Power Distance Belief, Status, and Charity Giving

DaHee Han, Indiana University, USA
Adam Duhachek, Indiana University, USA
Ashok K. Lalwani, Indiana University, USA

Three studies examined the link between power distance belief (PDB), status, and charity giving. Results suggested that among high (low) PDB consumers, status was positively (negatively) associated with charity giving. These results are traced to the differential empathy felt by high and low status people in the two types of systems.

[to cite]:
DaHee Han, Adam Duhachek, and Ashok K. Lalwani (2012), "Power Distance Belief, Status, and Charity Giving", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 40, eds. Zeynep Güürhan-Canli, Cele Otnes, and Rui (Juliet) Zhu, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 796-797.

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1012027/volumes/v40/NA-40

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Power Distance Belief, Status, and Charity Giving
DaHee Han, Indiana University, USA
Ashok K. Lalwani, Indiana University, USA
Adam Duhachek, Indiana University, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Power distance belief—the tendency to accept and expect inequalities in society—is a central construct in cross-cultural research (Hofstede 2001). Although limited research has examined the effects of PDB on consumer behavior, there is growing recognition that PDB is an important construct with significant implications on varied facets of consumer behavior (Winterich and Zhang 2011; Zhang et al. 2010). The current research is concerned with the effects on PDB and charitable giving. Some research shows that people in high PDB contexts are less likely to donate to maintain the status quo (Winterich and Zhang 2011).

Although this finding provides initial evidence that individual beliefs about inequalities in power affect charitable giving, we argue that charitable giving depends not only on individual beliefs toward power disparity but also on their own perceived power within the system. Prior research suggests that power held by individuals affects prosocial behaviors (e.g., Goetz et al. 2010; Piff et al. 2010). Therefore, we propose that the extent of charitable giving across PDB contexts depends on the power (i.e., “perceived asymmetric control over valued resources” [Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003; Rucker, Galinsky, and Dubois, 2011, p.8”).

In particular, we propose that among high PDB consumers, high power people will be more likely to donate to charity than low power people because in high PDB contexts low power people owe high power people respect and obedience whereas high power people in turn owe low power people protection, help, and support (i.e., the reciprocity principle; Carl et al. 2004). In contrast, we argue that in low PDB contexts, high power people will be less likely to donate to charity than low power people because low PDB consumers believe that it takes a lot of effort, persistence, and energy to become a member of the high power group as the government and society have rules to protect equality in society. Given the difficulties involved, high power people in low PDB contexts tend to be careful with money at best and miserly at worst (Stanley and Danko 1998).

We further posit that the mechanism underlying these effects relates to differences in empathy, defined as “an other-oriented emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another” (Batson 1990, p.399) felt by high and low power people in the two types of systems. Specifically, we hypothesize that in high PDB contexts, high (vs. low) power people will feel greater empathy toward people in need because of the reciprocity principle outlined earlier (de Waal 2008; Fisher et al. 2008), thus leading to greater charitable giving. Conversely, in low PDB contexts, low (vs. high) power people will feel greater empathy toward people in need because low power people in low PDB contexts have been found to pay more attention to others’ needs (van Kleef et al. 2008) and behave in ways that enhance social engagement and connection with others (Piff et al. 2010), thus leading them to be more prosocial (i.e., greater charitable giving).

Study 1. We manipulated participants’ perception of their power using the role playing scenario (Anderson and Berdahl 2002) and power distance belief by following the procedure of Zhang et al. (2010). Next, we showed the brief description of charities and then measured the amount of money participants would donate to charities. Results revealed a significant power by PDB interaction (p<.003) such that in the high PDB condition, participants with high power donated more than those with low power (p<.033) whereas among participants in the low PDB condition, those with high power donated less than those with low power (p<.042), supporting our hypotheses.

Study 2. PDB was manipulated by asking participants to complete a scrambled sentences task (see Zhang et al. 2010). We manipulated power by asking participants to recall the incident that they felt powerful or powerless (Rucker and Galinsky 2008). Donation intention and empathy were measured (Stürmer et al. 2006). A 2-way interaction results (p<.001) revealed that in the high PDB condition, those with high power reported greater intentions to donate money to the charity than those with low power (p<.001) whereas within the low PDB condition, those with low power reported greater intentions to donate money to the charity than those with high power (p<.001). In addition, a 2-way interaction results (p<.001) indicated that in the high (low) PDB condition, those with high (low) power reported greater empathy than those with low (high) power (p<.03). Finally, we performed mediation analyses (Muller et al. 2005) and found that empathy mediated the proposed relationship (Sobel test:z=3.01,p<.002).

Study 3. We experimentally manipulated empathy to provide further evidence of the process underlying our effects. We manipulated empathy (Batson et al. 1997, study 1) and power as in study 2 and measured PDB using the scale developed by Zhang et al. (2010). We also used a different charity and measured donation intention. We measured perceived similarity to rule out the alternative explanation. Results indicated that the three-way interaction was significant for donation intention (p<.001). In the high empathy condition, the results replicated such that for participants high in PDB, power was positively associated with charitable giving (β=3.44,p<.001), whereas for participants low in PDB, power was negatively associated with charitable giving (β=−2.86,p<.001). These relationships were not observed in the low empathy condition. The three-way interaction for perceived similarity was not significant (p>.79), ruling out the alternative explanation.

Our research makes a number of contributions. First, it shows that charitable giving depends on not only individual beliefs about inequalities in society, but also on their own power within the system. Second, prior research suggests that empathy based charitable donations stem from perceived similarity between the donor and the recipient. In sharp contrast to this perspective, our framework highlights the role of differences based on inequalities within the system. Hence, empathy does not always result from perceived similarity, but strong differences in power and inequality can promote empathy and lead to charitable giving.

REFERENCES