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ABSTRACT The current research examines how products from personized sellers operate as a source of social support and solidarity for essential workers who are experiencing elevated levels of occupational stress since the advent of COVID-19. A series of experiments show that consumers who view themselves as essential workers prefer products from personized sellers (e.g., Etsy) compared to nonpersonized sellers (e.g., Amazon). These effects are driven by higher feelings of solidarity made salient by the personized seller. Our findings document a novel way by which consumers who are experiencing significantly high levels of occupational stress during the COVID-19 pandemic may seek social support and solidarity to help cope with this elevated stress, that is, purchasing products from personized sellers. Our findings offer valuable avenues for future research and provide important implications for policy makers during the pandemic.

The term "essential worker" has become a common household notion in the age of COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, essential workers often referred to healthcare workers (e.g., nurses and doctors), police officers, and firefighters—personnel who were key to the underpinnings of society. Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, society's classification of essential workers has broadened to include all of those who are helping to keep the country running (e.g., retail workers). In fact, nearly 55 million US workers across 12 industries are now classified as essential (McNicholas and Poydock 2020). Furthermore, the expectations of essential workers—to risk exposure of themselves and their families to an unfamiliar, devastating disease—are in stark contrast to the expectations of the 316 million people in 42 states ordered to shelter-at-home to minimize the spread of COVID-19 (Mervosh, Lu, and Swales 2020). Thus, individuals who may not have previously considered themselves as essential workers, such as grocery store employees, warehouse workers, and bus drivers, are being asked to brave an unknown pandemic, likely resulting in a significant increase in their occupational stress stemming from a multitude of factors that include limited access to personal protective equipment (PPE), increased vulnerability to the disease, and a lack of control over their working conditions. High occupational stress can lead to negative outcomes both personally (e.g., depression) and professionally (e.g., employee burnout/turnover; Sauter et al. 1999) and is therefore an important issue to address.

Past research has shown that social support and feelings of solidarity can be effective coping mechanisms against stress, and the CDC (2020) lists connecting with others as a way to build resilience and manage stress. Unfortunately, social distancing requirements impede traditional routes of social support to cope with these newfound stressors, resulting in exceptionally high levels of occupational stress among essential workers (American Heart Association 2020). The current research seeks to address this issue by considering how essential workers might seek novel alternative means of social support and solidarity. Specifically, we explore whether and how products from personized sellers can be a source of social support and solidarity to essential workers. Personized sellers are those that provide consumers insight into who they are as individuals when offering their products (Kaiser et al. 2019; Van Ossalear et al. 2020). We suggest that products offered by personized sellers are likely to elicit greater perceptions of social support and solidarity compared to those from nonpersonized sellers because of their close associations with individuals, rather than large corporations. Personized sellers will also evoke greater social connection and solidarity because they may be viewed as individuals who are also working (like essential workers) during the pandemic, in order to provide products that are

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helpful for essential workers. Furthermore, we argue that such enhanced feelings of social support and solidarity will lead essential workers to be more likely to purchase from personized, as opposed to nonpersonized, sellers. This increased preference for products originating from personized sellers may be particularly surprising given that personized products may not only cue the potential for contagion or transmission of germs from the seller but also may be viewed as less effective, or less accessible, than their mass-produced counterparts, which are both likely to be key concerns for essential workers during the current coronavirus pandemic. However, since prior research has found that the need for social connection and belongingness is a very strong driver of our behaviors (Baumeister 2012), we predict that the need for solidarity is likely to outweigh concerns about contagion, accessibility, and effectiveness.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Essential Workers and Occupational Stress

While the COVID-19 pandemic has increased stress levels for most individuals (American Psychological Association 2020), essential workers have had a compounded effect given their stress-laden jobs. Occupational stress (i.e., work-related stress) consists of both the physical and psychological stress resulting from physical, mental, and emotional workplace demands (Butts et al. 2009). While occupational stress is relatively common across industries (Dar, Naseem, and din Khan 2011) and companies of all sizes (Anderson 2003), it often arises when a discrepancy exists between the expectations of one's job and the worker's ability to meet those expectations (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll 2001). Furthermore, occupational stress increases when workers perceive little personal control with respect to high work demands (Karasek 1979). For many essential workers, the expectation of continuing one's job during the pandemic (even though they may harbor concerns about protective measures or a fear of the virus) reflects a significant loss of control, as evidenced by an executive order declaring meat processing facilities and their workers as "critical infrastructure" when identified coronavirus cases were increasing (Swanson and Yaffe-Bellany 2020). Thus, intuitively, essential workers, in the current environment, are likely to be experiencing higher levels of occupational stress.

