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Influence of Political Orientation and Abstract vs. Concrete
Thinking of Service Employees on Customer Participation in the
Service Process

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Abstract

This thesis is intended to broaden the field of research in the context of customer participation. The existing literature on the influencing factors of customer participation shows that some fields need further research. Such as the political orientation of service employees, which is not only a highly relevant topic due to the current increase in power of political parties far away from the center but also because of the relationship between specific political orientations and personality traits. Besides that, the construal level or abstract versus concrete thinking style of service employees is another aspect that may have an impact on customer participation. Additionally, just as the political orientation, the abstract versus concrete thinking style also allows to draw conclusions on personality traits. These personal characteristics of service employees can influence the service interaction, which is specifically important in the intercultural context. The basis for this study is a data set that was collected from employees and customers at the Austrian Public Employment Service. The data for the first research question of this thesis regarding the effect of the political orientation of service employees on customer participation was examined in the context of overall conservatism, including social and economic conservatism. To further increase the granularity, social and economic conservatism were tested separately. All of the factors presented were examined from the perspective of both customers and employees with regard to customer participation. The regression analysis testing the effect of total conservatism on customer participation from the employees' perspective shows a statistically significant result. This finding indicates, along with the proposed hypothesis, that higher conservatism of employees positively affects customer participation. The other hypotheses regarding the first research question do not show statistically significant results. The second research question, which deals with the effect of abstract versus concrete thinking style of service employees on customer participation, showed no statistically significant results. The sample exhibited a propensity for abstract thinking among employees, a finding that concurrently unveils avenues for future research. Furthermore, managerial implications on the basis of the results are presented and the limitations of this research are displayed. Along with the limitations, further directions for future research are proposed.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit zielt darauf ab die Forschung im Bereich der Einflussfaktoren auf die Kundenbeteiligung im Dienstleistungsprozess zu erweitern. Die vorhandene Literatur zu den Einflussfaktoren der Kundenbeteiligung zeigt, dass einige Bereiche weiter erforscht werden müssen. So zum Beispiel die politische Orientierung von Servicemitarbeiter*innen, die nicht nur aufgrund des aktuellen Machtzuwachses von Parteien an den politischen Rändern von hoher Relevanz ist, sondern auch wegen des Zusammenhangs zwischen spezifischen politischen Orientierungen und Persönlichkeitsmerkmalen. Darüber hinaus ist das Abstraktionsniveau bzw. der abstrakte versus konkrete Denkstil von Servicemitarbeiter*innen ein weiterer Aspekt, der sich auf die Kundenbeteiligung auswirken kann. Ebenso wie die politische Orientierung, lässt auch der abstrakte versus konkrete Denkstil Rückschlüsse auf Persönlichkeitsmerkmale zu. Diese persönlichen Eigenschaften von Mitarbeiter*innen können die Dienstleistungsinteraktion beeinflussen, was insbesondere im interkulturellen Kontext von Bedeutung ist. Die Basis für diese Untersuchung bildet ein Datensatz, welcher im österreichischen Arbeitsmarktservice von Mitarbeiter*innen und Kund*innen erhoben wurde. Die Daten für die erste Forschungsfrage dieser Arbeit bezüglich der Auswirkung der politischen Orientierung von Servicemitarbeiter*innen auf die Kundenbeteiligung wurden im Kontext des allgemeinen Konservatismus, einschließlich des sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Konservatismus untersucht. Um den Grad der Detaillierung zu erhöhen, wurden der soziale und der wirtschaftliche Konservatismus zusätzlich getrennt untersucht. Alle dargelegten Faktoren wurden sowohl aus Sicht der Kund*innen als auch der Mitarbeiter*innen auf die Kundenbeteiligung untersucht. Die Regressionsanalyse, bezüglich des Effekts des allgemeinen Konservatismus auf die Kundenbeteiligung aus Sicht der Mitarbeiter*innen, zeigt ein statistisch signifikantes Ergebnis. Dies zeigt einhergehend mit der entwickelten Hypothese, dass sich ein höherer Konservatismus der Mitarbeiter*innen positiv auf die Kundenbeteiligung auswirkt. Die weiteren Hypothesen der ersten Forschungsfrage zeigen keine statistisch signifikanten Ergebnisse. Die zweite Forschungsfrage, die sich mit der Auswirkung des abstrakten versus konkreten Denkstils von Servicemitarbeiter*innen auf die Kundenbeteiligung befasst, ergab kein statistisch signifikantes Ergebnis. Die Stichprobe zeigt einen eher abstrakten Denkstil der Mitarbeiter*innen, ein Ergebnis, das gleichzeitig Wege für weitere Forschung aufzeigt. Zudem werden auf Basis der Ergebnisse Handlungsoptionen für Unternehmen und Management abgeleitet und die Grenzen dieser Untersuchung aufgezeigt. Damit einhergehend werden weitere Vorschläge für die zukünftige Forschung dargelegt.

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List of Abbreviations

AMS	Austrian Public Employment Service
CLT	Construal Level Theory
CP	Customer Participation
ORF	Österreichischer Rundfunk
SECS	Social and Economic Conservatism Scale

1. Introduction

In the era of digitalization and technological change, the digital service touchpoints and human touchpoints with a service employee blur into one hybrid interaction. Therefore, it is important to make the human interaction unique and have a good understanding of the personality traits that influence an employee within the interaction. The human factor, of course, can lead to conflict situations. The following will shed light on the strong increase of companies and institutions faced with service conflict situations. More specifically, a student project of the “Hochschule Darmstadt” shows in their customer conflict monitor that the conflict situations between customers and employees increased from 23% of the companies and institutions surveyed in 2018 to 38% in 2021 (Hochschulkommunikation, 2024). The increasing number of companies and institutions confronted with conflicts within service interactions underlines the relevance of the research regarding factors that can influence human service encounters.

In addition to that, political polarization caused by the gain in power of the political far right and left parties in Europe, increased. The Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) reports that many countries in Europe, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria, are facing a strong gain in power of parties who are defined by a program that is far away from the political center parties (Jürgen Klatzer, 2023). These ongoing news topics are particularly pertinent given the current migration situation in Europe and for this study, specifically in Austria. Statistik Austria displays the increasing influx of migrants in Austria in more detail. They show in their yearly migration report that 26.4% of the population in Austria has a migration background and also that the increase in migration was specifically strong in 2022 due to the Ukraine war (Statistik Austria, 2023). These aspects emphasize the importance of examining service encounters in an intercultural environment, particularly highlighting the relevance of factors that influence service interactions.

In intercultural service encounters, which are increasingly important due to the number of people with a migration background, customer participation (CP) is of specific relevance because of the importance of communication between customer and employee to match expectations and the actual service practices (Kenesei & Stier, 2017). Specifically, CP is of further interest because of its importance for the service outcome on both sides. The importance of CP is underlined by the research of Merlo et al. (2014), who show that customers with a higher CP tended to spend more money on the products offered by the

respective company. This shows that the customer's participation makes an important contribution to value creation in service interaction. Besides the financial motives for a high CP, the CP, in an intercultural context, can enable a better understanding between customer and service provider. This understanding can be hindered due to cultural differences. The described conflict situations diminish the opportunity for the customer and employee to work jointly for a positive outcome.

The scientific literature already focused on various factors that can influence the CP in a service interaction, in an intercultural context, as well as solely the behavior and attitudes of service employees. Literature, for example, Zhao et al. (2018) researched how the behavior of employees influences the CP. Bourdin et al. (2023) focused on the accent of employees and the impact on the respective CP. Nevertheless, the existing literature leaves other aspects and the respective influence on the CP uninvestigated. Mustak et al. (2016) show in their research that the literature needs further scientific research on CP in transformative services. Boenigk et al. (2021) define Transformative Service Initiatives “*as activities of organizations (public, private, nonprofit) or volunteers that serve people experiencing vulnerabilities and improve their well-being.*” (Boenigk et al., 2021, p. 542). Along with this research suggestion, the data on which this thesis is based was collected by conducting a survey in the public employment service in Austria, which is publicly owned and supports people in vulnerable situations in the process of finding a job.

The increasing number of companies faced with conflict situations shown at the beginning can be influenced by the personal characteristics of the service employees, such as friendliness (Kenesei & Stier, 2017). Therefore, attitudes and other aspects, linked to specific personality characteristics are of great importance. Political attitudes and the abstractness of thinking have a relation to some of these aspects and are therefore subject to this thesis.

Regarding the political attitude in the service interaction, there is already existing literature examining the topic of the political attitude of the service provider on customer satisfaction. Davidson and Theriault (2021) conducted research on the influence of the political attitude of service providers on the customer experience. Their research focuses on Airbnb and Uber, which differs from the transformative service, namely the publicly owned Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS). The AMS, with its intercultural service encounters, offers a good opportunity to conduct the research. Further, the impact of the service providers' political attitude on the CP has not been researched so far. Therefore, the following research question is proposed:

Is there a correlation between the political orientation of service employees and customer participation in the service process?

Besides the political attitude of service employees, another aspect of interest to this thesis is the construal level or abstract versus concrete thinking style. This aspect has various implications for human interpersonal behavior. Multiple researchers examined the construal level from a behavioral psychology point of view, such as Stephan et al. (2010), who conducted research on the relationship between construal level and politeness. Taghavi (2019) even researched the impact of construal level on the commitment to the job. These excerpts from the literature are only a few examples; further insights are given in chapter 2.4.3. Nevertheless, the review of the existing literature showed that a lack exists concerning the impact of construal level or abstract versus concrete thinking style in the CP. Therefore, the following research question is proposed, additionally to the first one:

To what extent does the abstract vs. concrete thinking style of service employees influence customer participation in service delivery?

These proposed research questions and the process of answering them are subject to the following chapters.

This research is, besides the relevance for the scientific literature, also relevant for practical uses. The possible effect of abstract versus concrete thinking and the political attitude of service employees on CP can enable a better understanding of the influencing factors of CP. Therefore, research into these questions can lead to important conclusions, especially for the allocation of tasks to the respective employees.

The following chapters provide a detailed examination of the current state of literature, beginning with a brief overview of service encounters, particularly focusing on intercultural aspects, which are particularly relevant due to the study being conducted in the AMS, where many service interactions are of intercultural nature. Subsequently, literature regarding political orientation and construal level, as well as CP, is reviewed and the results are displayed. Building upon this literature review, hypotheses are formulated to answer the proposed research questions. Afterward, the relevant scales from the scientific literature and the hypothesis test results are displayed and described. The respective test results are discussed following the described sections, using the relevant literature. Afterward, managerial implications of the results from this research are proposed and the limitations are examined, which also opens the way for future research in this field.

2. Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

2.1. Intercultural Service Encounters

The existing literature regarding intercultural service encounters features a wide variety of different approaches to the topic. Not only the effects of different cultures within a service encounter are examined, but also the different perspectives of the customer and the service provider.

Intercultural service encounters are increasingly important interactions in the customer service process, which affect both the service provider and the customer. Compared to the service encounters within one cultural background, the conditions in the intercultural context are entirely different. The values, rules, and overall behavior in various cultures are different and, therefore, can cause challenges within the service encounter (Sharma et al., 2009). The expectations and attitudes of customers from different cultures regarding service interaction and employees can strongly differ between cultures, which influences the interaction with the service employee (Sharma, 2019). Stauss and Mang (1999) show in this context the importance of communication with the customer. According to this research, appropriate communication from the service providers' side enables at least partly an adjustment of the customers' expectations. Further, within the communicational aspect of intercultural service encounters, Kenesei and Stier (2017) point out that the expectations from customers in intercultural service encounters are shaped by the customers' "known countries", which may cause major differences and misunderstandings between both parties. Their research, therefore, also suggests communicating between customers and service providers and matching the expectations with the common service practices of the respective country. Further, Sharma et al. (2012) show that not solely the party on the service providers' side influences the outcome. Instead, they show that the customer and the employee jointly influence the intercultural service encounter. All these aspects indicate the high importance of communication and specifically CP, not only in a service interaction within one culture but also specifically in an intercultural context. The in some cases, strong differences can cause misunderstandings, which can be counteracted by good communication. Furthermore, Ang et al. (2018) point out in their studies that higher CP can have a positive impact on intercultural service encounters. They show that higher CP improves the customers' perception of the employees' warmth and competence within the service process. Based on this, they show that

the service quality and satisfaction are increased. The topic of CP is further examined in chapter 2.2.

