.775	13.786	0.001	−71.795	−17.756	−37.875	13.764	0.006	−64.852	−10.898
<i>Fixed effects</i>										
County			Yes					Yes		
Year			Yes					Yes		
Adjusted R ²		0.182					0.185			
Number of observations		1,843,578					1,843,578			

Table 3 (continued)

Estimation results, Study 1

DV: Brand Equity	Model 3: CSymbolism					Model 4: PFunctionality				
	b	SE	p	CI _{LL}	CI _{UL}	b	SE	p	CI _{LL}	CI _{UL}
<i>Main effect</i>										
PBGlobalness	9.621	0.139	< 0.001	9.349	9.892	7.496	0.107	< 0.001	7.287	7.705
<i>Moderating effects</i>										
PIdeology	-5.173	0.834	< 0.001	-6.808	-3.538	-0.632	0.786	0.444	-2.173	0.910
CSymbolism	2.514	0.087	< 0.001	2.344	2.684	7.063	0.101	< 0.001	6.866	7.260
PFunctionality	-2.631	0.028	< 0.001	-2.685	-2.576	-3.177	0.034	< 0.001	-3.244	-3.110
PBGlobalness × PIdeology	-17.568	0.452	< 0.001	-18.454	-16.681	-6.783	0.226	< 0.001	-7.226	-6.340
PBGlobalness × CSymbolism	8.140	0.192	< 0.001	7.765	8.516			—		
PIdeology × CSymbolism	-2.603	0.269	< 0.001	-3.131	-2.076			—		
PBGlobalness × PIdeology × CSymbolism (H ₃)	-11.398	0.596	< 0.001	-12.565	-10.230			—		
PBGlobalness × PFunctionality			—			-3.902	0.084	< 0.001	-4.066	-3.738
PIdeology × PFunctionality			—			6.346	0.094	< 0.001	6.162	6.530
PBGlobalness × PIdeology × PFunctionality (H ₄)			—			6.447	0.266	< 0.001	5.926	6.967
<i>Controls</i>										
Perceived category risk	7.799	0.122	< 0.001	7.560	8.037	8.354	0.116	< 0.001	8.126	8.583
Brand familiarity	-3.846	0.232	< 0.001	-4.300	-3.391	-4.721	0.250	< 0.001	-5.210	-4.231
Number of stores	0.939	0.027	< 0.001	0.887	0.991	0.951	0.027	< 0.001	0.899	1.004
Income per capita (logged)	5.001	1.129	< 0.001	2.789	7.213	4.318	1.125	< 0.001	2.113	6.523
Unemployment rate (in %)	-0.074	0.050	0.142	-0.173	0.025	-0.080	0.050	0.110	-0.179	0.018
Population density (logged)	-4.954	2.526	0.050	-9.905	-0.003	-3.964	2.527	0.117	-8.917	0.988
Population (in 10,000)	0.006	0.126	0.963	-0.242	0.253	-0.012	0.127	0.927	-0.260	0.236
Caucasian population (in %)	10.103	7.689	0.189	-4.967	25.173	8.609	7.709	0.264	-6.500	23.717
International migration (net)	0.032	0.472	0.946	-0.892	0.957	0.026	0.472	0.957	-0.899	0.951
Age over 65 years (in %)	-9.479	4.568	0.038	-18.432	-0.525	5.024	4.551	0.270	-3.896	13.944
Urban-rural continuum	-0.061	0.035	0.080	-0.129	0.007	-0.161	0.034	< 0.001	-0.228	-0.094
Distance to last election	0.174	0.312	0.577	-0.437	0.785	0.828	0.311	0.008	0.218	1.439
<i>Constant</i>	-42.230	13.700	0.002	-69.082	-15.379	-41.592	13.713	0.002	-68.469	-14.716
<i>Fixed effects</i>										
County			Yes					Yes		
Year			Yes					Yes		
Adjusted R ²			0.194					0.192		
Number of observations			1,843,578					1,843,578		

Notes: Positive/negative PIdeology scores indicate a predominantly conservative/liberal market environment. PBGlobalness, CSymbolism, and PFunctionality are mean-centered. CI_{LL} and CI_{UL}: lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval.