To confirm this intuition, we conducted a pilot study on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) with 98 individuals (48% male, $M_{age} = 41$ years), who first wrote about the coronavirus' impact on their lives. Next, participants indicated their essential worker classification (no/yes) before completing scales measuring their occupational stress ($\alpha = .91$; Netemeyer, Maxham, and Pullig 2005) and general stress ($\alpha = .80$; Cohen, Karmack, and Mermelstein 1983). Finally, participants reported their perceptions of themselves as an essential worker (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). As expected, regressing participants' essential worker classification on their occupational stress score yielded a significant effect of the classification ($b = 1.69, t = 5.28, p < .001$), such that essential workers ($M = 4.24$, SD = 1.59) perceived greater occupational stress than their nonessential counterparts ($M = 2.55$, SD = 1.59). Furthermore, regressing the continuous essential worker perception scores on occupational stress yielded similar results ($b = .40$, $t = .51$, $p < .001$). These analyses were rerun with participants' general stress index as a covariate and the results remained the same (all $p < .001$). Thus, this study confirmed that essential workers report experiencing greater job-related stress, even when controlling for the additional life stress generally associated with the pandemic.

Reducing Stress through Social Support

Occupational stress can be effectively managed through various techniques including reframing toward more positive feelings (Nelson and Simmons 2011) and developing a network of strong social support. The buffering model of social support posits that support from others, which satisfies a need for affiliation and belongingness, can help mitigate the deleterious effects of occupational stress (Cohen and Willis 1985). In particular, social support stemming from others who understand the stressors, such as supervisors and coworkers, positively impacts workers plagued by occupational stress (Yousaf et al. 2019). In this regard, perceptions of solidarity may be an important means of establishing social support.

Solidarity is defined as "an awareness of shared interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies creating a psychological sense of unity."[1] Findings from research on responses to crimes, natural disasters, mass tragedies and epidemics have found that actions which enhance perceptions of solidarity among survivors (e.g., public memorials, displays of the American flag) can provide emotional support and strengthen social connection (Turkel 2002; Eyre 2007). Thus, perceptions of a shared, common fate with survivors creates feelings of similarity and togetherness (Kaniasty and Norris 2004) and result in more frequent helping behaviors such as trying to rescue those injured within a crowd (Drury, Cocking, and

1. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, s.v. "Solidarity," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solidarity.

Reicher 2009) and wearing masks during a pandemic (Cheng, Lam, and Leung 2020). Feelings of solidarity can provide a sense of comfort and act as a defense against the stressful conditions rampant during mass tragedies and natural disasters. Within the context of COVID-19, several solidarity initiatives have been attempted. For example, residents of several European cities were reported singing to one another, while Wuhan residents opened their windows to shout messages of support to their neighbors (*BBC News* 2020). Similarly, New York City encouraged clapping and cheering at specified times as a show of support and solidarity for healthcare givers and other essential workers (*ABC News* 2020).

Thus, any response that increases perceptions of solidarity may be helpful in reducing the stress experienced by essential workers as they are placed on the forefront of the battle against COVID-19. Since, as mentioned previously, social distancing and social isolation requirements provide less conducive environments for solidarity and social support to occur, we consider a novel and alternative way by which essential workers may seek out solidarity—purchasing from personized sellers. That is, in the absence of traditional means of seeking solidarity, we suggest that a similar sense of solidarity may be available to essential workers through products offered by personized sellers.

Solidarity through Personized Sellers

Recent work has suggested that a sense of social connection can be established through the sharing of personal information (i.e., personizing the seller) which enhances a consumers' overall experience (Van Osselaer et al. 2020). Personizing products can be undertaken in a variety of ways including hand producing the product instead of machine production (Fuchs, Schreier, and van Osselaer 2015), the use of handwritten font on packaging (Schroll, Schnurr, and Grewal 2018), signing the product (Kaiser et al. 2019) and allowing consumers to view the production process (Buell, Kim, and Tsay 2016). Personizing products can have significantly positive effects including more favorable evaluations, willingness to pay higher prices, and increased preference (Fuchs et al. 2015). These effects arise because personizing leads to higher perceptions of products as handmade, created by individual sellers rather than being mass produced, thus, symbolizing the sellers' emotional investment (i.e., "labor of love") and reducing the distance between producers and consumers. Thus, personized products can reduce the sense of alienation experienced by consumers and producers due to the advent of technological advances that have led to reduced producer-consumer contact.