Due to the focus of this work being on the service provider side, the following will shed light on the provider side in intercultural service encounters. In their work, Wang and Mattila (2010) found that intercultural service interaction can be perceived as stressors to the employees due to differences between the cultures, such as language differences or specific cultural differences. This either results in complete avoidance of intercultural service encounters or the service provider establishes a strategy to deal with these stressors. A strategy to deal with these situations may be to develop a specific communication technique for intercultural service encounters (Wang & Mattila, 2010). Additionally, as Stauss and Mang (1999) show, the behavior of service employees is a factor that can relatively easy be adjusted by the use of training and so on. Therefore, an understanding of the factors on the employee side that can influence intercultural service interaction is an important field of research. These circumstances make a deeper understanding of intercultural service encounters and the respective influencing factors, specifically on the employee side, so important.

In this context, it is also important to mention that service employees might not treat all customers similarly. These differences in treatment can have several reasons and are also often connected to the different cultural backgrounds of both parties (Sharma et al., 2012). Kenesei and Stier (2017) classify the factors that influence the service provider in the professional background and personal background. The professional background will not be further examined due to the scope of this thesis. According to their research, personal background includes characteristics that define a person, such as friendliness and openness. These personality characteristics, therefore, are of major importance in the context of intercultural service encounters, as these factors can strongly influence the outcome of the service interaction. Hence, it is of further interest to investigate the additional factors and attitudes associated with these characteristics. Within this context, it is evident that both political orientation and the ability to think abstractly or concretely stand in relation to specific attributes and behavior. The relationship between political orientation and personality is, for example, examined by Jonason (2014). Construal Level and the relationship with behavior is, for example, examined by Trope and Liberman (2012). These relationships are examined in more detail in chapters 2.3 and 2.4.

2.2. Customer Participation

The concept of CP is of major interest in the business and specifically the customer interaction process. Companies can learn a lot from their customers and conclude from this information. Merlo et al. (2014) define CP as “(...) *getting customers to provide constructive suggestions and share their ideas on how to shape product and service offerings*” (Merlo et al., 2014, p. 81). The term CP in the literature is related to many other concepts, such as coproduction. In this context, it must be stated that CP includes coproduction (Auh et al., 2007; Dong & Sivakumar, 2017). Nevertheless, coproduction does not cover CP (Dong & Sivakumar, 2017). However, not only does the literature identify CP as an important instrument in the interface between customer and company, but this construct also plays an important role in the company's strategic alignment. Although this construct is a powerful tool for companies, many managers underestimate this instrument to gain first-hand insights directly from the company's various customers (Merlo et al., 2014).

After focusing on CP, the following will set CP in a bigger picture. Various papers have dealt with factors that influence CP. Specifically in the intercultural context, Bourdin et al. (2023) investigated the impact of specific accents in different service settings on CP. Their findings indicate that employees or, more particularly, service providers with an unfavorable perceived accent reduce the CP compared to a local accent. However, they show in their research that if there is a favorable accent, CP does not increase in the same way as the decrease for unfavorable accents. In the research of Zhao et al. (2018), it was shown that employee extra-role behavior exhibits a greater influence compared to their in-role behavior, which refers to role-prescribed actions, in stimulating CP. In-role behavior refers to actions that are formally required by an employee's job description, while extra-role behavior encompasses voluntary actions that go beyond the formal job requirements and contribute to the organization's overall effectiveness (Zhao et al., 2018). This shows that the employees and their behavior strongly impact the respective CP. As already described in chapter 2.1, Ang et al. (2018) point out the positive influence CP can have in the context of intercultural service encounters.

To put CP in a bigger picture, it is also important to shed light not only on the factors that influence the CP but also on the factors that CP influences in an intercultural context. In this context, Chan et al. (2010) researched the influence of CP on customer satisfaction and employee job satisfaction as well as customer value co-creation. The findings indicate that CP has a mediating effect on value creation. This effect holds for customers, as well as

employees. This basically means that engaging in the service process allows the customers to collaboratively generate economic advantages like personalized services, improved quality, and increased control. However, this positive effect on the customer side can negatively influence the employee side. The co-creation, which enhances the relational connections between customers and employees, elevates their interaction satisfaction, simultaneously amplifies job stress, and diminishes job satisfaction among employees. This effect is particularly pronounced for employees who work individually or for employees who prefer a workplace where everyone is treated more equally in terms of authority and decision-making, known as having a “lower power distance” perspective. (Chan et al., 2010).

2.3. Political Orientation and the Business Context

2.3.1. Basic Principles of Conservatism

For a basic understanding, the principles of conservatism are proposed. When classifying conservatism, it is important to understand the underlying social-cognitive motives of a conservative orientation. Jost et al. (2018) classified those motives into three categories.

- Epistemic motives
- Ideological motives
- Existential motives

Firstly, the epistemic motives include, for example, dogmatism, uncertainty avoidance, and desire for order. Secondly, ideological motives are, for example, group-based dominance and the system's justification. Thirdly, existential motives are, for example, self-esteem and loss prevention (Jost et al., 2018). As already briefly mentioned, the prevention of losses is an important underlying motive of conservatism, which is, for example, examined by Jost et al. (2018) and Janoff-Bulman (2009). This means that the conservative attitude of individuals is often linked to a conservation of the status quo (Janoff-Bulman, 2009). Furthermore, as mentioned briefly, dogmatism is linked to conservatism (Crowson, 2009; Jost et al., 2018). Crowson (2009) conducted research not only on the correlation between dogmatism and conservatism but also on dogmatic aggression. In this study, conservatism was considered in different sub-constructs, in this case, cultural and economic conservatism. It must be clearly stated that, nevertheless, within the research of Crowson (2009), the term cultural conservatism is used instead of the in this thesis used wording social conservatism.

Nevertheless, it is indicated that both terms have the same meaning. The results from these studies suggest that a correlation exists between cultural conservatism and dogmatism. Additionally, a weak correlation between economic conservatism and dogmatism was found within these proposed studies.

After identifying the underlying motives of conservatism, an understanding of the core dimensionality of conservatism is essential. Conservatism has two core dimensions: resistance to change and the acceptance of inequality (Huntington, 1957; Jost et al., 2018). Resisting change has historically aligned with opposition to advancing egalitarianism. On the flip side, preserving the status quo commonly involves entrusting the present and future to the authorities that have wielded control in the past (Jost et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the distinction between different conservative ideologies is important to enable a precise classification of possible effects that can influence conservatism. Such a classification was made, for example, by Johnson and Tamney (2001) and allows a distinction between social traditionalism and economic conservatism. They show, within their research, that economic conservatism and its foundational principles serve as a rationale for individuals with higher incomes to justify and perpetuate their economic advantages. This kind of conservatism plays a crucial role in maintaining their financial privileges. For instance, endorsing the idea that the government should refrain from redistributing wealth from higher-income individuals to those with lower incomes offers clear benefits to those possessing wealth (Johnson & Tamney, 2001). Social traditionalism instead refers to people who have a conservative mindset on various social topics such as religion and sexuality (Johnson & Tamney, 2001). The term social traditionalism differs from the wording of social conservatism, which is used in this thesis. Nevertheless, the meaning is the same. The distinction between social and economic conservatism is made in the research of Everett (2013), in which a scale that composes both the social and economic characteristics of conservatism is combined to develop a new measure for the conservatism of individuals. This specific measure will be examined in more detail in chapter 3.4, along with the other relevant measures for this research. Nevertheless, social and economic conservatism is not seen as two completely different constructs, there are linkages between both (Busch, 2012; Everett, 2013). Everett (2013) describes a correlation between economic and social conservatism and, therefore, includes both in the developed measure. Furthermore, Busch (2012) describes that many of the fundamental assumptions and principles of social conservatism align closely with those of economic conservatism and a commitment to limited government. Shared values

include opposition to the idolization of the state, a focus on individualism, and a belief in natural rights. Social conservatives also support economic freedom, such as economic conservatives, not only for economic reasons but also for political and moral reasons (Busch, 2012).

The assessment of political conservatism is crucial in various private and business contexts. One important underlying motivation for assessing people's conservatism is the fact that several personal characteristics or character traits are linked to a conservative mindset. Although the scientific literature does not agree on whether personality can predict political attitudes, several authors have made a connection between political attitudes, specifically conservatism and personality traits, in their studies. In the research of Jonason (2014), for example, a link between openness and liberalism was found. For conservatism, the different studies showed mixed results, implicating a link between conservatism and narcissism in one study and psychopathy in the other study. Furthermore, both studies showed different results in the context of conservatism and conscientiousness (Jonason, 2014).

Further implications on the linkage between the conservatism of individuals and personality traits were explored in the study by Carney et al. (2008). They stated that specifically the following personality traits in context to liberalism and conservatism were found: *“Liberals did appear to be more open, tolerant, creative, curious, expressive, enthusiastic, and drawn to novelty and diversity, in comparison with conservatives, who appeared to be more conventional, orderly, organized, neat, clean, withdrawn, reserved, and rigid.”* (Carney et al., 2008, p. 834). The score of political liberals concerning openness to new experiences was higher compared to conservatives, whereas political conservatives had a higher score than liberals in conscientiousness (Carney et al., 2008). These findings go along with other studies conducted by different authors.

Furthermore, a connection between conservatism and free will belief is made by Carey and Paulhus (2013). This means that the belief in free will is associated with a higher political conservatism compared to a liberal ideology (Carey & Paulhus, 2013; Fernandes et al., 2022). Carey and Paulhus (2013) explain this relation with free will belief, necessitating more robust self-regulation, which basically means that increased self-control becomes essential in resisting the temptation to get involved in behaviors that are deemed antisocial.

2.3.2. Political Orientation in Organizations and Service

In the context of the relationship between conservatism and business, Swigart et al. (2020), for example, focus on the effects that political ideology can have within an organization. An important part of their research is how political attitude influences an organization's social dynamics.

This social interaction includes affiliation to different groups, which is shaped by the political orientation of individuals. Iyengar et al. (2012) have already demonstrated by conducting research in the United States that out-group disliking and in-group favoritism exist regarding political parties.

The following part of the chapter is divided into two different sections, on the one hand the impact of conservatism on the customer side and on the other hand the impact of conservatism on the employee side. Nevertheless, it must be stated that the implications of conservative customers have received more attention in scientific research than on the employees' side.

Political Orientation of Customers

As the proposed connection between conservatism and personality traits already shows, the implications of a political attitude may give insights into the behavior of individuals. This is, of course, also applicable in the service context. This topic has received attention from different authors. Fernandes et al. (2022), for instance, conducted research on the effect of customer conservatism on the satisfaction of the consumed product or service. They show that political identity or, more specifically, conservatism has an effect on customer satisfaction. The effect shows that conservative customers are more satisfied with the goods and services they consume than liberals. Fernandes et al. (2022) explain this effect with the belief in free will, which is higher for conservatives than for liberals. They show that this belief in free will enhances the trust in the respective consumption decision.

Further implications on the conservatism of customers, specifically on the impact of conservatism on variety-seeking, are provided by Fernandes and Mandel (2014). They found that there is a positive relationship between conservatism and variety-seeking. This is explained by the conservatives' desire to follow social norms.

Political Orientation of Employees

The impact of the political orientation of employees is, as already stated, a topic with rather low coverage in the scientific literature. Nevertheless, the impact of political ideology and, more specifically, conservatism on the customer experience has already received some attention from the research of Davidson and Theriault (2021). In this case, the participants were asked about their customer experience expectations. The customers were asked for their opinions on whether the expectation was to have a better experience with a conservative or liberal employee. The results indicate that in the perception of customers, liberal employees are preferred over conservatives. Besides the expectations, the actual customer experience in the context of political conservatism was researched by Davidson and Theriault (2021). They found evidence in the exact opposite direction. The customer experience was increased by the conservative employees. This was explained in their research by the higher degree of conscientiousness of conservatives compared to liberals. The relationship between conscientiousness and conservatism was already presented in chapter 2.3.1 on the basis of the research from Carney et al. (2008).

