

Serwaa Karikari
&
Michael Callow

Earl G. Graves School of Business
and Management

ABSTRACT

Historically, pandemics have resulted in massive societal change. Pandemic-related behavioral changes may be associated with personal protection such as the wearing of face masks. In the COVID-19 context, anecdotal evidence suggests that there exists substantial tension between consumers and retailers, particularly when the former's attitude toward mask-wearing is at odds with the latter's store policy on mask wearing. This study examines consumers' thought processes regarding their attitude toward wearing masks when visiting traditional brick-and-mortar retail establishments during pandemics, and how this affects their attitude toward as well as their intention to revisit retail establishments. Drawing on the behavioral reasoning theory (BRT), we propose a conceptual framework to test the interactions between the antecedents of consumers' revisit intention and their resultant intention to revisit retail establishments. Findings will have implications for research, marketing practitioners, policy makers, and societal stakeholders promoting mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONTACT

Serwaa Karikari
Email: sekar1@morgan.edu

INTRODUCTION

Countries worldwide are experiencing the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and several governments have suggested or mandated practices to help flatten the curve, notable among which is the wearing of face masks. The CDC, doctors, and public health officials recommended mask-wearing in public settings to help save lives. However, there has been controversy regarding mask-wearing, with resistance from politicians and citizens alike. Although most of the U.S. states previously mandated mask-wearing, states continue to lift their mask-wearing mandate. Major retailers have stated that they will continue to require masks in-store. The CDC now recommends that fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear masks in most cases. However, retailers are legally allowed to impose mask mandates on their premises for both employees and customers. While some retailers have lifted the mandate, others continue to enforce mask-wearing on their premises.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- BRT posits that reasons serve as key determinants of individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Westaby, 2005). Reasons are influenced by beliefs. In the politicized COVID-19 context, political ideology (i.e., beliefs) may explain reasons for (and against) mask-wearing.
- Political ideology is typically conceptualized as a liberal vs. conservative dimension (Jung et al., 2017). Empirical evidence shows that differences in the belief systems of liberals and conservatives impact their responses to COVID-19 and perceptions of preventive practices (Nowlan & Zane, 2020)
- Reasons encompass two wide dimensions, namely reasons for (pros) and reasons against (cons) executing a behavior (Westaby, 2005). Reasons for and against wearing a mask" is influenced by political orientation and in turn can impact attitude towards wearing a mask..
- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers may also develop attitudes toward stores due to factors such as the store's policy on mask-wearing. Particularly when a consumer's attitude regarding the wearing of masks goes contrary to the store policy, this is likely to influence whether they have a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the store.
- Store policy refers to the store's rule as to whether customers and employees are required to wear face masks. We expect store policy to moderate the relationship between attitude towards mask-wearing and any change in attitude towards the store.

HYPOTHESES

- H1a: Liberalism values positively impact reasons for mask-wearing**
- H1b: Conservatism values positively impact reasons against mask-wearing**
- H2a: Liberalism values positively impact attitude toward mask-wearing**
- H2b: Conservatism values negatively impact attitude toward mask-wearing**
- H3a: Reasons for mask-wearing positively impact attitude toward mask-wearing**
- H3b: Reasons against mask-wearing negatively impact attitude toward mask-wearing**
- H4: Consumers' attitude toward mask-wearing positively impacts their attitude toward the store**
- H5: Store policy on mask-wearing moderates the effect of consumers' attitude toward mask-wearing on their attitude toward the store**
- H6a: Reasons for mask-wearing positively impact the intention to revisit a store**
- H6b: Reasons against mask-wearing negatively impact the intention to revisit a store**
- H7: Consumers' attitude toward the store is positively related to their intention to revisit the store**