We draw on these characteristics of personization and suggest that personized sellers of products related to COVID-19, such as face masks or hand sanitizer, will be viewed as highly committed to helping the country battle the current health crisis, thereby leading to enhanced feelings of solidarity among essential workers, who will subsequently hold higher preferences for such personized products. For example, an essential worker may be more likely to purchase a face mask from Etsy rather than Amazon because of a greater feeling of solidarity and social connection with the seller from Etsy as compared to Amazon, given that all other factors, such as product quality and price, are equivalent.

We test this prediction across four experiments. Studies 1A and 1B support our theorizing by showing that essential workers show an increased preference for products offered by personized versus nonpersonized sellers. Study 2 confirms the mediating role of solidarity, while study 3 provides further evidence of solidarity as the underlying mechanism by showing that the increased preference for products offered by personized sellers among essential workers only manifests in the absence of alternative means of experiencing solidarity/social support. Full details of all manipulations, measures, and statistics are reported in the appendix, available online.

STUDY 1A

Method

Two hundred and sixty-five MTurk participants (57% male, $M_{age} = 41$ years) completed a 2 (seller: nonpersonized [Amazon] vs. personized [Etsy]) $\times$ 2 (worker classification: essential vs. nonessential) between-subjects study. Because the study's focal product involved reusable masks, participants were initially screened on their beliefs regarding whether or not individuals should wear face masks; those who agreed (79.6% of potential respondents) proceeded into the study.

Participants first reported demographic information, including their essential worker classification (yes/no). All participants were informed that they needed to purchase a face mask from an online retailer, after which they viewed an image for a reusable cotton mask that was either being offered by a nonpersonized seller (Amazon Fashion on Amazon) or by a personized fictional seller (SewSweetParadise on Etsy). All mask-related content in terms of description, ratings, price, and shipping were held constant across conditions. The key differences across the two conditions were the seller (nonpersonized [Amazon Fashion] vs. personized [SewSweetParadise]), an icon indicating that the product was handmade and the website itself (Amazon vs. Etsy).

Participants reported their probability of purchasing the face mask (0%–100%).

Results and Discussion

Purchase Intentions. An ANOVA with seller type and essential worker classification as the independent variables, and purchase likelihood as the dependent variable yielded a significant seller × worker interaction ($F(1, 261) = 5.45$, $p = .02$; see fig. 1). Within the essential worker status, participants reported greater purchase intentions for the mask when it was offered by a personized seller on Etsy ($M = 62.94\%$, $SD = 32.03$) than by a nonpersonized seller on Amazon ($M = 47.59\%$, $SD = 33.07$; $F(1, 261) = 6.66$, $p = .01$). Conversely, purchase intentions did not differ among participants not classified as essential workers between the seller conditions ($M_{Etsy} = 50.09\%$, $SD = 33.43$ vs. $M_{Amazon} = 53.47\%$, $SD = 31.93$; $F(1, 261) = .36$, $p = .55$).

Study 1A provides support for our framework that essential workers preferred products from personized sellers over a nonpersonized alternative. However, while familiar online sites (Etsy and Amazon) were employed to reinforce the product source manipulation, we acknowledge that additional associations (or preferences) for products on these sites may provide an alternative explanation for our findings. Therefore, in our next study, we employ a fictitious online site and manipulate the description of the site to reinforce that it represents nonpersonized versus personized sellers. Furthermore, we seek to manipulate, rather than measure, participants' essential worker status.

