

Beggars Can Be Choosers: How the Group Affiliation of The Helper Affects Willingness to Accept Help Among Consumers of Low Socioeconomic Status

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Resumo

Consumers of low socioeconomic status (SES) often encounter helpful free-cost initiatives tailored to them. Nevertheless, relatively little is known about the factors that influence those consumers' willingness to accept help. In this article, we posit that the group affiliation of the helper plays an important role on that willingness. One pilot-study and two experiments, using real problems (polio immunization crisis in Brazil and covid-19 pandemic in the U.S.), present evidences for the effect of the helper's group affiliation on willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES. Further, we show that when the helper is an out-group individual, consumers who are low on SES tend to accept less free-cost help than when the helper is an in-group individual. This effect is not elicited among consumers who are high on SES, as expected. The activation of different models of selves, the interdependent and the independent models elicited by low and high SES respectively, is suggested as the explicative mechanism for those effects. This research thus offers an initial understanding of why consumers of low SES reject free-cost help, even when they should accept it, as they are the ones who need help the most.

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Abstract: Consumers of low socioeconomic status (SES) often encounter helpful free-cost initiatives tailored to them. Nevertheless, relatively little is known about the factors that influence those consumers' willingness to accept help. In this article, we posit that the group affiliation of the helper plays an important role on that willingness. One pilot-study and two experiments, using real problems (polio immunization crisis in Brazil and covid-19 pandemic in the U.S.), present evidences for the effect of the helper's group affiliation on willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES. Further, we show that when the helper is an out-group individual, consumers who are low on SES tend to accept less free-cost help than when the helper is an in-group individual. This effect is not elicited among consumers who are high on SES, as expected. The activation of different models of selves, the interdependent and the independent models elicited by low and high SES respectively, is suggested as the explicative mechanism for those effects. This research thus offers an initial understanding of why consumers of low SES reject free-cost help, even when they should accept it, as they are the ones who need help the most.

Keywords: socioeconomic status, willingness to accept help, the helper, group affiliation, prosocial behavior

Introduction

Poverty increases in countries as Brazil and the United States, as more people reach the bottom of the socioeconomic status (SES) ladder (The Economist 2019a; 2019b). More people are low on SES, more they are exposed to restriction of different resources as money, education and social capital (Kraus et al., 2012; Stephens et al. 2019). Consequently, people of low SES need more support to deal with troublesome events and should accept more help than the ones placed at the top of the SES ladder, who experience abundance of resources. Indeed, restriction of resources increases individuals' disposition to accept help, while abundance decreases this disposition (Vohs et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the group affiliation of the helper (i.e., the individual or organization that provides help) may change this logic in which restriction of resources increases willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES. Lower levels of SES activate an interdependent model of self. This model assumes that the normatively appropriate individual should be connected to others and respond to others' needs (Stephens et al., 2019). Consequently, individuals who are low on SES are more connected to their groups and more loyal to them (Stephens et al., 2019). Thus, we propose that consumers of low SES tend to accept less help when the helper is viewed as an out-group individual. In this case, the recipient of help and the helper do not belong to the same group. Conversely, these consumers may accept more help when the helper is viewed as an in-group individual. We do not expect the same effect among consumers from high SES contexts, where an independent mode of self is prized (Stephens et al., 2019). Since these consumers tend to be more independent from others, their willingness to accept help may depend less on the in-group versus out-group division and more on their own motivations.