2.3.3. Impact of Political Orientation on Customer Participation

At the beginning of researching the relationship between political orientation and CP stands the already proposed research question, namely:

Is there a correlation between the political orientation of service employees and customer participation in the service process?

In order to find an appropriate answer to this question, the term “political orientation” has to be defined more closely. As already proposed in the previous chapters, the conservatism literature plays a vital role in this context. The literature describes a relationship between conservatism and specific personality traits, such as a higher degree of conscientiousness compared to more liberal individuals (Carney et al., 2008). Along with that, studies conducted by Ekinçi and Dawes (2009) show that besides other personality traits, the conscientiousness of service employees has a positive influence on the quality of interaction between a service provider and the customer receiving the service. Furthermore, the research of Davidson and Theriault (2021), which was designed to test the influence of political conservatism on the customer experience, supports this. The results indicate that conservative employees

positively influence CP compared to more liberal employees. This is also partly explained by the higher conscientiousness of service employees with a conservative political orientation.

These findings indicate that a higher degree of conservatism is related to higher CP. On the basis of the findings from the existing literature, the first hypothesis is proposed, which namely is the following:

H1: Higher level of service employees' conservatism positively influences the customer participation in the service process.

After examining the influence of overall conservatism on the CP, a more differentiated view on different kinds of conservatism is needed to draw a more detailed picture of the influence. In this context, as shown, Everett (2013) created a scale to measure social and economic conservatism separately. When combined, they also fit as a scale that indicates the overall conservatism of an individual. This alignment of many aspects of economic and social conservatism is also described in the research of Busch (2012). Nevertheless, the differentiation between both aspects of conservatism will enable a more granular view of the evaluation of the relation between conservatism and CP. Along with the previously described relation between higher conservatism and the interaction quality of employees and customers, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: Higher level of service employees' social conservatism positively influences the customer participation in the service process.

H2b: Higher level of service employees' economic conservatism positively influences the customer participation in the service process.

2.4. Construal Level Theory

2.4.1. Basic Principles

CLT has recently received much attention in the scientific community. The motivation behind the development of the CLT was to understand the psychological background of people's evaluation and planning of the future (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). The primary origin of the CLT is linked to the construct of Vallacher and Wegner (1989), which formulates the principles to evaluate the degree of abstract or concreteness of events or objects perceived by individuals.

A basis for this theory was created in the research of Liberman and Trope (1998), which included studies about high-level construal and low-level construal. The respective studies linked the temporal distance and the construal level. Events in the distant future showed a higher level of construal and therefore, a higher degree of abstraction than in temporal context closer events. Vice versa, events in the near future were construed on a lower level, so they were more concrete (Liberman & Trope, 1998). This effect even occurred when the information for the more distant event in the future was equal to the level of information about the near future event (Trope et al., 2007). The term psychological distance plays a vital role in the context of CLT. The basic proposition of CLT is: *“Construal level theory (CLT) specifically proposes that individuals use more abstract mental models, or higher level construals, to represent information about distant future events than information about near-future events.”* (Trope & Liberman, 2003, p. 405). The psychological distance includes the following dimensions, according to Trope and Liberman (2010):

- Social distance
- Hypotheticality
- Temporal distance
- Spatial distance

Trope and Liberman (2010) describe the different distances as follows: social distance, for instance, refers to the basic assumption that people construe themselves differently than others. Hypotheticality describes the distinction between real and imaginary objects or events. Temporal distance refers to the point in time and spatial distance refers to the degree of remoteness in spatiality. All these different psychological distance dimensions are linked to each other because they share the egocentric point of reference (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Further, the CLT proposes that the effect of distance on the construal level is not a one-directional effect, but the construal level has vice versa, the respective effect on the distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010). For example, a high-level construal brings back a more distal representation of an action or object (Trope & Liberman, 2010). In this context, Liberman and Förster (2009) conducted studies showing that a high-level of perceptual construal, in contrast to low-level construals, increases the perceived psychological distance, while a low-level of perceptual construal produces a contrary effect. This again underlines that the CLT effect of construal level and psychological distance is not a one-directional effect. So, the effect does

not only occur in the direction of psychological distance to the construal level but also vice versa, so the construal level influences psychological distance.

2.4.2. Implications of High and Low-Level Construals

As already mentioned, the different construal levels have various levels of abstraction. “*Low-level construals are relatively unstructured, contextualized representations that include subordinate and incidental features of events. High-level construals, in contrast, are schematic, decontextualized representations that extract the gist from the available information.*” (Trope et al., 2007, p. 83). So, it can be summarized that high-level construals are rather abstract compared to the more concrete low-level construals. The main difference between an abstract and concrete representation of an object is that the higher the degree of abstraction becomes, the more the focus on the central information of the object or event is of primary interest. In contrast, other information is omitted through the degree of abstraction (Trope & Liberman, 2010). The following example is proposed to better understand an event or object's abstract versus concrete representation. In the research of Vallacher and Wegner (1989), one of the various daily tasks that can be perceived at different abstraction levels is “eating”. The association “getting nutrition” refers to the higher construal or more abstract expression and “chewing and swallowing” refers to the lower-level construal or more concrete expression. An even simpler example to differentiate the degree of abstraction is the typical forest example, which can either be construed at a low-level, which means that the trees are more focused individually and not put into one big picture, or it is construed at a higher level and therefore all trees combined are construed as a forest (Henderson et al., 2011).

The fundamental premise of CLT posits that as the psychological distance of an object increases, so does the construal or abstraction level associated with that object. The basic explanation for this is that high-level construals are more prone to stability than low-level construals, whether one approaches or distances oneself from an object (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

In recent years, the application of CLT has broadened in various use cases, and human behavior implications have been of major interest (Adler & Sarstedt, 2021). This makes further research in this field so important.

2.4.3. Business and Interpersonal Context

CLT is not only applicable to solely psychological research areas. The connection of CLT in business becomes more important and the research in this context broadens (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). Wiesenfeld et al. (2017) indicate that CLT gives implications on the circumstances under which individuals channel their efforts toward broader considerations, indicated by a higher construal level and, consequently, more abstract mental representations. Their research also sheds light on when individuals are more focused, characterized by a lower construal level and a tendency to think more concretely. This is quite an important fact to know in order to understand other individuals better.

An important contribution to the research about CLT and social interactions, more specifically, how individuals navigate psychological distances within the realm of their social interactions, is examined by Trope and Liberman (2012). They proposed the following four specific topics in their research:

- Interpersonal similarity
- Social power
- Politeness
- Social conflict

Interpersonal similarity refers to the previously described social distance (Liviatan et al., 2008). Liviatan et al. (2008) found that the actions that are executed by similar people are perceived on a lower-level construal. In contrast to that, actions of dissimilar others are perceived on a higher-level construal. Furthermore, high-level construals broaden people's social perspective, allowing them to connect with individuals from diverse social backgrounds, while low-level construals direct their reactions toward those who share similarities with them (Trope & Liberman, 2012).

Social power refers to the perception that people with power perceive themselves in a different manner in context to their relationship with others. More specifically, they perceive themselves as not that similar and along with that, more distant from others. Therefore, this distance, connected with social power, makes people with more social power perceive information on a higher construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2012). Further research on the relationship between social power and construal level was conducted by Smith et al. (2008). They examined in their research how abstract thinking influences one's sense of power. In

their studies, participants were primed regarding either concrete or abstract thought. Importantly, they found evidence that abstract-primed participants felt more powerful than people who were not primed at all or were primed with concrete thought (Smith et al., 2008).

Stephan et al. (2010) examined the topic of politeness in the context of construal levels more closely in their conducted studies. They found that a higher degree of politeness in interpersonal interaction is connected to a higher construal level, so a more abstract perception of the individual (Stephan et al., 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2012). The reason for this connection between politeness and construal level can be explained by the fact that politeness is a regulator for distance, more specifically social distance is demonstrated by a higher level of construal (Trope & Liberman, 2012). In simpler terms, when we are more polite, it often means we're keeping a social distance and this is shown by thinking in a more abstract way.

Social conflict in the business context is often connected to, for example, negotiations in an interpersonal environment. Henderson and Trope (2009) researched how the level of abstraction is connected to the joint outcome in negotiations. The findings indicate that a higher level of construal or higher degree of abstraction in the context of the negotiation issues resulted in a higher joint outcome of the negotiation.

Another important implication of construal level in the interpersonal context was examined by the studies of Reyt et al. (2016). The studies that were conducted show that communication on a higher construal level is associated with higher expertise than communication on a low-level construal. Additionally, Reyt et al. (2016) suggest that how advisors communicate and indicate a specific construal level influences people's choice to seek and follow their advice, mainly because of their expert reputation. Nevertheless, their research was explicitly focused on communication in an abstract versus concrete manner and not directly on the abstract versus concrete thinking style.

Further, specifically in situations when two individuals argue, Eyal et al. (2004) found that individuals representing on a higher-level construal focused more on the pro or positive side of an argument than on the con or negative side.

However, in a discussion, the construal level not only plays a role in focusing on a positive or negative argument. Construal level can also influence the stereotyping of others. The subject of different studies was the construal levels and the interpersonal effects, especially in an intercultural environment. McCrea et al. (2012) researched the relationship between construal

level and the stereotyping of oneself and others. The results show that participants in a more abstract situation in terms of abstract thinking showed an increased likeliness of stereotyping a job applicant. Nevertheless, it must be stated that McCrea et al. (2012) point out that the construal level is not a direct primer of the stereotyping. Instead, the perceivers are directed to a within-group similarity and a rather inclusive categorization. However, these effects were observed exclusively in situations where a relevant cue for categorization was explicitly provided.

Along with stereotyping, which may affect customers negatively, self-control is an important aspect of employee-customer interaction. A lack of self-control can have major consequences for the quality of work. It not only impairs their performance in task-related activities but also damages interactions within the social realm. For instance, depleted employees exhibit reduced levels of cooperation and are more prone to engaging in abusive behavior (Johnson et al., 2018). Further, self-control is important to focus on current goals and stay focused until they are completed (Johnson et al., 2018). This shows how important self-control is in a service interaction. Fujita et al. (2006) made the link between self-control and the construal level. The results of their studies show that high-level construals increase the level of self-control when compared to a more concrete level of representation or a lower level of construal.

The connection between CLT, or more specifically, an abstract thinking style and the engagement of an employee in the job is of specific interest to this thesis. Several positive effects linked to an abstract mindset of employees are proposed by Taghavi (2019). The findings from the described research will be outlined in the following. The impact of an abstract thinking style by employees is, firstly, that the focus on task-related activities is heightened. Secondly, the commitment and involvement in the job is stronger. Thirdly, positive emotions and moods are elevated. Lastly, prosocial and extra-role behavior is positively affected. Prosocial and extra-role behavior allude to an employee who does more than the normally expected workload and contributes more to the job tasks (Taghavi, 2019).

Finally, Hess et al. (2018) indicate the need for further research on the construal level and its impact on interpersonal processes. The importance of future research in this field is underlined.

2.4.4. Impact of Abstract versus Concrete Thinking on Customer Participation

The literature shows that an abstract versus concrete thinking style can have a major impact on interpersonal communication. This leads back to the at the beginning proposed research question, namely:

To what extent does the abstract vs. concrete thinking style of service employees influence customer participation in service delivery?

The implication of thinking style in a work environment and more specifically, the contact between employees and customers was examined by different researchers in the relevant literature. Taghavi (2019) for example found that an abstract mindset of employees alludes to prosocial behavior, which of course is beneficial in an interpersonal service encounter. Furthermore, according to their research, commitment and involvement in the job are stronger with an abstract mindset of individuals. Further, by construing on a higher level, individuals focus more on the fundamental aspects (Trope et al., 2007). Therefore, a focus on the existing problem can be set by the service employee, who construes on a higher level. Additionally, Stephan et al. (2010) found that politeness is associated with high-level construal. In turn politeness can of course be beneficial for a relatively convenient service situation between customer and employee. Additionally, self-control, more specifically, a higher level of self-control, can be a further beneficial factor for the interaction between employees and customers. It enables the employee to focus on the relevant goals and stay focused until completion (Johnson et al., 2018). Further, a higher level of self-control can also be beneficial in difficult situations with the customer. A higher level of construal compared to low-level construal increases the self-control of individuals and can therefore be beneficial for the service situation (Fujita et al., 2006).