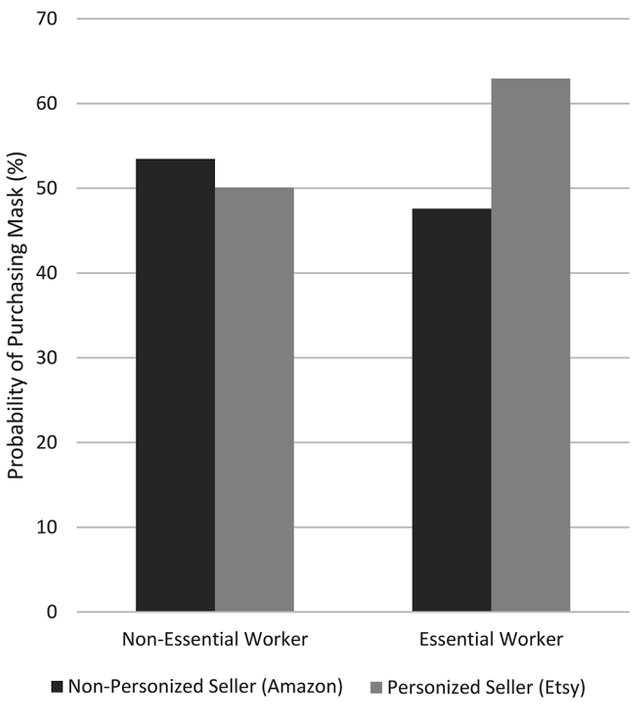

Figure 1. Study 1A: Effect of seller type on purchase intentions as a function of essential worker classification.

STUDY 1B

Method

Two hundred and eighty-two MTurk participants (44% male, $M_{age} = 42$ years) completed a 2 (seller: nonpersonized vs. personized) × 2 (worker prime: nonessential vs. essential) between-subjects study. Similar to study 1A, because the focal product was reusable face masks, the same initial screening question was used, and once again, those who agreed (86.2% of potential respondents) proceeded into the study. After completing a general COVID-19 writing task, all participants read the following introduction: "During the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, essential workers have been on the front lines, keeping the nation moving forward. Since the declaration of a pandemic and the widespread 'shelter at home' orders that soon followed, the government declared key industries and positions as essential to the infrastructure of our society. As a result, millions of individuals ranging from retail workers to bus drivers to healthcare workers have been reporting to work throughout the pandemic."

Next, participants were randomly assigned to either an essential or nonessential worker condition. Participants in the essential (nonessential) condition read, "Imagine that you are classified as an essential (nonessential) worker and have (have not) been required to report to work in order to carry out your job responsibilities throughout the pandemic. Please spend up to the next minute describing how having a role as an essential (nonessential) worker, not being able (being able) to shelter-at-home when needed, would make you feel on a daily basis."

Participants were then assigned to either a personized or nonpersonized seller condition. The procedure, materials and dependent measure used were similar to study 1A, with the exception of employing a fictitious retail website (NOMOS) where the seller was either NOMOS Fashion (nonpersonized) or SewSweetParadise (personized). Participants in the nonpersonized (personized) seller condition read that NOMOS offered its customers access to high-quality (*handmade*) goods that were either its own branded/other manufacturer's products (*individual sellers seeking to market their products*). Participants reported their probability of purchasing the face mask (0%–100%).

Results and Discussion

Purchase Intentions. An ANOVA revealed the expected interaction between seller and worker classification ($F(1, 278) = 4.02$, $p = .046$; see fig. 2). Participants in the essential worker condition expressed greater purchase intentions for the mask when it was offered by a personized ($M = 42.13\%$, SD = 33.03) versus a nonpersonized seller ($M = 30.97\%$, SD = 30.61; $F(1, 278) = 3.87$, $p = .046$). Conversely, purchase intentions did not differ among participants classified as nonessential workers between seller conditions ($M_{\text{personized}} = 38.62\%$, SD = 35.16 vs. $M_{\text{nonpersonized}} = 43.45\%$, SD = 34.68; $F(1, 278) = .74$, $p = .39$).

Studies 1A and 1B provide converging evidence for our argument that essential workers prefer products offered by a personized (vs. nonpersonized) seller. Across both studies, essential worker classification was a dichotomous variable. Yet since the introduction of essential worker classifications during the pandemic, both employers' and workers' interpretations of an essential worker have varied considerably. For example, numerous retailers adopted a broad interpretation of their offerings, such as Gamestop and Hobby Lobby, resulting in their self-declaration as essential services; yet many employees disagreed (Mosendz and Melin 2020). Individuals may also be classified as essential given their industry, but may not view themselves as essential workers due to reduced potential risk by being able to work from home. Not surprisingly, the amount of occupational stress experienced by workers in both instances would vary greatly, as found in our pretest, with much higher levels for the former than the latter. Therefore, study 2 seeks to replicate our findings using a continuous measure of perceptions of the self as an essential worker and a different target product, hand sanitizer. This study also provides evidence of solidarity as the process underlying essential workers preferences for products from personized sellers.

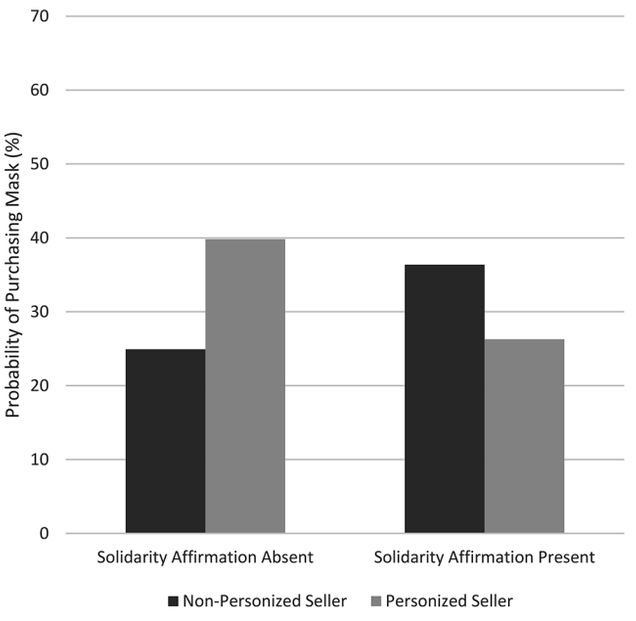

Figure 2. Study 3: Effect of seller type on purchase intentions as a function of availability of solidarity affirmation task among participants primed as essential workers.

STUDY 2

Method

One hundred and ninety-eight MTurk participants (50% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 43$ years) completed a 2 (seller: nonpersonized vs. personized) × self-perceptions as an essential worker (measured, continuous) study.

Participants first wrote about how their life had changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and were then informed that they were going to purchase hand sanitizer from the NOMOS website. Participants were then randomly assigned to either the nonpersonized or personized seller condition, which involved reading a brief description of NOMOS for their assigned condition before seeing the product page. Like in study 1B, the content was consistent across conditions with the exception of identifying the seller as either nonpersonized or personized. After indicating their probability of purchasing the hand sanitizer (0%–100%), participants reported their feelings of solidarity (e.g., my decisions were driven by a shared sacrifice/shared responsibility/solidarity/we are all in this together; $\alpha = .94$). Finally, participants reported the extent to which they considered themselves an essential worker (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) and their essential worker classification (yes/no).

Results and Discussion

Purchase Intentions. A regression analysis with seller (0 = nonpersonized, 1 = personized), essential worker self-perceptions and their interaction as independent variables, and purchase intentions as the dependent variable yielded a significant seller × essential worker self-perception interaction ($b = 5.35, t = 2.60, p = .01$). A spotlight analysis, performed at 1 SD above the essential worker self-perception mean (2.97), revealed that among participants who viewed themselves as more of an essential worker, greater purchase intentions were reported in the personized versus nonpersonized seller conditions ($b = 18.13$, $t = 2.73$, $p = .007$). Conversely, purchase intentions did not differ by seller condition for those who viewed themselves as less of an essential

worker ($b = -4.68$, $t = -.75$, $p = .45$). A floodlight analysis indicated that the effect of seller condition was significant for those who scored higher than 3.69 on the essential worker perception scale ($b_{JN} = 9.7$, SE = 4.92, $p = .05$). A subsequent ANOVA, using participants' essential worker classification (0 = yes, 1 = no), replicated the expected seller × essential worker classification interaction ($F(1, 194) = 4.27$, $p = .04$; see the appendix).

Perceptions of Solidarity. A regression analysis with solidarity as the dependent variable, revealed a significant effect of seller type ($b = -1.12$, $t = -2.11$, $p = .04$), and a worker × seller interaction ($b = .42$, $t = 2.96$, $p = .003$). A spotlight analysis (±1 SD from the mean of 4.47) showed that participants who viewed themselves as more essential perceived greater solidarity in the personized (vs. nonpersonized) seller condition ($b = 1.08$, $t = 2.38$, $p = .02$), while no such difference was observed for participants who perceived themselves as less essential ($p > .10$).

Mediating Role of Solidarity. To explore the mediational role of solidarity, an analysis using PROCESS Model 8 (Hayes 2013) was conducted with purchase intentions as the dependent variable; seller type, essential worker self-perceptions, and their interaction as independent variables; and feelings of solidarity as the mediator. The results revealed a significant effect of the mediator on intentions ($b = 7.39$, $t = 8.16$, $p < .001$) and the inclusion of solidarity as a mediator rendered the seller × essential worker interaction not significant ($b = 2.26$, $t = 1.24$, $p = .22$). A bootstrap analysis showed that the indirect effect of the highest order interaction with feelings of solidarity as the mediator was significant ($b = 3.10$, SE = 1.172, 95% CI: [.7029, 5.427]). Further supporting our framework, the increased feeling of solidarity was found to mediate in the more essential worker condition ($b = 8.01$, SE = 3.80, 95% CI: [.3557, 15.3236]) but not in the less essential worker condition ($b = -5.17$, SE = 3.09, 95% CI: [−11.4578, .9033).

Replicating our prior results, study 2 finds that consumers who perceive themselves as more (vs. less) essential expressed higher purchase intentions for products offered by personized sellers. These findings speak to the generalizability of prior studies' results beyond just individuals officially classified essential workers. Furthermore, study 2 provides evidence that the increase in purchase intentions for personized products among essential workers that was observed in prior studies is, indeed, being driven by perceptions of solidarity.

Our next study seeks to provide additional support for our proposed mediator via a moderation of process design (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005). Our theorizing suggests that consumers who perceive themselves as essential will respond favorably to personized products as a means of solidarity, such that there is a perceived sense of shared responsibility and sacrifice in addressing the pandemic. Therefore, we suggest that the increased preferences for products offered by personized sellers among essential workers found in studies 1 and 2 will be attenuated when essential workers are provided with an alternative way of satisfying their need for social support/solidarity.

STUDY 3

Method

Three hundred and ninety-eight MTurk participants (42% male, $M_{age} = 43.7$ years) completed a study that consisted of a 2 (worker prime: nonessential vs. essential) × 2 (seller: nonpersonized vs. personized) × 2 (solidarity affirmation: absent vs. present) between-subjects design. The study design was similar to study 1B and since the focal product was a face mask, respondents were screened based on their beliefs about mask use (90.9% of potential respondents proceeded into the study). First, all participants completed a brief writing task about the pandemic (see the appendix). Next, participants were randomly assigned to either an essential or nonessential worker condition. After writing about the feelings they would experience in their respective roles, participants were randomly assigned to either a solidarity affirmation-present or solidarity affirmation-absent condition. Participants in the solidarity-affirmation condition were asked to imagine that they had experienced gestures of social support from others and a sense of solidarity with their coworkers and to write about how it would impact them in their role. Alternatively, those in the solidarity affirmation-absent condition wrote about a recently watched movie.

In an ostensibly separate study, all participants were asked to imagine that they lived in an area where face masks were required in public, creating a need to purchase another face mask, which they have decided to purchase online through NOMOS. Participants in the nonpersonized (personized) seller condition read that NOMOS offered its customers access to high-quality (*handmade*) goods that were either its own branded/other manufacturer's products (*individual sellers seeking to market their products*). Participants reported their probability of purchasing the face mask (0%–100%).

Results and Discussion

Purchase Intentions. An ANOVA revealed the expected interaction between essential worker prime, solidarity affirmation, and seller type ($F(1, 390) = 6.75, p = .01$). According to our framework, essential workers seek out products from personized sellers as a source of social support/solidarity. Accordingly, to further explore this interaction, we tested for solidarity affirmation × seller type interactions in the essential versus nonessential worker prime conditions separately (see fig. 2).[2]

Replicating our earlier results, when the essential worker status was primed, a significant seller type × solidarity affirmation interaction emerged ($F(1, 195) = 8.09$, $p = .005$). Participants in the solidarity affirmation-absent condition (i.e., when there was no alternative means by which participants could experience feelings of social support/solidarity), reported greater purchase intentions for the mask when it was offered by a personized seller ($M = 39.83\%$, SD = 32.26) than the nonpersonized seller ($M = 24.92\%$, SD = 28.03; $F(1, 195) = 5.95$, $p = .02$), replicating our previous results. However, when participants had the opportunity to experience solidarity in the affirmation-present condition, no such difference in intentions was observed ($M_{\text{personized}} = 26.27\%$, SD = 32.36 vs. $M_{\text{nonpersonized}} = 36.37\%$, SD = 30.95; $F(1, 195) = 2.52$, $p = .11$).

