

How Political Ideology Shapes Preferences for Human vs. AI Agents

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Cite as:

Hong Sujeong (2026), How Political Ideology Shapes Preferences for Human vs. AI Agents. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133930)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



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Abstract

As artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly influences the service sector, transforming everything from financial advising to medical diagnostics, distinct patterns of consumer acceptance and resistance are emerging. Simultaneously, political polarization is intensifying globally, influencing consumer choices in domains previously thought to be apolitical, such as retail patronage and brand loyalty. While prior research has largely examined technology acceptance through functional lenses—such as utility, ease of use, and efficiency—scant attention has been paid to the influence of deep-seated political identity on algorithmic interaction. This research explores the relationship between political ideology and the preference for human versus AI decision-makers. Across two studies—a secondary analysis of the Korean General Social Survey (N=1,230) and a controlled experiment (N=160)—we demonstrate that conservative political ideology is positively associated with a distinct preference for human agents. Mediation analyses reveal that this preference is not driven by technophobia or a lack of digital literacy, but by a psychological need for control. These findings suggest that AI adoption is partially an identity-based choice, offering novel implications for market segmentation and the design of automated service interactions in an increasingly polarized marketplace.

Track: Consumer Behaviour