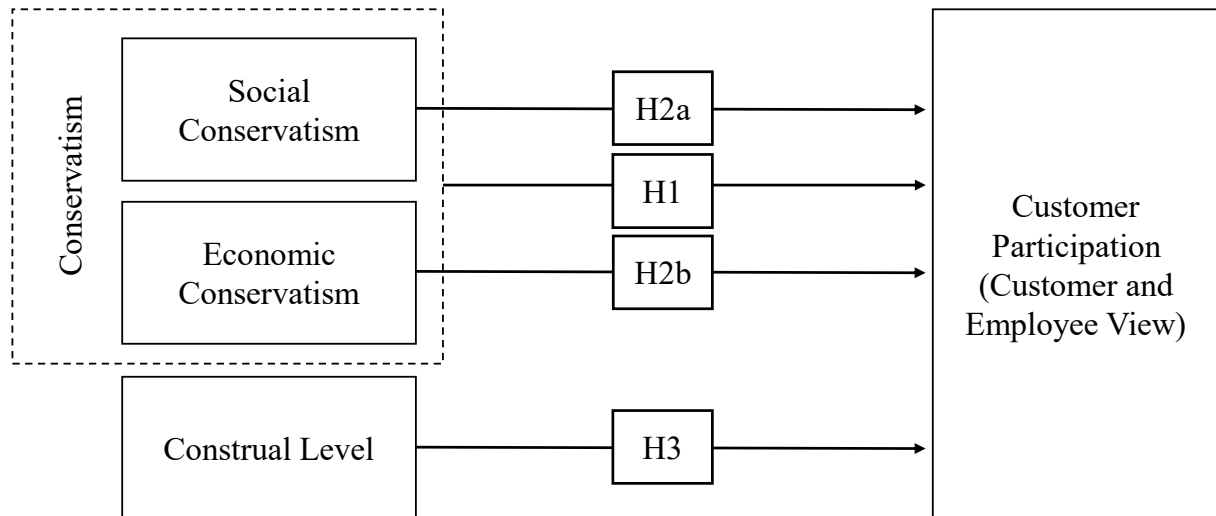
All these different implications show that high-level construals of individuals and in this case specifically service employees, can have a positive impact on the interaction between customer and employee. Along with politeness and commitment to the job of high-level construals, the customer is positively influenced to participate actively in the service interaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Higher level of abstraction in the thinking style of service employees positively influences customer participation in the service process.

Finally, this hypothesis is along with the previous described hypotheses set into context. All research hypotheses and the respective subjects of research are displayed in an illustrative

way in Figure 1. This gives a good overview of the research perspective which is subject to this thesis.

Figure 1: Illustration of the Research Model



The in this chapter proposed theoretical background and the hypotheses are the basis for the following empirical study and the respective hypothesis tests, to answer the research questions of this thesis.

2.5. Abstract versus Concrete Thinking and Political Orientation

After considering both the construal level and the political orientation separately, the question of the connection between both topics arises. Literature suggests that there is indeed a relation between abstractness in the thinking style and individuals' political orientation.

The political polarization in the context of the construal level was researched by Luguri and Napier (2013). They found that abstract versus concrete thinking does influence political polarization, but political versus national identity plays an important role in determining in which way this influence has an impact. In the political context, when individuals were reminded of one's political self the liberals and conservatives showed a higher polarization while thinking in an abstract way rather than concrete. In contrast to that, when individuals were thinking of their national self, both groups liberals and conservatives, showed a lower polarization in an abstract versus concrete thinking style (Luguri & Napier, 2013).

The abstraction level of the mindset can further influence the prejudice of individuals against other persons. Luguri et al. (2012) conducted research on the impact of abstract versus concrete mindsets on the prejudice versus tolerance on groups that differ from Judeo-

Christian norms. These groups include, for example, gay men, lesbian women, Muslim individuals, and atheists. Their findings indicate that conservative people who adopt an abstract mindset can lower prejudice expressions compared to an adopted concrete mindset.

Besides the influence of abstractness on political polarization and prejudice, the abstractness of the mindset can also influence the way of answering surveys. More specifically, Alper (2018) conducted research on the influence of abstract mindsets on the response behavior of individuals in context to scales that measure political attitudes. The findings of Alper (2018) indicate that the consistency in the answering behavior regarding political attitude scales is higher if the mindset is abstract. The finding that abstract thinking decreases the variation in the answering of political attitude scales is a relation of interest between the construal level and political orientation.

3. Empirical Study

3.1. Research Objective

The research objective of this study is divided into different aspects. Firstly, this research is split up into two research questions. Secondly, the research on conservatism is split up into one main and two subconstructs. The overall main objective of this study is to analyze specific characteristics that influence CP from a customer and from an employee perspective in the service encounter. These two different viewpoints of CP improve the picture of the actual subjective CP within the service interaction between both parties. Therefore, this distinction enables a more diverse picture.

As already proposed, the first research question is:

Is there a correlation between the political orientation of service employees and customer participation in the service process?

This research question is aimed at relational research between the political orientation of service employees or, more specifically, the effect of service providers' conservatism on the CP. The field of political orientation of service employees and their effect on customers has received rather little attention in scientific research. The research of Davidson and Theriault (2021) was one of the only research that examined the topic of the political orientation of service employees on customer satisfaction more closely. Nevertheless, this thesis, in contrast to Davidson and Theriault (2021), focuses on a different product/service category. Further, the focus lies on the impact on CP instead of customer satisfaction.

Besides that, another factor of the employee thinking style and attitude and the implication on CP is part of this research. Namely the level of abstraction in the thinking style and the impact on the respective CP.

To what extent does the abstract vs. concrete thinking style of service employees influence customer participation in service delivery?

This research, including both research questions and the respective hypotheses, is intended to broaden the literature on influencing factors of CP.

3.2. Research Design

This thesis is based on data that was collected through a survey conducted at various AMS branches in Vienna under the project lead of Prof. Dr. Christina Sichtmann.

The AMS is an Austrian labor-market agency that supports companies in finding applicants and individuals in the process of finding a job. Mainly, the AMS registers the qualifications of an applicant and matches them with job openings. Also, information about the various job possibilities is provided to the candidates. This service plays a vital role in the government's effort to reduce unemployment (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2020).

The research conducted in the AMS consisted of four different questionnaires, which were handed out to the employees as well as to the customers. Each employee received at least two questionnaires, one of which contained questions about demographics and political orientation and a short association test regarding the level of abstraction in the thinking style. The specific measures that were used to receive reliable results in the survey are presented in chapter 3.4.1. Another one included statements on the interaction with a specific customer. This included statements about the perceived CP from the employee side. While the first survey had to be filled out only once by each employee, the survey about customer interaction had to be separately filled out for each interaction with a customer.

Each customer had to fill out two questionnaires. One questionnaire contained demographic data such as gender, age, and education of the respective customer. The second questionnaire contained questions about the interaction with the employee, for example, about the customer's self-assessed CP. It must be mentioned that both parties, the customer and the employee, received the same questions regarding CP. This information enabled a closer analysis of both views on the interaction.

The mode of execution of the survey was that all questionnaires were printed and filled out by hand of each participant.

The dataset, which initially consisted of two separate datasets, one for the employee and one for the customer, was merged using a key variable. This total dataset is the basis for testing the hypotheses within this thesis.

Method of Data Evaluation

The collected data from the survey, in the form of two datasets, is analyzed using the statistical program SPSS version 29. This tool enables an appropriate analysis of the collected data and the proposed research objective. The described merged dataset containing the information from the employees and the customers and additionally, the separate dataset, which only contains the employees, was the basis for further examination.

The data was then analyzed descriptively to gain insights into the characteristics of the data from the employees' side as well as the customers' side. Further, all eight proposed hypotheses made it necessary to conduct statistical tests to answer the hypotheses on the basis of the data. For each hypothesis, a linear regression analysis was chosen and conducted. To carry out these regression analyses, specific variables on the basis of scientific scales were created, this process is displayed in chapter 3.4.2.

Statistical regression tests for the hypotheses tests made it necessary to check for the respective linear regression assumptions, which are discussed in chapter 3.5 by the use of references and thresholds from the scientific literature.

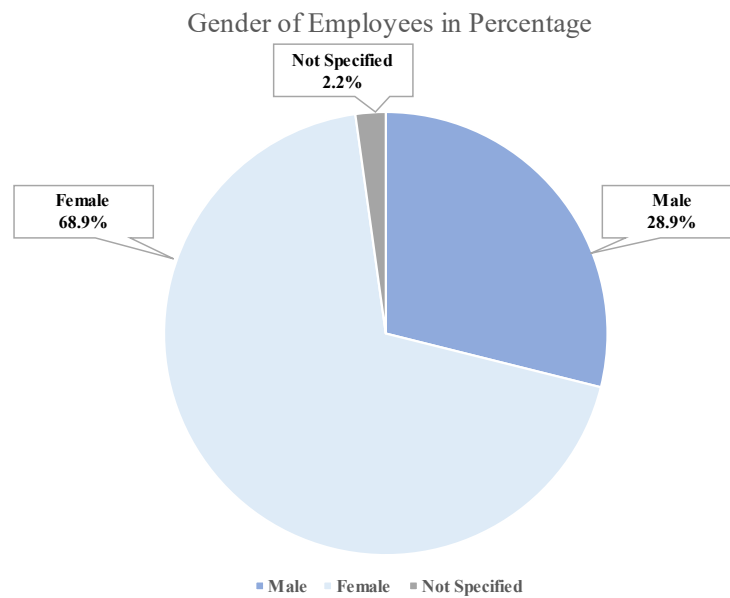
3.3. Descriptive Statistics

3.3.1. Employee Data

As already described, the participants were, on one side, employees and, on the other, customers. The employee sample contains 45 employees from different AMS branches in Vienna. The gender of the employees is displayed in Figure 2.

Specific variables like gender, education, and age are subject to this section. Further, and quite importantly, this section also includes the distribution of customers among employees, which varies across all employees.

Figure 2: Pie Chart of the Gender Distribution from Employees

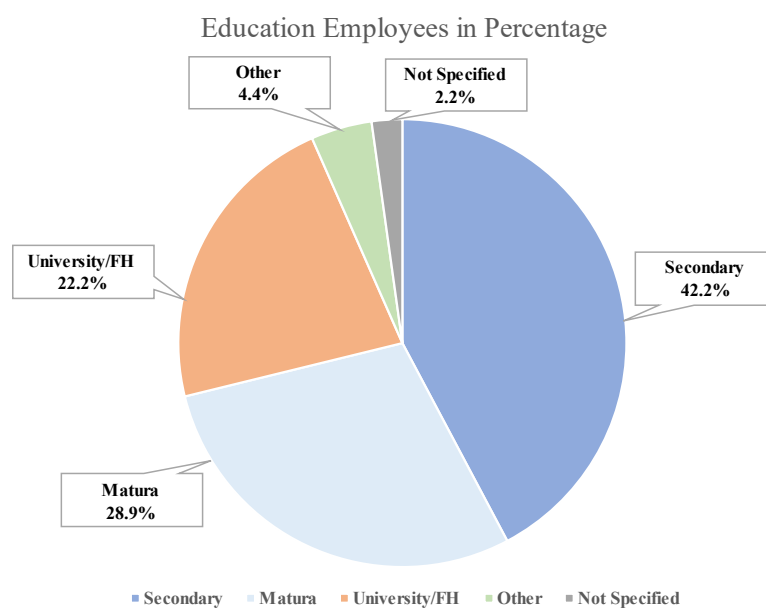


The data shows that 31 or 68.9% of the employees are female, 13 or 28.9% are male, and 1 or 2.2% did not fill in their gender, as shown in Figure 2.