Results from one pilot study and two experimental studies using a diverse set of contexts bring initial evidences for the proposed effect. First, a correlational study uses the idea of affective polarization, relative to an animosity and division between Republicans (right-wing) and Democrats (left-wing) (Iyengar et al. 2019), to shed light on the effect of the group

affiliation of the helper on willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES. Findings from this study indicate that most of the Brazilian cities that faced poliomyelitis immunization crises in 2017 (i.e., parents did not immunize their children, so they rejected help) were low on SES and more identified with the left-wing, than with the right-wing, of the political identity continuum. Free-cost polio vaccine shots were provided by the Federal Government (the helper), which was not aligned to the political identity of those cities, being an out-group entity. Most important, at that time affective polarization was widespread among the masses in Brazil (The Economist, 2018). Then, we present findings from an experiment with conservative consumers in the U.S, where there is affective polarization (Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro, 2020), that replicated the tendency from the correlational study in a more controlled setting. In this experiment, conservative consumers exposed to a low SES condition accepted less help to deal with the covid-19 pandemic when the helper was a democrat. Those consumers accepted more help when the helper was a republican. There was not an effect among conservative consumers who were exposed to a high SES condition. Finally, a single factor experiment supports the proposed effect by showing that when the group affiliation of the helper is not made salient, consumers exposed to restriction of resources (low SES) tend to accept more help in a Monopoly Game match.

This research contributes to the consumer behavior and prosocial behavior literature by shedding light on an overlooked topic, willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES, the consumers who may need help the most. Many governmental and non-governmental initiatives are designed to help these consumers (Olson et al., 2016; Anisman-Razin and Levontin, 2020; White, Habib, and Dahl, 2020). For instance, Lyft offers free rides for unemployed consumers (Vera, 2019), scholarships are available for low income students each year in the U.S. (Wasik, 2017) and in Brazil (Education Ministry, Brazil), food stamp is available for needy consumers (Food and Nutritional Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture). However, some of these helpful resources goes unused or unclaimed by consumers of low SES, for whom these initiatives are tailored to (Wasik, 2017). Previous literature on prosocial behavior tend to focus on the determinants of willingness to donate and help others (White et al., 2020), but this literature has paid less much attention on the factors that influence willingness to accept help among consumers who need support (Ferreira, Mas, Goldsmith, 2020). This research represents an initial effort to explore one of those factors, the group affiliation of the helper. By knowing these factors, public policy makers, governments, NGO's, and business companies that design programs to help consumers exposed to low SES contexts can be more assertive when developing and communicating these programs.

Socioeconomic Status and Willingness to Accept Help

Material substance of social life (income, education, occupation) and individuals' perception of their class hierarchy vis-à-vis others in society shape socioeconomic status (Bradley and Corwyn, 2002; Kraus et al., 2012). Individuals who are low on SES face restriction of different resources. They attend lower quality high schools, have the worse jobs and positions, and accumulate less material and financial resources than their high SES counterparts (Stephens et al., 2019). The restriction of a diverse set of resources (education, social capital, money) declines individuals' capabilities to deal with troublesome events by themselves. Thus, individuals of low SES may need more free-cost help and should accept it more. On the other hand, abundance of resources boosts individuals' capabilities to come up

with solutions to problems by themselves. So, they should accept less free-cost help. Indeed, restriction of resources grows disposition to accept help while the abundance of resources drops this disposition (Vohs et al., 2006). Nevertheless, we suggest a boundary condition for this effect, especially among consumers exposed to restriction of resources (i.e., consumers of low SES): the group affiliation of the helper.

Group affiliation is a natural and essential behavior for individuals (Baumeister, 1982). This helps them to identify in-group and out-group members as well as define themselves as a member, or not, of a specific group (Iyengar et al., 2019; Brewer and Gardner, 1996). SES activates different models of selves relative to the independence, or dependence, that individuals have on groups (Kraus et al., 2012). For example, lower levels of SES elicit an interdependent model of self (Kraus and Keltner, 2009). This means that individuals of low SES are more interdependent to others, they care more about the others and the needs of others. Since they view themselves as more connected to their groups, their behaviors and decisions are more dependent on the groups they belong to (Stephens et al., 2019). Conversely, higher levels of SES elicit an independent model of self in which individuals viewed themselves as separate from others, even from in-group individuals (Kraus et al., 2012). This model encourages individuals to behave and make decisions regardless of the opinion and the needs of others. They are less dependent on their groups (Stephens et al., 2019).