Table 4
Estimation results, Study 2

DV: Brand Equity	Model 5: Feature Intensity					Model 6: Display Intensity					Model 7: Discount Intensity				
	b	SE	p	CI _{LL}	CI _{UL}	b	SE	p	CI _{LL}	CI _{UL}	b	SE	p	CI _{LL}	CI _{UL}
<i>Main effect</i>															
PBGlobalness	13.237	0.184	< 0.001	12.876	13.599	13.632	0.196	< 0.001	13.248	14.017	13.333	0.180	< 0.001	12.982	13.685
<i>Moderating effects</i>															
PIdeology	1.478	1.632	0.365	-1.720	4.676	0.714	1.612	0.658	-2.446	3.874	1.269	1.615	0.432	-1.896	4.435
Feature intensity	2.408	0.073	< 0.001	2.265	2.551	2.411	0.064	< 0.001	2.287	2.536	2.666	0.066	< 0.001	2.537	2.796
Display intensity	1.371	0.040	< 0.001	1.292	1.450	2.314	0.079	< 0.001	2.160	2.468	1.188	0.039	< 0.001	1.112	1.263
Discount intensity	0.135	0.021	< 0.001	0.093	0.177	-0.061	0.024	0.012	-0.108	-0.013	0.495	0.026	< 0.001	0.443	0.546
PBGlobalness × PIdeology	-13.971	0.496	< 0.001	-14.943	-13.000	-17.593	0.548	< 0.001	-18.666	-16.520	-14.608	0.470	< 0.001	-15.528	-13.688
PBGlobalness × Feature intensity	5.861	0.202	< 0.001	5.466	6.257										
PIdeology × Feature intensity	-6.013	0.277	< 0.001	-6.555	-5.471										
PBGlobalness × PIdeology × Feature intensity	-11.316	0.735	< 0.001	-12.757	-9.875										
PBGlobalness × Display intensity						4.954	0.187	< 0.001	4.587	5.322					
PIdeology × Display intensity						-6.325	0.282	< 0.001	-6.878	-5.773					
PBGlobalness × PIdeology × Display intensity						-10.118	0.671	< 0.001	-11.434	-8.802					
PBGlobalness × Discount intensity											3.428	0.093	< 0.001	3.246	3.610
PIdeology × Discount intensity											-2.539	0.117	< 0.001	-2.768	-2.309
PBGlobalness × PIdeology × Discount intensity											-6.672	0.379	< 0.001	-7.415	-5.929
<i>Controls</i>															
Cultural symbolism	8.247	0.140	< 0.001	7.972	8.522	8.290	0.144	< 0.001	8.008	8.572	9.176	0.153	< 0.001	8.877	9.476
Product functionality	-2.608	0.040	< 0.001	-2.686	-2.530	-2.889	0.043	< 0.001	-2.975	-2.804	-2.850	0.043	< 0.001	-2.934	-2.767
Perceived category risk	8.510	0.210	< 0.001	8.099	8.921	6.852	0.247	< 0.001	6.369	7.335	6.664	0.243	< 0.001	6.187	7.141
Brand familiarity	-9.115	0.402	< 0.001	-9.902	-8.327	-9.497	0.405	< 0.001	-10.291	-8.703	-9.494	0.412	< 0.001	-10.301	-8.687
Number of stores	0.929	0.030	< 0.001	0.871	0.987	0.939	0.030	< 0.001	0.881	0.997	0.924	0.029	< 0.001	0.866	0.982
Income per capita (logged)	7.606	2.493	0.002	2.721	12.491	8.900	2.507	< 0.001	3.986	13.813	7.104	2.498	0.004	2.208	12.000
Unemployment rate (in %)	-0.051	0.113	0.654	-0.272	0.171	-0.070	0.113	0.532	-0.291	0.150	-0.172	0.114	0.130	-0.395	0.051
Population density (logged)	-8.905	4.490	0.047	-17.705	-0.104	-10.734	4.508	0.017	-19.570	-1.897	-8.109	4.496	0.071	-16.920	0.702
Population (in 10,000)	-0.012	0.147	0.935	-0.299	0.275	-0.005	0.147	0.972	-0.293	0.282	0.017	0.147	0.907	-0.271	0.305
Caucasian population (in %)	-5.285	12.741	0.678	-30.256	19.687	-4.662	12.756	0.715	-29.663	20.339	3.889	12.749	0.760	-21.099	28.877
International migration (net)	-0.125	0.502	0.803	-1.108	0.858	-0.060	0.505	0.905	-1.051	0.931	-0.075	0.505	0.882	-1.064	0.914
Age over 65 years (in %)	7.173	11.539	0.534	-15.443	29.790	-5.145	11.457	0.653	-27.601	17.311	-11.452	11.498	0.319	-33.988	11.084
Urban-rural continuum	-0.186	0.093	0.046	-0.368	-0.003	-0.214	0.094	0.023	-0.399	-0.029	-0.190	0.095	0.046	-0.376	-0.004
Distance to last election	-1.510	0.654	0.021	-2.792	-0.228	-1.878	0.659	0.004	-3.169	-0.587	-1.611	0.658	0.014	-2.900	-0.322
<i>Constant</i>	-12.153	29.907	0.684	-70.769	46.464	-5.722	29.929	0.848	-64.382	52.939	-8.328	29.923	0.781	-66.976	50.319
Adjusted R ²			0.232					0.227					0.228		
Number of observations			929,051					929,051					929,051		

Notes: Models include county and year fixed effects. Positive/negative PIdeology scores indicate a predominantly conservative/liberal market environment. PBGlobalness and all moderators (except for PIdeology) are mean-centered. CI_{LL} and CI_{UL}: lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval.