

Consumer Response to Dehumanization of Frontline Employees: The Role of Political Ideology

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Abstract

Managerial wisdom in many service firms suggests that the more the employees behave like robots the more successful the service will be. This research investigates consumer response to the dehumanization of frontline employees (i.e., firms asking employees to behave with limited capacity to think, plan, and have goals, and limited capacity to have emotions and feelings). Two experiments demonstrate that the effect of dehumanization of frontline employees is contingent upon consumer political ideology such that dehumanization has a negative effect for liberals but not for conservatives. Further investigation of the underlying mechanism shows that dehumanization increases perceptions of surface acting and capitalism stereotypes. Building on these two underlying mechanisms, we further show that the negative effect of dehumanization is more prominent for firms that are less associated with capitalism.

Keywords: *dehumanization of frontline employees; political ideology; capitalism stereotypes*

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