The group affiliation of the helper may play an important role on willingness to accept help among consumers who are low on SES, but not among their high SES counterparts, since consumers of low SES view themselves more as a part of a group and less as an independent entity. Therefore, we propose that consumers of low SES may accept less help when the helper is viewed as an out-group individual than when the helper is viewed as an in-group individual. We do not expect an effect of the group affiliation of the helper on willingness to accept help when consumers are in high SES contexts. So, the group in which the helper belongs to may not interfere consumers' disposition to accept help in those contexts.

First, we present two studies (the pilot-study and experiment that bring evidences for the proposed effect by exploring a phenomenon that becomes stronger among the masses in countries as Brazil and the United States - affective polarization (Iyengar et al. 2019; The Economist, 2018; 2019a; 2019b). We opted to use this phenomenon as affective polarization works as a natural offshoot of the partisan group identity being the tendency of identifying oneself as a republican or a democrat to view copartisans positively (in-group individuals) and opposing partisans negatively (out-group individuals) (Iyengar et al., 2019). The pilot-study uses secondary data to show that most of the Brazilian cities that faced polio immunization crisis in 2017, even when free-cost polio vaccine shots was provided by the Federal Government (the helper), were low on SES and identified with the left-wing of the political identity continuum. In 2017, the Brazilian president was not a representative of the left-wing and affective polarization was widespread in country (The Economist, 2018). So, the helper was not in the same group as the recipients of help. Then, a 2 (SES: low vs. high) x 2 (helper: democrat vs. republican) between subjects experiment with conservative consumers in the U.S reinforces findings from the pilot-study. Finally, a single factor (resources: restriction vs. abundance) between subjects experiment shows that when the group affiliation of the helper is not revealed, consumers exposed to restriction of resources accept more help in a Monopoly Game match.

Pilot-Study: Real World Evidences for The Proposed Effect

The goal of this pilot study was to start shedding light on the effects of the group affiliation of the helper on willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES through a problem faced in the “real world”, the polio immunization crisis in Brazil.

Method

Three hundred and twelve Brazilian cities faced poliomyelitis immunization crisis in 2017, as less than fifty percent of the children were immunized in those cities (Coelho and Oliveira, 2018). Although the Federal Government provided free-cost polio vaccine shots, parents in those cities were not immunizing their children, so they were rejecting free-cost help. In Brazil, the Federal Government provides free-cost polio immunization (i.e., polio vaccine shot) for children, regardless of the SES of their parents (Health Ministry, Brazil). Despite the fact that there were isolated cases of immunization crises after 2013 in Brazil, the number of cities facing immunization problems started raising in 2016, reaching the apices in 2017 (Guimarães, 2017).

Mr. Michel Temer was the Brazilian president in 2017, after taking office when president Dilma Rousseff, a representative of the left-wing of the political identity continuum, was impeached (Redação do Senado Federal, 2016). Michel Temer was Dilma Rousseff’s vice president, nevertheless he was not viewed as a representative of the left-wing. The impeachment process highlighted the affective polarization that was widespread across the country (The Economist, 2016). As the impeachment process occurs in 2016 and the president Michel Temer took office that year, we opted to analyze immunization data from 2017, a year without presidential changes. In 2017, the polio vaccine shot was a free-cost help provided by the government led by president Michel Temer (right-wing). In this scenario, we treat the government as the helper.

We accessed the socioeconomic status of the cities mentioned above by using the GDP of the region (i.e., the five Brazilian regions, North, Northeast, Middle, Southeast, and South) where the cities were localized to classify each city through a five-points Likert scale (1- Low GDP; 5 - High GDP). This measure was used as a proxy to SES. To access the political identity of the cities and, consequently, the political group they belong to, we collected data on the candidate that won the 2018 presidential elections in each city (data collected on the *Mapa eleitoral de presidente por municípios: 1º turno - Gazeta do Povo*). There were two groups, the left-wing group composed by cities where Fernando Haddad (from the left-wing) won, and the right-wing group, with cities where Jair Bolsonaro (from the right-wing) won. Ciro Gomes, one of the presidential candidates, won in just one city from the immunization crisis list. This city was removed from the analysis. We expected that most of the cities that faced polio immunization crisis were from the left-wing group and low on SES, as there was not a convergence between their political identity group and the political identity group of the helper - the Brazilian Government led by Michel Temer. In this case, the helper was an out-group entity.

Results and Discussion

Among the three hundred and eleven cities facing polio immunization crisis, one hundred and ninety-five (62,5%) were in the left-wing group since they voted for Fernando Haddad in the presidential election, and one hundred and sixteen cities (37,5%) were in the right-wing group, as Jair Bolsonaro won in those cities. An independent t-test revealed that the cities in the left-wing group were poorer ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .851$) than the cities in the right-wing group ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.179$), $t(309) = -16.002$, $p = .000$. These result presents initial evidences for changes on willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES when there is divergence between the group they belong to and the helper's group. This finding shows that parents in low SES cities rejected available free-cost help, by not immunizing their children, when the helper (Brazilian Government) seemed not to have the same political identity as they had, being an out-group helper. In a context where there is affective polarization, the divergence between the political identity of the consumers who is a potential recipient of help and the helper indicates that the recipient of help and helper are not in the same group. In this case, the helper is viewed as an out-group individual, and help may be rejected by consumers of low SES. Next, we present an experimental study to show causal evidences for this effect.

Experiment 1: The Group Affiliation of The Helper and Its Effect on Willingness to Accept Help Among Consumers of Low SES

The goal of this experiment was to investigate the role played by the group affiliation of the helper on willingness to accept free-cost help among consumers of low SES. Similar to the pilot study, this experiment used the affective polarization phenomenon to bring evidences for the proposed effect. We tested this effect using the covid-19 pandemic event. This pandemic elicits different needs that people might not suppress by themselves, as many of them lost their jobs, cannot work as they are in the high-risk groups for covid-19, or are exposed to other situations that drops their household incomes (Menickella, 2020). In this circumstance, people, mainly the ones who are low on SES, should accept more free-cost help.

Method

Two hundred and forty-one individuals ($M_{age} = 49.55$; $SD = 15.04$; 57.7% female) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk participate in a 2 (SES: low vs. high) x 2 (group affiliation of helper: a democrat vs. a republican) between subjects experiment. All participants were American conservatives living in the U.S., where affective polarization is widespread (Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro, 2020). So, participants assigned to the democrat (vs. republican) helper condition were in a situation in which the helper was an out-group (vs. an in-group) individual.

In order to place participants as low or high on SES, first all participants reported their household income. Then, they were told that their income was compared to other participants' income and, according to this comparison, they were classified as either being part of the low SES group or the high SES group. Participants in each group read a description about being low or high on SES, based on to the group they were randomly allocated. The SES manipulation was checked through the SES ladder that represents where people stand in the U.S. (Goodman

et al., 2001). Participants placed themselves on one of the ten levels of the ladder, lower levels indicated low SES and higher levels indicated high SES.

Sequentially, participants read a situation where the group affiliation of the helper was manipulated. In the democrat helper condition, participants read that the American president was Barack Obama (Democratic party), and he was working on helpful initiatives to help American citizens during the covid-19 pandemic. In the republican helper condition, they read that the president who was working on helpful initiatives was Donald Trump (Republican party). By exposing conservative American participants to a manipulation that made salient the political identity of the helper, in a context where there is affective polarization, the in-group and out-group division was elicited (Iyengar et al., 2019). To check the helper manipulation, participants reported how liberal or conservative was the president in the situation they read (“In the situation I read, the president was...”, 1- Liberal, 7- Conservative).

Then, all participants reported the extent to what they would accept, or not, \$1200 check, \$500 for three months, and masks to face the covid-19 pandemic (1- Definitely I would not accept, 7 - Definitely I would accept), help provided by the helper from the condition participants were assigned to. The help offered was displayed in a random order. Finally, participants answer questions about their personality and demographics.