Regarding the distribution of employee age, 44 employees answered the question about their age. The youngest employee was 21 and the oldest employee was 66 years old. The mean of the age is 39.36, and the standard deviation of the age is 10.706.

The educational background of the employees is displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Pie Chart of the Education Distribution from Employees

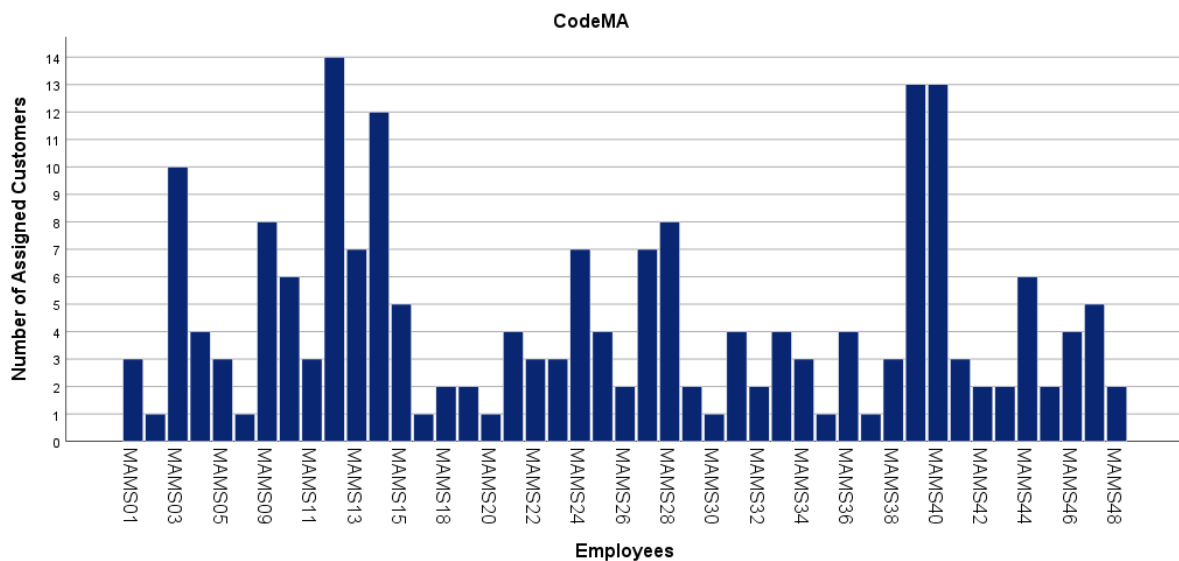


19 employees or 42.2% have a secondary educational background; 13 or 28.9% have a matura; 10 or 22.2% have a university or similar education; 2 or 4.4% have other educational backgrounds, and 1 or 2.2% did not fill in this question.

Furthermore, data about the migration background of the employees show that 33 employees or 73.3% have no migration background and 10 or 22.2% were either born in a different country, or at least one of their parents was born in a foreign country. Furthermore, two employees did not fill in this question. These results can be seen in Table 13 in the Appendix.

After displaying the demographic data of the service employees, the distribution of customers and their respective employees is subject to the following. In this context, it is important to clarify that the customers are not equally distributed among the employees. This means that while some employees only had contact with one customer, others had contact with various customers. Figure 4 shows the distribution of customers over service employees, so the number of customers that are allocated to one service employee in the sample.

Figure 4: Employee-Customer Assignment



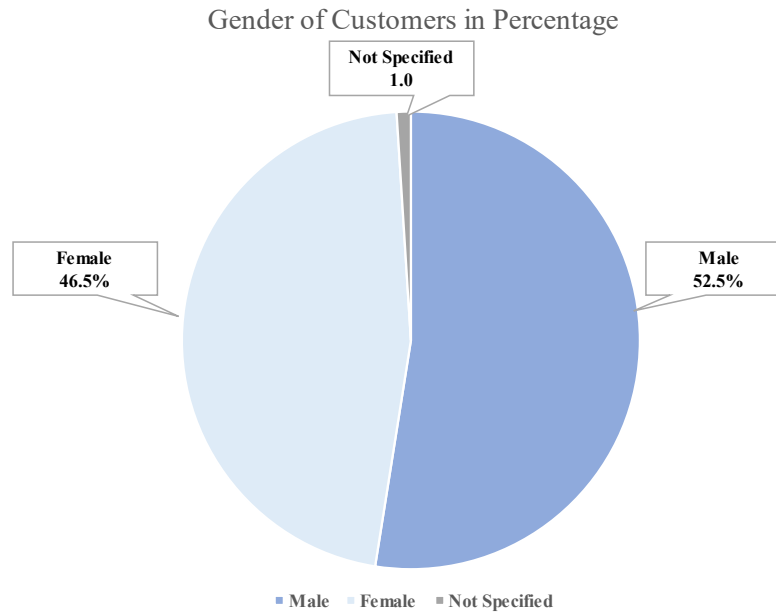
This graph shows that, for example, employee number 12 had contact with 14 customers, and employee number two only had contact with one customer.

3.3.2. Customer Data

The total sample size of customers is 199. One customer had to be excluded because there was no assignment to a specific employee and the relevance for the proposed research questions and hypotheses are all based on data from the customer and employee side, which

was not given in this specific case. Therefore, the relevant sample consists of 198 customers. First of all, the gender of the different customers is displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Pie Chart of the Gender Distribution from Customers



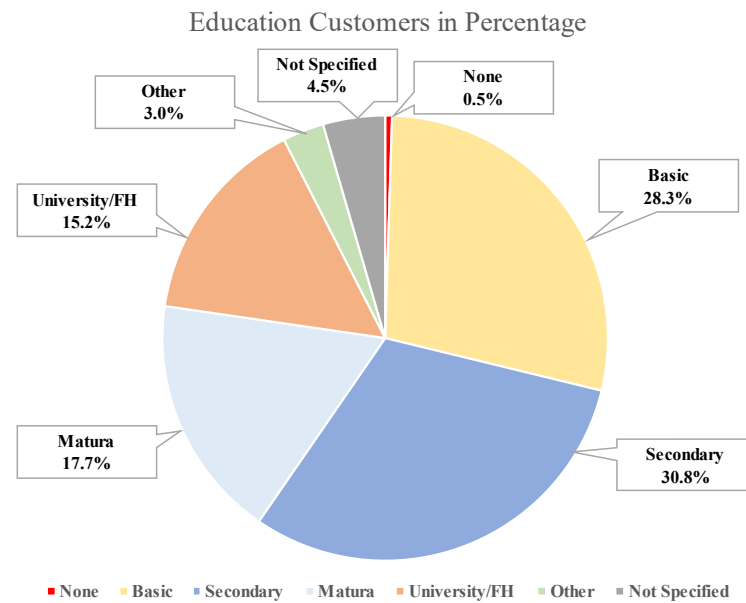
The gender of the customers is relatively equally distributed between males and females. The data shows that 104 customers or 52.5% are male; 92 or 46.5% are female, and 2 or 1% did not fill in their gender, as it can be seen in the pie chart in Figure 5.

Regarding the age, 193 out of the 198 cases filled in the respective field in the survey and are therefore relevant for this analysis. The youngest customer was 15 years old, while the oldest customer was 65. The mean of the customer age is 37.37, with a standard deviation of 12.856.

The questionnaire also included questions about customers' educational backgrounds. Data on this question are displayed in Figure 6.

The data show that 1 customer or 0.5% has no educational qualification. 56 customers or 28.3% have a basic education; 61 or 30.8% have a secondary education; 35 or 17.7% have a matura; 30 or 15.2% have university or similar education; 6 have other educational qualifications, and 9 participants did not fill out the question.

Figure 6: Pie Chart of the Education Distribution from Customers



The data about the country of origin of each customer showed that most customers, with a number of 109, were from Europe. The country in Europe that was named most is Austria, with 44 participants. The continent with the second most named country of origin is Asia, with 56 participants. The country with the most participants from Asia is Turkey, which had 18 participants. Furthermore, participants from two additional continents filled in the questionnaire. Namely Africa with 8 participants and South America with 3 participants. Besides that, 3 participants inserted that they are stateless, and 19 participants did not fill in this question. The respective data can be seen in more detail in the Appendix in Table 12.

3.4. Scales and Development of Variables

3.4.1. Overview of Relevant Scales

Scales are used to appropriately measure the constructs proposed by the respective research questions. These scales are tested and verified by scientific research studies and, therefore, enable accurate measurements. The following will display the appropriate scales, including the respective sources from the scientific literature.

Conservatism Scale

The first research question makes it necessary to test the conservatism and the CP. Literature regarding measures for conservatism proposes different measures. It is important, especially in terms of conservatism, to use a scale that is not outdated. Therefore, the Social and Economic Conservatism Scale (SECS) from Everett (2013) is used. This scale enables, on the one hand, the measurement of social and economic conservatism separately by using the respective subscale. On the other hand, the combination of all items creates a conservatism scale that measures the overall conservatism. Nevertheless, the SECS does not include preformulated statements; rather, it includes topics that need to be part of the questionnaire to assess the conservatism level. Therefore, the connections between the survey statements and the respective topics of the SECS will be examined more closely. Furthermore, as the SECS, in this case, is used for a survey in Austria, specific topics such as gun ownership were not relevant for this use case and, therefore, not included in the survey. The relevant topics are printed in bold within Table 1, which shows all topics of the SECS from Everett (2013).

Table 1: Items of the SECS

Social and Economic Conservatism Scale (SECS)	
Social Conservatism	Economic Conservatism
Abortion	Fiscal responsibility
The family unit	Business
Religion	Limited government
Traditional marriage	Gun ownership
Traditional values	Welfare Benefits
Patriotism	
Military and national security	

Note. Bolded themes indicate integration in this research and non-bolded were not utilized. Adapted from Everett (2013, p. 7)

The following list shows the relationship between the statements of the questionnaire and the respective construct of the SECS.

Social Conservatism:

- *Immigration is a force for good.* (Disagreement = Conservative)

- The **immigration** aspect was included in the SECS development but then excluded for the final scale. Nevertheless, in this case the opinion on immigration is an important aspect due to the high share of migrant customers from the AMS.
- *I believe same sex couples should have the same treatment as heterosexual couples.*
(Disagreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **traditional marriage**.
- *Religion should play an active role in our society.* (Agreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **religion**.
- *The state should have a strong military in order to defend its national security.*
(Agreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **military and national security**.
- *Building a traditional family should be the most important goal of every individual.*
(Agreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspects of the SECS for this statement are **traditional values** and **the family unit**.

Economic Conservatism:

- *No man or state should spend more money than it makes.* (Agreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **fiscal responsibility**.
- *The state should not interfere with business.* (Agreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **business**.
- *The less state regulates the economy the better.* (Agreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **limited government**.
- *The state should tax the rich to provide for the poor.* (Disagreement = Conservative)
 - The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **welfare benefits**.
- *The state should provide welfare benefits to people in bad financial condition.*
(Disagreement = Conservative)

- The relevant aspect of the SECS for this statement is **welfare benefits**.

As already proposed, these two scales enable measurement of economic/social conservatism and all statements combined serve as a measure of overall conservatism.

Construal Level Scale

To enable a good measurement of the abstractness and concreteness of the thinking style, the instrument of Vallacher and Wegner (1989) is used. As already briefly mentioned, the scale from Vallacher and Wegner (1989) is based on the interpretation of specific headlines. The participants can choose between two different answers, one is an abstract interpretation of the statement and the other one is a concrete interpretation. In total, the scale contains 25 association statements and the questionnaire contained 10 out of the 25 statements. As an example, the statement “*greeting someone*” is proposed. The low-level construal or more concrete interpretation in this case is “*saying hello*”, the high-level construal and more abstract interpretation is “*showing friendliness*” (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989).