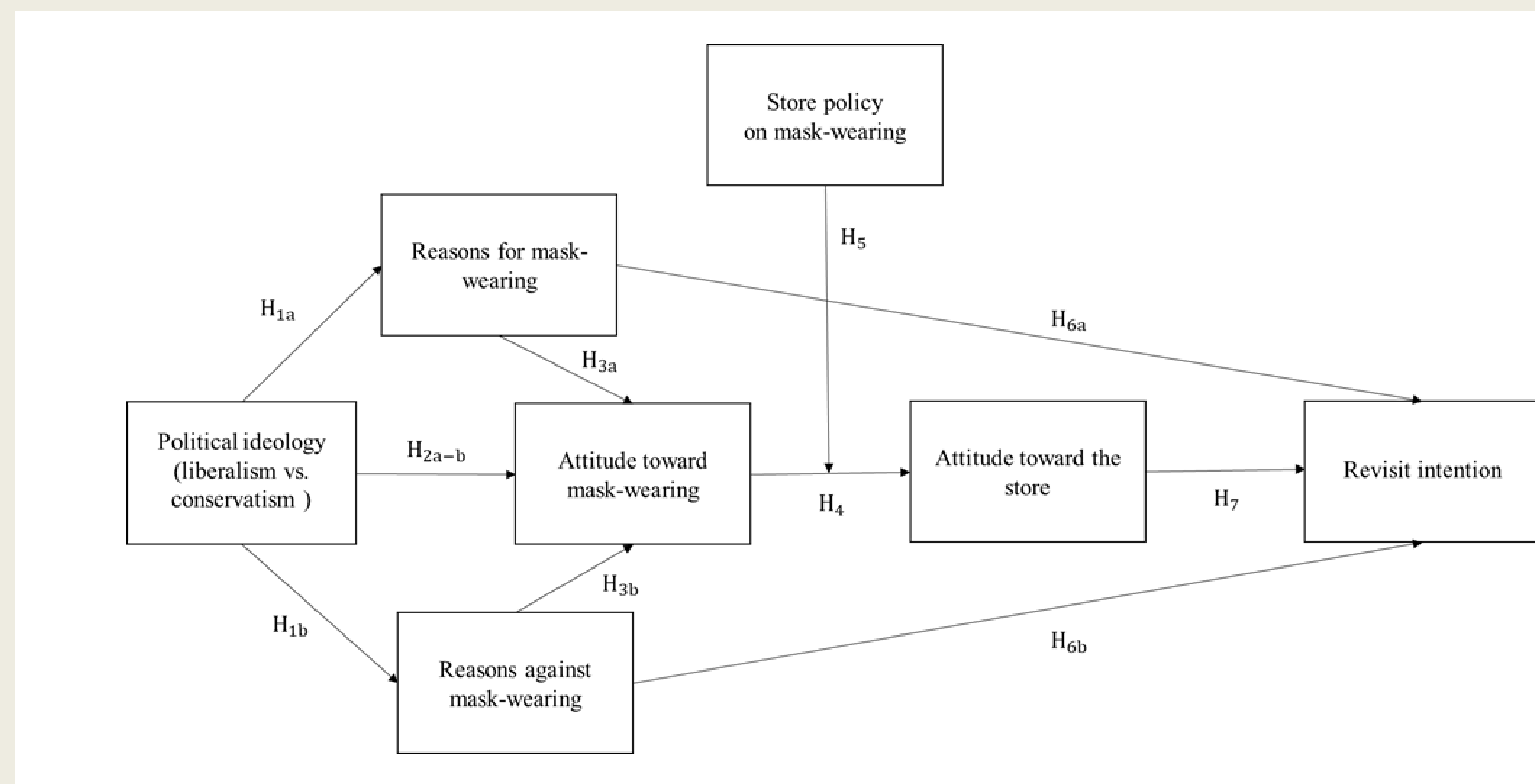


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

PROPOSED METHODS

- Experimental research design
- **2 (political ideology: liberal vs. conservative) x 4 (store policy: employees and customers required to wear masks vs. neither employees or customers are required vs. employees are required, customers are not vs. employees are explicitly forbidden from wearing masks)**
- Sample: US residents who self-identify as either liberal or conservative and reside in States with recently lifted mask-wearing mandates
- Sample will be obtained using Prolific Academic
- Proposed analysis: SEM (Mplus)