We expected that conservative consumers exposed to the low SES manipulation might accept less help to deal with the covid-19 pandemic when the helper was a democrat (i.e., an out-group helper) than when the helper was a republican (i.e., an in-group helper). We did not expect an effect of the group affiliation of the helper for conservative consumers in the high SES group.

The manipulations worked as expected. Participants in the low SES condition placed themselves on the lower levels of the SES ladder ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 2.16$) compared to participants in the high SES group ($M = 6.11$, $SD = 1.83$), $F(1, 237) = 24.587$, $p < .001$. There were not a main effect of the helper and an effect of the interaction between SES and the helper on the ladder measure. Participants in the democrat helper group classified the helper as being more liberal ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.79$) than participants in the republican helper group did ($M = 6.25$, $SD = 1.12$). There were neither a main effect of the SES manipulation nor an interaction effect on the political identity measure.

Results and Discussion

We conducted a 2(SES: low vs. high) x 2(helper: a democrat vs. a republican) MANCOVA to predict willingness to accept the available help, including one index relative to the consequences of covid-19 for participants' lives (“I am running out of money due to covid-19 pandemic”, “I lost my job due to covid-19”, “I have, or had, covid-19”, “I am running out due to covid-19”, “I cannot stay at home since I need to go out to work”, $\alpha = .798$) as a covariate. Consistent with our predictions, the results revealed a significant interaction between the SES and the helper manipulations, $F(3, 234) = 2.776$; $p = .042$; $\eta_p^2 = .034$.

Pairwise comparisons showed that this effect occurs only for consumers in the low SES group. Conservative consumers in the low SES group accepted less a \$1200 check when the helper was a democrat ($M = 5.87$; $SE = .290$) than when the helper was a republican ($M = 6.55$; $SE = .199$), $F(1, 236) = 5.539$, $p = .019$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$. They also accepted less masks when the helper was a democrat ($M = 4.90$; $SE = .284$) than when the helper was a republican ($M = 6.04$; $SE = .270$), $F(1, 236) = 8.406$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .034$. There was a not a significant effect when the

help was \$500 for three months (democrat helper: $M = 5.65$; $SE = .249$, republican helper: $M = 6.23$; $SE = .236$), $F(1, 236) = 2.901$, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$, but these results had the expected direction. The group affiliation of the helper did not affect willingness to accept help among conservative consumers in the high SES group (a \$1200 check, $F(1, 236) = 1.240$, *n.s.*; masks, $F(1, 236) = .381$, $p = n.s.$; \$500 for three months $F(1, 236) = 1.650$, *n.s.*). Neither the SES manipulation nor the helper manipulation produced a significant main effect on willingness to accept the helpful items. There was not a significant effect of the covariate.

This study supports the findings from the pilot-study by showing the influence of the group affiliation of the helper on willingness to accept help among consumers who are low on SES. These findings together suggest that in circumstances where the helpers are not viewed as in-group individuals by consumers who are low in SES, these consumers tend to accept less help. These two studies used problems faced by consumers living in countries where there is affective polarization, that makes salient the in-group vs. out-group division based on the individuals' political identity, to bring evidences for the proposed effect. So, they shed light on the fact that the poor may be the ones who suffer the most in contexts where in-group (vs. out-group) division is present.

Experiment 2: Absence of Effect When The Group Affiliation of The Helper Is Not Salient

The objective of this experiment was to show that the proposed effect is suppressed when the group affiliation of the helper was not made salient to the potential recipient of help exposed to restriction of resources (low SES). In this case, consumers of low SES might accept more help.