Customer Participation Scale

An evaluation of the CP is such as the other constructs, based on a validated scale from scientific literature, namely the research of Auh et al. (2007). In the case of Auh et al. (2007), the scale was adapted to the financial industry. Therefore, the items for CP have to be adapted firstly to fit the AMS questionnaire and secondly to fit both perspectives, the employee and customer perspective. As both CP perspectives, the employees’ and customers’ are relevant for this research, both surveys contain the same questions from the proposed scale.

The respective sections of the survey are based on these scales. Further, the relevant data from these sections is combined on the basis of these scales to enable further hypothesis testing.

3.4.2. Variable Creation for Data Evaluation

On the basis of the proposed scales, variables for the data evaluation were created by combining the respective questions and statements, furthermore if applicable, the Cronbach’s Alpha values of the items were checked. The common threshold of Cronbach’s Alpha is that a

value starting from .6 - .7 is acceptable. Values below .6 and above .95 are not desirable (Ursachi et al., 2015).

Beginning with validating and creating the conservatism sub-scales, namely, the economic and social conservatism. At first, the sub-scale for social conservatism is validated and created as a variable (**Social_Conservatism**). First of all, the items for the social conservatism scale are measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The exact assignment of the statements of the survey and the SECS was displayed in chapter 3.4.1. At the beginning all statements needed to be coded in one direction. Therefore, the statements *“Immigration is a force for good.”* and *“I believe same sex couples should have the same treatment as heterosexual couples.”* were coded in reverse. After the recoding, all five items are coded in the same direction, with number 1 on the Likert scale being the equivalent for the least conservative and 7 for the most conservative ideology. The initial Cronbach’s Alpha value of .468 for the five items made it necessary to exclude items in order to improve the Cronbach’s Alpha. The following items were excluded to achieve a Cronbach’s Alpha of .605:

- *“The state should have a strong military in order to defend its national security.”* (excluded in a first step results in $\alpha = .543$)
- *“Immigration is a force for good.”* (excluded in a second step results in $\alpha = .605$)

The variable **Social_Conservatism** is displayed in more detail in Table 16 in the Appendix.

Another variable in terms of conservatism is the economic conservatism or, specifically, the variable **Eco_Conservatism**. Items belonging to the economic conservatism are just as the social conservatism measured by the use of a 7-point Likert scale. As for social conservatism, the assignment of statements for economic conservatism and the according topics of the SECS are displayed in chapter 3.4.1. As a first step, the statements *“The state should tax the rich to provide for the poor”* and *“The state should provide welfare benefits to people in bad financial condition.”* are coded in reverse so that all statements point in the same direction with 7 on the 7-point Likert scale indicating a conservative ideology. Checking the respective items for reliability indicates a Cronbach’s Alpha of .645, which is already acceptable, furthermore, excluding one item does not result in a high increase in the score. So, all five items are included in the final variable **Eco_Conservatism**, the Appendix provides the complete table of the created variable, which namely is Table 16. The **Conservatism_Total** variable, which is just like the two previous variables based on the SECS, contains all 10 items that were initially applicable to economic and social conservatism. As all 10 items were

already included in a scale, the recoding of those items can be retraced in the creation of both the **Eco_Conservatism** and the **Social_Conservatism** variable. Cronbach's Alpha of all 10 items shows a value of .640, which is already acceptable. Furthermore, an exclusion of one item does not enable an appropriate increase. Therefore, all 10 items are included in the variable **Conservatism_Total**, which can be seen in Table 14 in the Appendix.

For the construal level, the variable **Constr_Lvl**, which measures the level of abstraction, is created. As a first step, the association statements "*Reading*", "*Locking a door*", "*Growing a garden*" and "*Greeting someone*" are coded in reverse to ensure that all items now point in the same direction, with 0 being the abstract association and 1 the concrete association. Afterwards, the 10 items are summed up to the final variable **Constr_Lvl**. So, the maximum possible level of concreteness of the created variable **Constr_Lvl** is equivalent to 10 and the maximum level of abstractness is 0, this can be seen in Table 17 in the Appendix.

After constructing the independent variables for the analysis, the dependent variables, more specifically the CP from the employee and customer perspectives, are created. These variables are accordingly named **CP_Emp** for the employee view and **CP_Cus** for the customer view. As a first step, all items need to be coded in the same direction. Therefore, the following items were coded in reverse: "*The customer/I talked about personal issues, not directly related to his/her unemployment status.*" and "*The customer/I had to ask everything myself (The customer/I didn't explain all of the issues himself/herself).*" To achieve an appropriate Cronbach's Alpha, exclusions of the following two statements were necessary for both perspectives so the customer and employee perspective:

- "*The customer/I talked about personal issues, not directly related to his/her unemployment status.*" (1)
- "*The customer/I had to ask everything myself (The customer/I didn't explain all of the issues himself/herself).*" (2)

Initially, Cronbach's Alpha for CP, from the employee perspective, showed a value of .432. Therefore, (1) was excluded to achieve a value of .714. A further exclusion of (2) resulted in an even higher value of .884. The Cronbach's Alpha of the CP from the employees' perspective, so the variable **CP_Emp** after excluding shows a value of .884, which can be interpreted as a high value. This can be seen in the Appendix in Table 15.

Accordingly, as already proposed, the same two statements were excluded to receive a good value of Cronbach's Alpha on the customer side. The initial Cronbach's Alpha value of .432

was increased to .568 by the exclusion of statement (1). A further improvement of Cronbach's Alpha was enabled by excluding statement (2) to achieve a value of .815. The Cronbach's Alpha shows a value of .815 for the variable **CP_Cus**; see Appendix Table 15.

3.5. Quantitative Assessment and Display of Experimental Results

In advance of the assessment of experimental results, one case from the dataset was excluded, more specifically the case of customer 34, as there was no assignment to an employee possible and therefore, it was not relevant for any of the analyses. Furthermore, employee number 1 did not fill in any of the relevant statements for **Eco_Conservatism** and employee number 22 did not fill in any of the statements for **Social_Conservatism**. Therefore, these two cases were excluded only for the respective analysis and both were excluded for the analysis of the total conservatism (**Conservatism_Total**).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Scale Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Combined Dataset					
Conservatism_Total	192	1.40	4.60	3.05	.71
Social_Conservatism	195	1.00	7.00	2.62	1.03
Eco_Conservatism	195	1.20	5.60	3.28	1.01
Cosntr_Lvl	195	0	8	3.28	1.65
CP_Emp	198	1.40	7.00	5.87	1.22
CP_Cus	197	2.20	7.00	6.25	1.00
Only Employee Dataset					
Conservatism_Total	43	1.40	4.60	3.00	.72
Social_Conservatism	44	1.00	7.00	2.53	1.20
Eco_Conservatism	44	1.20	5.60	3.23	.98
Constr_Lvl	44	0	8	3.20	1.86

Table 2 contains both views on the respective data. So, the combined and employee-only data. In the first step, the proposed variables are descriptively analyzed to visualize the relevant data. In Table 2, the results of the descriptive statistics from the variables concerning conservatism, construal level, and CP are proposed. Regarding the conservatism variables **Conservatism_Total**, **Social_Conservatism**, and **Eco_Conservatism**, the value 1 indicates the lowest possible and the value 7 the highest possible conservatism. In the same way, **CP_Emp** and **CP_Cus** indicate for 1 a low CP and for 7 a high CP in the perspective of the respective side. **Constr_Lvl** is coded from 0, being the most abstract, to 10, being the most concrete thinking style.

The overall conservatism, so the variable **Conservatism_Total**, has a mean of $M = 3.05$ and $SD = .71$. These values account for the combined dataset, the separate dataset only including employees nearly shows the same values of $M = 3.00$ and $SD = .72$. These values are relatively in the middle of the 7-point scale but rather on the side of lower conservatism.

The two sub-scales of conservatism so social (**Social_Conservatism**) and economic conservatism (**Eco_Conservatism**) have the following values. Social conservatism has a mean of $M = 2.62$ and $SD = 1.03$ for the combined and $M = 2.53$ and $SD = 1.20$ for the dataset, containing each employee only once. The economic conservatism, respectively, has a mean of $M = 3.28$ and $SD = 1.01$ for the combined and $M = 3.23$ and $SD = .98$ for the employee dataset. So, the social conservatism sub-scale showed a rather lower conservatism than the economic conservatism scale. The construal level of the employees (**Constr_Lvl**) with $M = 3.28$ and $SD = 1.65$ for the combined and $M = 3.20$ and $SD = 1.86$ for the employee dataset indicates that the participating employees associated statements rather abstract than concrete. The CP of both customers (**CP_Cus**) and employees (**CP_Emp**) is with $M = 6.25$ and $SD = 1.00$ and respectively $M = 5.87$ and $SD = 1.22$ indicating an overall rather high CP. Nevertheless, there is a difference in CP from both perspectives, the Customers rated their participation higher with a lower standard deviation than the employees.

After this examination, the focus will now be on hypothesis testing using regression analysis. All hypotheses are tested for both CP perspectives, the customer and the employee perspective. In advance of each analysis, the respective assumptions for a linear regression analysis are checked.

A graphical representation was used to check for linearity. All graphics showed a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Furthermore, the homoscedasticity was also checked using a graphical representation. All graphics are homoscedastic.

The thresholds for the following assumptions are displayed in the next paragraph, but to enable better traceability, all values, such as skewness, kurtosis, and Cook's distance, are presented in each regression table.

The autocorrelation assumption is checked using the Durbin-Watson test. Field (2018, pp. 385–387) suggests thresholds of 1 to 3 to indicate no autocorrelation. Nevertheless, even if the stricter thresholds from literature, namely 1.5 to 2.5 are used, no autocorrelation is detected.

Cook's distance is used to assess whether influential outliers exist. The threshold for the maximum of Cook's distance within the respective analysis is based on the commonly used threshold of values above .5 needing a further examination and values above 1 likely being influential outliers (9.5 - *Identifying Influential Data Points* | STAT 462, 2019).

Another assumption which is the normal distribution of residuals is for this research assessed by checking the skewness and kurtosis of residuals for each regression model. The thresholds to expect normality are for skewness between -2 and 2 and kurtosis between -7 and 7 (Curran et al., 1996). All values outside of this range can be suspected as nonnormal.

In summary, it can be said that for all 8 regressions, so 2 per hypothesis for each CP perspective, the assumptions are met and therefore, the hypotheses can be tested. All regression analyses are tested to a confidence interval of 95%.

Hypothesis 1:

The first hypothesis, which is assessed by the use of the SECS is tested first for the CP from the employee perspective and then for the CP from the customer perspective. The dependent variable for the first regression analysis is **CP_Emp** and the independent variable is **Conservatism_Total**. These results are shown in Table 3.

The results of the regression analysis show that the model explains 1.6% (Adjusted $R^2 = .016$) of variance in the dependent variable, which is a rather low value. Nevertheless, the purpose of the hypothesis is not that the independent variable totally explains the dependent, but rather whether there exists a relation between both variables. The regression analysis shows a significant p-value and a positive B -coefficient ($B = .249$; $p = .043$).

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 1 CP Employee Perspective

Variable		CP_Emp				
Conservatism_Total	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)		-1.201		
		Kurtosis (of residuals)		.912		
		Durbin-Watson		1.673		
		Cook-Distance (max.)		.05		
		R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient
		.021	.016	4.147	1 / 190	.249
						.043

These results confirm a positive relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, so the total conservatism (**Conservatism_Total**) positively influences the CP from the employee perspective (**CP_Emp**). The significant result of the regression analysis, therefore, supports H1 from the employees' perspective.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 1 CP Customer Perspective

Variable		CP_Cus				
Conservatism_Total	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)		-1.690		
		Kurtosis (of residuals)		3.074		
		Durbin-Watson		1.925		
		Cook-Distance (max.)		.127		
		R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient
		.004	-.001	.766	1 / 189	.083
						.382

After examining the employee perspective, Table 4 shows the results of the regression analysis for the CP from the customer perspective (**CP_Cus**).