Within the nonessential worker prime condition, there were no main or interactive effects (all $p > .1$), and there were no significant differences between the conditions ($M_{\text{aff-abs-nonpers}} = 35.78\%$, SD = 34.64 vs. $M_{\text{affi-abs-pers}} = 31.2\%$, SD = 30.33, $M_{\text{aff-pres-nonpers}} = 35.33\%$, SD = 31.63, $M_{\text{aff-pres-pers}} = 38.6\%$, SD = 30.98, all $p > .1$)

The results of study 3 suggest that the social connections and feelings of solidarity through affirmation satisfy the need that essential workers might otherwise seek to fill from personized products. These results also provide additional support for the mediating role of solidarity, as solidarity affirmation attenuated essential workers' preference for personized products.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current research investigated a novel way by which consumers experiencing significantly high levels of occupational stress during the COVID-19 pandemic can seek solidarity and social support - via products from personized sellers. We find that consumers' occupational stress stemming from their essential roles (both actual and perceived) during the pandemic can shape their preferences for products from personized sellers. Results from four studies demonstrate that during a time of social isolation and distancing, the increased stressors and responsibilities experienced by essential workers (pilot study) can lead to a desire for social solidarity through alternative means, namely, purchasing products from personized sellers (studies 1–3). These effects hold for both real life (study 1A) and fictional (studies 1B–3) sellers and emerge due to a greater perception of solidarity with personized sellers (studies 2 and 3). In addition to measurement-based mediation (study 2), evidence for perceptions of solidarity and social connection as the underlying process was confirmed when participants primed as essential workers no longer expressed an increased preference for personized products when feelings of social support/solidarity were addressed by an alternative route (study 3).

Our findings make several contributions to the literatures on stress and consumption, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, we identify a key antecedent to consumers' purchase intentions, occupational stress, which has not been previously examined in the marketing literature. Our findings highlight how physical and emotional consequences of key roles within consumers' lives, such as a highly stressful job exacerbated by a pandemic, can impact consumers' decisions. Documenting this factor within the consumer decision-making process is import given that even outside of a pandemic context with essential worker classifications, millions of workers are employed within industries fraught with high levels of occupational stress (Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health 2016). In this regard, future research could examine whether our findings are moderated by usage context, that is, preference for use of PPE from personized (vs. nonpersonized) sellers at work versus for leisure.

Second, our findings add to the burgeoning stream of research on personized sellers (Van Osselaer et al. 2020). While research has documented positive effects of personizing a manufacturer (Fuchs et al. 2019), our research extends such findings by identifying enhanced perceptions of solidarity as a previously unconsidered mediator within the context of personization.

Our results also reinforce prior work on the importance of establishing and maintaining solidarity during times of crisis and stress. As such, the current research holds significant public policy implications. The finding that essential

2. Exploring the three-way interaction within solidarity affirmation conditions (absent vs. present) separately, we replicated our prior findings in the solidarity affirmation absent condition ($F(1, 204) = 4.97$, $p = .03$), but when the solidarity affirmation was present, we find the predicted attenuated results ($F(1, 186) = 2.14$, $p = .15$).

workers may find solidarity in the purchase of personized products highlights how critical it is to offer such alternative routes to traditional solidarity, especially for consumers who are under the highest levels of stress. Thus, to improve essential worker well-being as the pandemic continues to persist, particularly as spontaneous displays of solidarity and supplemental hero bonuses were short-lived and have since disappeared (Corkery 2020), our research suggests that it may be beneficial for policy makers to promote avenues such as the creation of online public forums or specific events (e.g., #Solidarityat8; Orjoux 2020) for essential workers, to allow for expressions of solidarity in their roles. Our findings highlight how valuable such feelings are to essential workers experiencing high levels of occupational stress; so valuable, in fact, that the perceived feelings of solidarity with personized sellers overshadow any other potential concerns that may be present related to manufacturer efficiency or even potential contagion from personized products.

Finally, our findings hold significant implications for individual sellers and large brands, alike. In particular, while our findings suggest that personized products may be viewed as a source of social connection, the perceived connection may be context-dependent (e.g., pandemic-related PPE). Hence, the approach of personizing the seller is not a "one size fits all." Therefore, it may be beneficial for sellers/brands to have targeted criteria to highlight, that align with market segmentation strategies, in order to personize sellers for various target markets. On a similar note, it will be important to consider whether the enhanced perceptions of solidarity are also due to negative feelings toward nonpersonized sellers (e.g., lack of trust in big corporations).

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