Method

Three hundred and eight participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk ($M_{age} = 39.35$; $SD = 12.05$; 41.55% female) to play a new version of the Monopoly Game with one fictitious player. Participants were assigned to one of two experimental conditions, where restriction of resources (vs. abundance of resources) was the manipulated factor. All participants first were informed that there was one other player in the game and that, in this new version, there was an angel investor (the helper) who was not in the match but available to help the players, who needed to draw the "Help Card" to have the investor's help. Then, participants assigned to the restriction of resources were informed that in the match they were in, they owned only \$100 in cash and a small house worth about \$5,000, and their total wealth was \$5,100. Participants in the abundance of resources condition read they had \$10,000 in cash plus another \$200,000 worth in properties, and their total wealth was \$210,000.

Sequentially, participants were told that it was their turn to draw a random card, and the "Help Card" was displayed to all participants. The angel investor's help was available in two forms, \$1000 dollars and 10 properties. Most important, there was not information relative to the group affiliation of the helper. Inspired by the dictator game, as participants had the help, they were requested to decide how they would allocate the available help between them and the other player - they could keep the total amount of help to themselves or share the help with the other player. The more the participants allocated the help to the other player, less they keep it, so they rejected more the available help when they gave more to the other player. For each form of help, participants wrote down in an appropriate space the amount they would keep to themselves and offer to the other player in the match. The amount of help allocated to

the other player was our dependent variable. The forms of help and the questions about the amount of help participants would keep and offer were presented in a random order. Finally, participants answered questions about their competitiveness, personality and demographics.

We expected that participants exposed to the restriction of resources condition would offer less help to the other player, keeping more help to themselves. On the other hand, participants in the abundance of resources condition would offer more help to the other player.

To access participants' perception of the availability of their resources in the match, they indicated the extent to which they agreed with four items about their experienced scarcity (Roux, Goldsmith, & Bonezzi, 2015), $\alpha = .85$. An independent t-test showed that experienced scarcity was higher for participants in the restriction of resources condition ($M = 5.67$; $SD = 1.16$) than for participants in the abundance condition ($M = 3.96$; $SD = 1.42$), $t(306) = -11.657$, $p = .000$.

Results and Discussion

Results revealed that when participants were exposed to restriction of resources, they offered less money ($M = \$212.63$; $SE = \$21.05$, $t(306) = 3.339$, $p = .001$) and properties ($M = 2.24$; $SE = .198$, $t(306) = 3.409$, $p = .001$) to the other player, as compared to the abundance of resources condition (money: $M = \$326.42$; $SE = \$26.79$, properties: $M = 3.28$; $SE = .229$). Competitiveness (did not produced a significant effect on the amount of help participants offered to the other player in the match, money, $F(1, 306) = .182$, $n.s.$, and properties, $F(1,306) = 1.751$, $n.s.$

Similar to previous results from the traditional dictator game in which some allocators keep the total amount of money to themselves (see Camerer & Thaler, 1995), in this study some participants did not allocate the available help to the other player. For instance, one hundred and thirty-seven participants allocated "0" dollars to the other player when the available help was money, and one hundred and twenty-one participants allocated "0" properties to the other player when the available help was properties.

These results help us to reinforce the idea that the group affiliation of the helper affects willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES, since when the helper's group affiliation is not revealed, participants in the restriction of resources condition, that works as proxy for SES, accepted more the investor's help. Those participants offered less help to the other player in the match, so they accept more help. In this study, participants exposed to abundance of resources offered more help to the other player, so they turned more the investor's help. These results converge to Vohs et al. (2006)'s findings.

General Discussion

The current research contributes to advance the understanding of the factors that decrease willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES, who may need free-cost help the most. Specifically, we show that the group affiliation of the helper plays an important role on those consumers' decision to accept help. When the helper was characterized as an out-group individual, consumers exposed to low SES conditions accepted less help than when the helper was an in-group individual. This effect was not produced among consumers of high SES. In support of the proposed effect, the pilot-study provides "real world" evidence for the impact of the group affiliation of the helper on willingness to accept help among consumers who are low on SES. Consistent with this, experiment 1 shows that manipulating the helper as an out-group (vs. an in-group) decreases willingness to accept help when consumers were exposed to a low

SES condition but not when they were exposed to a high SES condition. Conservative consumers in the low SES condition accepted less free-cost help to deal with the covid-19 pandemic when the helper was a democrat than when the helper was a republican. On the other hand, there was not difference on willingness to accept help among conservative consumers in the high SES group. Finally, experiment 2 builds on these results by showing that consumers exposed to restriction of resources accepted more help when the group affiliation of the helper is not made salient.