This regression model explains -.1% (Adjusted $R^2 = -.001$) of variance in the dependent variable, which is even lower than the regression from the employee perspective. The result of this regression analysis, specifically the p-value is not significant ($B = .083$; $p = .382$). The

analysis did not yield statistically significant evidence to support the presence of a meaningful effect of the overall conservatism (**Conservatism_Total**) on the CP from the customers' perspective (**CP_Cus**) within the sample of the research. Hence, there are mixed results for H1. These different outcomes of the regressions will be compared and interpreted more closely in chapter 4.

Hypothesis 2a:

The second one, split up into H2a and H2b, increases the granularity of hypothesis 1 by separately testing the employees' social and economic conservatism. At first, the results of the regression analysis for hypothesis 2a will be displayed for the CP from the employees' perspective (**CP_Emp**).

Table 5: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 2a CP Employee Perspective

Variable		CP_Emp					
Social_Conservatism	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)					-1.158
		Kurtosis (of residuals)					.696
		Durbin-Watson					1.634
		Cook-Distance (max.)					.063
	R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient	Significance (p-value)	
	.007	.002	1.325	1 / 193	.098	.251	

The results of the conducted regression analysis in Table 5 show that .2% (Adjusted $R^2 = .002$) of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the model, indicating a low model fit. Additionally, and most importantly for the hypothesis test, the result for this regression model, specifically the p-value is not significant ($B = .098$; $p = .251$). This analysis did not yield statistically significant evidence to support the presence of a meaningful effect of **Social_Conservatism**, namely the social conservatism of the employees on the dependent variable **CP_Emp**, the CP from the employees' perspective within the sample of the research.

After examining H2a and the CP from the employees' perspective, Table 6 displays the regression result for the CP from the customers' perspective (**CP_Cus**).

Table 6: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 2a CP Customer Perspective

Variable		CP_Cus				
Social_Conservatism	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)		-1.739		
		Kurtosis (of residuals)		3.319		
		Durbin-Watson		1.884		
		Cook-Distance (max.)		.185		
		R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient
		.005	.000	.969	1 / 192	.067
						.326

Regression analysis for the customer perspective of CP results in a really low model fit, showing that 0% (Adjusted $R^2 = .000$) of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the model. The regression model shows a non-significant result ($B = .067$; $p = .326$). Therefore, this analysis did not yield statistically significant evidence to support the presence of a meaningful effect of social conservatism (**Social_Conservatism**) on CP from the customers' perspective (**CP_Cus**). So, in summary, neither perspective results in a significant regression outcome and therefore, Hypothesis H2a cannot be confirmed.

Hypothesis 2b:

Hypothesis 2b is, along with Hypothesis 2a, intended to examine the relationship between conservatism and CP. More specifically, H2b proposes that there is a relationship between economic conservatism and CP from the employees' perspective as well as the customers' perspective of CP. H2b is tested using a regression analysis and the result of this analysis is documented in the following tables. The order for the dependent variable is the same as for all other results. Starting with the CP from the employees' perspective. This regression analysis and all relevant results are shown in Table 7.

The regression analysis shows a negative model fit with -.2% (Adjusted $R^2 = -.002$) of the variance in the dependent variable, being explained by the model. The regression model shows a non-significant result ($B = .067$; $p = .433$). These results, specifically the quite high p-value, yield that there is no statistically significant evidence to support the presence of a

meaningful effect of employees' economic conservatism (**Eco_Conservatism**) on the CP from the employees' perspective (**CP_Emp**) within the sample of the research.

Table 7: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 2b CP Employee Perspective

Variable		CP_Emp				
Eco_Conservatism	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)		-1.207		
		Kurtosis (of residuals)		.846		
		Durbin-Watson		1.653		
		Cook-Distance (max.)		.051		
		R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient
		.003	-.002	.616	1 / 193	.067
						.433

Subsequently, the regression analysis of the employees' economic conservatism on the CP from the customers' perspective is conducted. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 2b CP Customer Perspective

Variable		CP_Cus				
Eco_Conservatism	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)		-1.699		
		Kurtosis (of residuals)		2.985		
		Durbin-Watson		1.847		
		Cook-Distance (max.)		.128		
		R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient
		.004	-.001	.788	1 / 192	.060
						.376

The regression analysis for the employees' economic conservatism on the CP from the customers' perspective results in a negative model fit with -.1% (Adjusted $R^2 = -.001$) of the variance in the dependent variable being explained by the model. The regression model, specifically the p-value, shows no significant result ($B = .060$; $p = .376$). Therefore, these

results of the analysis did not yield statistically significant evidence to support the presence of a meaningful effect of the variable **Eco_Conservatism** on **CP_Cus** within the sample. So, in summary, economic conservatism does not show a significant effect on both the CP from the customers' and the CP from the employees' perspective within the sample of the research. Therefore, the hypothesis H2b cannot be confirmed.

Hypotheses H1, H2a, and H2b are related to the first research question of this thesis, namely, the relation between conservatism and the CP.

Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3 refers to the second research question of this thesis. As proposed in chapter 2.4.4, H3 suggests that a higher degree of abstractness in the thinking style of the service employee results in a higher CP. This hypothesis is analyzed in the same manner as the previous hypotheses, namely, both perspectives of CP, so the customers' and employees' perspectives are analyzed separately. The independent variable for both regression analyses is the variable **Contr_Lvl**. In the same order as before, at first the employee perspective is analyzed. Table 9 displays the results of the regression analysis that was conducted.

Table 9: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 3 CP Employee Perspective

Variable		CP_Emp				
Constr_Lvl	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)				-1.173
		Kurtosis (of residuals)				.685
		Durbin-Watson				1.629
		Cook-Distance (max.)				.116
	R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient	Significance (p-value)
	.002	-.003	.366	1 / 193	-.032	.546

The conducted regression analysis in Table 9 shows a negative model fit, specifically $-.3\%$ (Adjusted $R^2 = -.003$) of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the regression model. Further, most importantly, the regression shows no significant p-value ($B = .032$; $p = .546$). The respective p-value is relatively high. Therefore, H3, which suggests that the higher

abstractness in the thinking style of a service employee is related to a higher CP, is not confirmed for the CP from the employees' perspective within the sample.

After the examination of the CP from the employees' perspective, in the same way as for all other hypotheses, the CP from the customers' perspective is analyzed, also by the use of a regression analysis. Table 10 displays the results of the regression analysis for the construal level (**Constr_Lvl**) as the independent variable and CP from the customers' perspective (**CP_Cus**) as the dependent variable.

Table 10: Regression Analysis Results of Hypothesis 3 CP Customer Perspective

Variable		CP_Cus				
Constr_Lvl	Assumptions	Skewness (of residuals)				-1.739
		Kurtosis (of residuals)				3.320
		Durbin-Watson				1.913
		Cook-Distance (max.)				.262
		R-square	Adjusted R-square	F-value	df1 / df2	B-coefficient
		.01	.004	1.842	1 / 192	-.058
						.176

The results show a low model fit, specifically .4% (Adjusted $R^2 = .004$) of the variance in the dependent variable, being explained by the model. The regression model does not show a significant p-value ($B = -.058$; $p = .176$). This means that the analysis did not yield statistically significant evidence to support the presence of a meaningful effect of the abstractness in thinking style (**Constr_Lvl**) on CP from the customers' perspective (**CP_Cus**) within the sample. Overall, as the construal level on both CP perspectives does not show significant results, this means that H3 cannot be confirmed in the conducted regression analysis for either of the CP perspectives.

3.6. Summary of the Results

After displaying the regression analysis for all hypotheses and CP perspectives, this chapter will summarize these results and the outcome for each hypothesis. Table 11 gives a brief overview of the relevant results.

Table 11: Summary of Hypotheses Test Results

Research Question	Hypothesis (Independent Variable)	CP Perspective	Result
1 (Conservatism)	H1 (Conservatism_Total)	Employee	✓
		Customer	✗
	H2a (Social_Conservatism)	Employee	✗
		Customer	✗
	H2b (Eco_Conservatism)	Employee	✗
		Customer	✗
2 (Construal Lvl.)	H3 (Constr_Lvl)	Employee	✗
		Customer	✗

The summary of all eight conducted regression analyses indicates that most hypotheses were not confirmed. Nevertheless, the overall conservatism on the CP from the employee perspective showed significant results, which supports the hypothesis that higher conservatism positively affects the CP. Therefore, the higher granularity view on each of the hypotheses shows valuable insights, as specifically in the first hypothesis, both results indicate different outcomes for the proposed hypothesis. The reason for the different outcomes will be discussed in chapter 4. The results show that all regression models show a rather low R-Square; nevertheless, for the proposed hypotheses, which are intended to prove a relation between the independent and dependent variables, this is not problematic.

The descriptive statistics of the created variables also provide insights into the characteristics of the data. For example, the CP shows different means within both perspectives; the customers rated their CP higher with a lower standard deviation than the employees rated the CP. Other variables, such as the construal level, also have further implications. For the other variables, which were only applicable to the employees, both perspectives are displayed. The mixed dataset includes all employees, but the number of inclusions is dependent on the service interactions of each employee, which ranges from 1 to 14 customer interactions per

employee. Besides that, the same descriptive values are calculated for the employee-only dataset, which only includes each employee once.

Both perspectives are important as all regression analyses had to be executed in the mixed dataset; nevertheless, the dataset that includes each employee only once enables a reference point, showing the characteristics of the participating employees. However, it must be stated that the values for both datasets only show minor differences. The data for **Constr_Lvl** show a tendency toward abstract thinking among service employees, this aspect is discussed further in chapter 4.

4. Discussion

The outcomes of the presented findings are subject to critical discourse within the framework of scientific literature. The two perspectives, namely the CP from the employee and customer side, on the one hand, show a similar direction of answering behavior, which indicates a generally rather high CP, but on the other hand, there are also the following differences that are important for the data interpretation. The descriptives of both perspectives give implications on the reason behind the different outcomes. When considering the employee side compared to the customer side, the mean is lower and the standard deviation higher. The mean from customers' perspective, which is between 6 and 7 on the 7-point Likert scale, indicates that customers overall rated their participation in a similar way quite at the top of the scale. The employees instead rated the CP a bit more diverse on the scale. This shows that customers tended to rate their participation higher than the employees rated the CP. A reason for this may be that the CP self-assessment by the customers was interpreted as a rating of their own performance. Therefore, it is quite likely that the results from employees' CP perspective enable better detection of possible effects.

Considering the conservatism and precisely the total conservatism, which was tested in H1, the results reveal that, at least from the employees' perspective, the hypothesis is supported. This hypothesis states that higher conservatism leads to a better CP. These findings support the existing literature from Davidson and Theriault (2021), who found that conservatism positively relates to customer satisfaction. This finding may seem counterintuitive to the common perception of more conservative employees, which was also outlined within their research. In their studies, they found that customers expected better customer satisfaction with liberals than conservatives, but actually, customer satisfaction with conservatives was higher. One main reason for that, which is proposed by multiple authors, is that the hidden strength of conservatives is conscientiousness (Carney et al., 2008; Davidson & Theriault, 2021). The moderating factor of conscientiousness was not part of this research. Nevertheless, the results match the existing literature for the employee perspective on CP in H1. In contrast, the customer view with no significant results did not indicate an effect, but as described, the data for the CP from the customers' perspective was mostly quite at the top of the scale with a low SD. Therefore, the detection of an effect is statistically more difficult. Overall, H1 can be confirmed for the CP from the employee perspective and conservatism from service employees has a positive effect on the CP.

The results of H2a and H2b go into more detail about the conservative attitude of service employees but only reflect one part of conservatism, namely economic and social conservatism. Nevertheless, neither economic nor social conservatism showed a significant result in either of the two CP perspectives.

The fact that the tests for H2a and H2b did not find an effect while H1 was confirmed for the CP from employees' perspective may seem counterintuitive from the first view. However, the following points allow a better interpretation of the described results in the overall context. More specifically, the total conservatism includes all ten items. In contrast to that, economic conservatism only includes five out of the ten items from the total conservatism. The social conservatism includes three items because two had to be excluded to achieve an appropriate reliability score. This shows that for both subscales, namely the economic and social conservatism, only a fraction of the statements of the overall conservatism variable are taken into account. Along with that, the overall conservatism, including all statements, can display a broader picture of the conservatism of an individual. So, it cannot be concluded that either social or economic conservatism has an effect on the CP in a separate consideration. This indicates that the positive effect of conservatism on CP cannot be specifically attributed to social or economic conservatism within the sample.

