Feeling Powerful Increases Altruistic Donation

By

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Abstract

Many people believe that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Consistent with this belief, power has been shown to lead to immoral behaviors in various social contexts. Existing research, however, has mostly focused on whether the powerful do bad things. We hypothesized that when facing an opportunity to do good things, power may in fact facilitate moral behavior. In particular, we predicted that high levels of experienced power facilitates donating behavior when donation is framed as an altruistic action. Under such a situation, powerful people believe that they are capable of making bigger impacts on the recipients, which consequently makes them think positively about themselves. In a few donation contexts that involve either real or hypothetical donations, powerful people consistently show a greater tendency to donate for altruistic appeals than powerless people. This effect dissipates when a donation action makes small impacts on recipients, and even reverses when donation is framed as an egoistic action that brings benefit to the one who donates.

Dr. Yan Zhang is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at National University of Singapore. Her research interests include consumer judgment and behavior, prosocial behavior, and consumer intuitive beliefs. Her work has been published in leading journals including Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, and Psychological Science.

All interested are welcome.