In addition to offering evidence for our predicted effect, the current data also addresses certain possible alternative explanations for the logic supporting the proposed effect (i.e., the different models of selves elicited by different SES). First, one might argue that the affective polarization per se could have been an explicative mechanism for the proposed effect. However, experiment 1 showed that the proposed effect occurs just among consumers in the low SES condition, but not among consumers exposed to the high SES condition. If affective polarization was the explicative mechanism, we should have observed a similar effect in the high SES group. This suggests that the different models of selves activated when consumers are in low SES or high SES contexts is a plausible explicative mechanism for the proposed effect.

In doing so, this research provides two important theoretical contributions. First, it provides a perspective that shifts the attention from the donor/helper to the potential recipient of help, contributing to the prosocial behavior literature that focus mainly on the factors that determine willingness to donate and help others (White et al., 2020), but not on the determinants of willingness to accept help among consumers in need (Ferreira et al., 2020). As more people are going to the bottom of the SES ladder (Stephens et al., 2019), more they may need free-cost help as their resources are scarcer, and they may face more difficulties to deal with troublesome events by themselves. Thus, it is important to understand the factors that increase, or decrease, needy consumers' willingness to accept help. As described, we provide evidences of the interaction between low SES and the group affiliation of the helper on consumers' willingness to accept help. To date, studies have just investigated the effects of the group affiliation of the potential recipient of help on donors' and helpers' willingness to help (Winterich, Zhang, and Mittal, 2012; Puntoni, Sweldens, and Tavassoli, 2011).

Second, this research adds to the growing literature on SES, especially the literature on the effects of the restriction of resources on consumers behavior and decisions (Stephens et al., 2019; Stephens et al., 2012; Griskevicius and Mittal, 2016). Poverty is increasing in different countries (The Economist, 2019a; 2019b), so research that explores the effects of being low on SES, or exposed to restriction of resources, are actual and relevant. Studies focusing on this topic can guide researchers, public policy makers, NGO's and other organizations that develop initiatives to help consumers exposed to restriction of resources.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the results that support the proposed effect, this research has limitations that can be viewed as fruitful opportunities for future research. First, although we suggested the interdependent (vs. independent) model of self as a possible explicative mechanism for the effect presented in this paper, we did not empirically address this mechanism. Further research can explore this mechanism as well as possible alternative mechanisms as the threat relative to being helped by a distant other (Fisher, Nadler, and Witcher-Alagna, 1982).

Having observed that the interaction between low SES and the group affiliation of the helper occurs when we manipulated the helper's political identity, it is important to investigate if the proposed effect is produced when we change the group affiliation of the helper (e.g., a helper from the same neighbor vs. from a different neighbor). This will help to show the robustness of the proposed effect.

Practical Implications

This research suggests important implications. First, our findings provide implications for policy makers designing an efficient approach to communicate helpful initiatives tailored to support consumers of low SES. For example, when governments offer some support as free-cost immunization to citizens in countries where there is affective polarization, they may frame the communication in a way that the potential recipient of help, who is in general low on SES, can view the government as an in-group entity, not as an out-group entity, despite the political identity of the government. Also, when promoting helpful initiatives, it is possible to create advertisement with characters that are identified by consumers in low SES contexts as in-group members.

Moreover, in contexts where the in-group (vs. out-group) division is salient (e.g., countries where there is affective polarization, cities where racism is strong, and others), public policy makers, NGOs, and organizations should work to diminish the impact of this division on willingness to accept help among consumers of low SES by communicating that at the end everybody is equal, or that they are in the same group as the ones, who need help the most, are.

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