The research of Davidson and Theriault (2021) is similar to the research of this thesis based on the SECS from Everett (2013). Therefore, the basis for the measure of conservatism is the same. Nevertheless, Davidson and Theriault (2021) focus in their study on products like Airbnb and Uber and the interaction between employees and customers, while this study focuses on a publicly owned employment service, specifically the customer and employee interaction at the AMS. Despite this major difference in the product/service of the research, the results point in the same direction. The results of this thesis extend the existing literature of Davidson and Theriault (2021) as proposed in a new product/service segment and also in another country, namely Austria. Additionally, the intercultural aspect for future research was proposed by Davidson and Theriault (2021). In this context, the AMS, being a contact point for people from different cultures, enabled a sample with customers from various countries. The descriptive data shows that many customers who participated in the survey came from different countries, mainly in Europe and Asia.

In terms of the second research question of this thesis, which refers to the abstractness in the thinking style of the service employee and the influence on the CP, the results give a clear picture. Both perspectives of CP clearly showed no significant results. Therefore, H3 was not

confirmed in this thesis. These results differ from the expected outcome of the existing literature. However, a closer look at the descriptive data of the respective construal level variable gives further implications for this outcome. The data shows that the employees who participated in the survey tended to have a more abstract mindset overall. Therefore, the detection of a possible effect is statistically much more difficult. This finding of a more abstract thinking style on average from the employees brings up the question of whether there is a relationship between a higher level of abstraction in the thinking style and the occupation at the AMS. This specific question is also suggested as a future research direction. As hypothesis H3 cannot be confirmed in any CP perspective, the existence of an effect for the second research question cannot be confirmed within the proposed sample.

The findings have further important implications. As Alper (2018) shows in the research, the consistency of response behavior for political attitude scales is increased for a more abstract mindset of individuals. The results show, as proposed, a rather abstract mindset of the participating service employees. The overall conservatism showed an appropriate Cronbach's Alpha without the exclusion of any research item; one reason for this may be the more abstract mindset of the employees, which leads to a higher consistency, according to the results from Alper (2018). Therefore, this relational effect from these research studies may be a reason for this finding. Nevertheless, this was not explicitly part of this thesis and needs further examination in research.

Additionally, the results of this research have implications for management. The fact that multiple hypotheses from this research were not confirmed opens the way for future research. Future research implications are displayed following the managerial implications of this thesis.

Managerial Implications

The conducted research has important implications for practical and not only theoretical use cases. The results from this research indicate that higher overall conservatism has a positive influence on CP and can help management allocate the appropriate tasks to the respective employees. One conclusion in this context can, for example, be that more conservative employees should be staffed in customer service to work with the customers. Of course, this must be integrated into the application process through the integration of intelligent questions about related personality traits to avoid any sort of political discrimination against applicants.

Conscientiousness, which is associated with conservatism, was not part of this study, but nevertheless, different authors confirmed the relation. This can positively influence the collaborative work between employees and customers to solve issues or problems jointly.

According to the results, customers with various issues might be better served by a more conservative employee. Therefore, employee-customer allocation should be considered as a management tool. It might be useful for the management to classify customers. At the AMS, this could take place before they receive their service.

Especially in the AMS, which often becomes a meeting point for different cultures, a conscientious and trustworthy analysis of customer problems and life backgrounds is of great importance in order to offer the best possible assistance. Higher CP in the context of AMS can increase the quality of job offers by the employees, as it enables a better understanding of the respective customer life situations. Moreover, elevated CP may also contribute to a more transparent and responsive service delivery system within the AMS, potentially fostering greater trust and satisfaction among the customers. Lastly, a better CP can enable improvement in customer service by the use of feedback and insights provided by the customers of the AMS.

Overall, this research provides firsthand information for management and employees to enable suitable customer service. The goal is to encourage customers to participate in the service process, which in turn makes it possible to serve the customers and their respective problems in the best possible way and to help them.

Limitations and Future Research

Besides the discussed findings, this research has limitations that open the way for future research directions. As the effect of conservatism on CP was confirmed from one CP perspective, a further interesting research approach would be to ask the employees and customers about their political orientation by the use of the same measure. The objective would be to analyze whether customers and employees holding the same political orientation or conservatism have a better CP. Besides that, disclosure of the political attitude from the counterpart could be an interesting approach for future research, for instance, when the customer knows what degree of conservatism the employee holds within the interaction.

A further limitation is the possible bias in the participants' self-assessment of political orientation, who may tend to rate in a socially desired way. In some cases, participants may

tend to answer the questionnaire by choosing the socially desired answer from the proposed alternatives. This can be the case, although their underlying real opinion indicates another direction.

The employees who participated in the survey showed a rather high abstraction level in their thinking style. Nevertheless, this opens the way for future research. On the one hand, it might be fruitful to repeat this research in another industry or a scope that includes more concrete-thinking employees in addition to abstract thinking employees. On the other hand, further research can examine whether there exists a relation between the occupation and the thinking style, namely that employees at the AMS or other employment agencies tend to think more abstractly. This approach could also be executed for different industries to provide a better picture of possible patterns regarding the abstractness of thinking and occupancy in specific industries.

These aspects should encourage future researchers to conduct research on these proposed topics and broaden the research in this segment.

5. Conclusion

The research that was conducted brought up interesting findings with regard to political attitudes, abstract versus concrete thinking styles of service employees, and their effect on CP. The main focus is on influential factors on the employee side that affect the CP. The results of the first research question, which contains the influence of the political attitude of service employees on CP, show a significant result for the hypothesis test of H1, specifically for employees' CP perspective. This result confirms H1, which suggests that higher conservatism positively influences the CP. The customers' CP perspective did not confirm the hypothesis. Nevertheless, the CP from the employees' perspective enables a better detection of the effect due to the characteristics of the answering behavior. The customers tended to rate their CP on the top of the scale, even higher than the employees rated the CP. Therefore, the effect of higher conservatism, which positively influences CP, can be confirmed partly by the research conducted in this thesis. Further, hypotheses H2a regarding social and H2b regarding economic conservatism cannot be confirmed for either of the two CP perspectives. Regarding these two hypotheses, it must also be taken into account that they reflect a subpart of the conservatism measure compared to the overall conservatism measure used for H1.

Contemplating the first research question, it can be concluded that higher conservatism positively affects CP from the employees' perspective. However, this effect is not discernible in the separate examination of economic and social conservatism.

The second research question, and therefore H3, which focuses on the construal level, also showed no significant results for either of the two CP perspectives. One reason for that is the fact that employees who participated in this survey showed a rather abstract thinking style. Therefore, the effect detection is statistically more difficult. So, H3 cannot be confirmed and along with that, no effect of abstract versus concrete thinking of service employees on the CP was found within this research sample.

In summary, the future research directions from this thesis open the way for different approaches, such as the proposed direction, namely whether service interactions with customers and employees with the same political orientation result in a better CP. Furthermore, a closer examination of employees' abstract thinking in relation to specific industries and service institutions, such as the AMS, presents a novel approach.

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Appendix

Table 12: Customers' Country and Continent of Origin

Country	Continent	Number of participants
Not Specified	-	19
Afghanistan	Asia	10
Algeria	Africa	1
Austria	Europe	44
Bosnia	Europe	5
United Kingdom	Europe	1
Bulgaria	Europe	3
Chechenya	Asia	2
China	Asia	2
Colombia	South America	2
Croatia	Europe	3
Egypt	Africa	3
Philippines	Asia	2
France	Europe	1
Germany	Europe	3
Ghana	Africa	1
Hungary	Europe	3
India	Asia	1
Iran	Asia	1
Iraq	Asia	3
Italy	Europe	1
Kurdistan	Asia	1
Macedonia	Europe	2
Mali	Africa	1
Palestine	Asia	1
Peru	South America	1
Poland	Europe	7
Romania	Europe	3
Serbia	Europe	27
Slovakia	Europe	3
Slovenia	Europe	1
Somalia	Africa	1
Spain	Europe	1
Stateless	-	3
Syria	Asia	15
Tunisia	Africa	1
Turkey	Asia	18
Ukraine	Europe	1
Total	-	198

Table 13: Migrational Background Employees

Do you have a migration background? (EG4A9_A10_A11)

	Frequency	Percentage
No answer	2	4.4%
No	33	73.3%
Yes, I was born abroad	4	8.9%
Yes, one or both of my parents were born abroad	6	13.3%

Table 14: Items and Reliability Score of Total Conservatism Variable

Conservatism_Total (Cronbach's Alpha α = .640)	
No man or state should spend more money than it makes. (EG9B1)	
The state should not interfere with business. (EG9B2)	
The less state regulates the economy the better. (EG9B3)	
The state should tax the rich to provide for the poor. (EG9B4) (reverse coded)	
The state should provide welfare benefits to people in bad financial condition. (EG9B5) (reverse coded)	
Immigration is a force for good. (EG9C1) (reverse coded)	
I believe same sex couples should have the same treatment as heterosexual couples. (EG9C2) (reverse coded)	
Religion should play an active role in our society. (EG9C3)	
The state should have a strong military in order to defend its national security. (EG9C4)	
Building a traditional family should be the most important goal of every individual. (EG9C5)	

Note. Source of the SECS: Everett (2013)

Table 15: Items and Reliability Score of Customer Participation Variables

CP_Cus (Cronbach's Alpha α = .815)	CP_Emp (Cronbach's Alpha α = .884)
I tried to make the AMS employee's job easier. (CI6A1)	The customer tried to make my job easier. (EI6A1)
I tried to help the AMS employee serve me better. (CI6A2)	The customer tried to help me serve him/her better. (EI6A2)
I prepared before coming to meet the AMS employee. (CI6A3)	The customer prepared before coming to AMS. (EI6A3)
I openly discussed my needs with the AMS employee to help her/him deliver the best possible advice. (CI6A4)	The customer openly discussed his/her needs with me so that I can deliver the best possible advice. (EI6A4)
I shared a lot of information about my unemployment status. (CI6A5)	The customer shared a lot of information about his/her unemployment status. (EI6A5)

Note. Source of the initial items: Auh et al. (2007)

Table 16: Items and Reliability Score of Economic and Social Conservatism Variables

Eco_Conservatism (Cronbach's Alpha α = .645)	Social_Conservatism (Cronbach's Alpha α = .605)
No man or state should spend more money than it makes. (EG9B1)	I believe same sex couples should have the same treatment as heterosexual couples. (EG9C2) (reverse coded)
The state should not interfere with business. (EG9B2)	Religion should play an active role in our society. (EG9C3)
The less state regulates the economy the better. (EG9B3)	Building a traditional family should be the most important goal of every individual. (EG9C5)
The state should tax the rich to provide for the poor. (EG9B4) (reverse coded)	
The state should provide welfare benefits to people in bad financial condition. (EG9B5) (reverse coded)	

Note. Source of the SECS: Everett (2013)

Table 17: Items of Construal Level Variable

Constr_Lvl (all 10 answers summed up)		
Headline	Abstract (= 0)	Concrete (= 1)
Reading (EG10A1) (reverse coded)	Gaining knowledge	Following lines of print
Washing Clothes (EG10A2)	Removing odors from clothes	Putting clothes into the machine
Locking a door (EG10A3) (reverse coded)	Securing the house	Putting a key in the lock
Eating (EG10A4)	Getting nutrition	Chewing and swallowing
Growing a garden (EG10A5) (reverse coded)	Getting fresh vegetables	Planting seeds
Cleaning the house (EG10A6)	Showing one's cleanliness	Vacuuming the floor
Paying a rent (EG10A7)	Maintaining a place to live	Writing a check
Greeting someone (EG10A8) (reverse coded)	Showing friendliness	Saying hello
Talking to a child (EG10A9)	Teaching a child something	Using simple words
Voting (EG10A10)	Influencing the vote	Marking a ballot

Note. Source of the items: Vallacher and Wegner (1989)