



# Effects of power and individual-level cultural orientation on preferences for volunteer tourism



Jimmy Wong<sup>a,1</sup>, Joshua D. Newton<sup>b,\*</sup>, Fiona J. Newton<sup>b,2</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Marketing, Caulfield Campus, Monash University, PO Box 197, Caulfield East, VIC 3145, Australia

<sup>b</sup> Department of Marketing, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, McMahon Rd, Frankston, VIC 3199, Australia

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Travel intentions are shaped by power and individual-level cultural orientation.
- Vertical individualists primed to feel powerful prefer self-indulgent holidays.
- Horizontal collectivists primed to feel powerful prefer volunteer holidays.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined whether individual-level cultural orientation and psychological feelings of power interact to influence preference for volunteer or self-indulgent holiday packages. Results from a study involving 466 participants revealed that intentions to purchase a holiday package were greater among those who had been primed to feel powerful, supporting the notion that power increases an individual's tendency to take action. Nevertheless, the holiday packages that powerful participants chose varied as a function of their individual-level cultural orientation. Specifically, when primed to feel powerful, vertical individualists exhibited a distinct preference for a self-indulgent holiday package whereas horizontal collectivists preferred a volunteer holiday package. These findings indicate that preference for volunteer or self-indulgent holidays arises from the confluence of individual-level cultural orientation (which shapes goal meaning) and power (which influences goal pursuit).

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## 1. Introduction

While tourism has the potential to benefit destination nations (Archer & Fletcher, 1996; Heng & Low, 1990; Narayan, 2004), from the perspective of tourists these benefits are largely incidental to the tourism experience. That is, most individuals choose to go on holidays not because they seek to support the local economy but because it allows them to experience a range of self-indulgent pursuits (e.g., Dann, 1981; Fodness, 1994). In recent years, however, alternative forms of tourism have emerged that allow tourists to obtain pleasure by more directly benefitting local communities (Butcher, 2003). One such example is volunteer tourism, where tourists work with stakeholders to address issues of need in a local

community (Wearing, 2001). As such, tourists can now choose to derive pleasure from providing benefits to others (e.g., volunteer tourism) or by engaging in activities that more directly accrue benefits to the self (e.g., self-indulgent tourism). The questions for tourism managers are why some individuals prefer volunteer over self-indulgent tourism packages and how to translate the preferences that some individuals have for volunteer tourism packages into actual purchase intentions.

While considerable research has been directed towards the factors that shape individuals' tourism choices (e.g., Beerli, Meneses, & Gil, 2007; Carneiro & Crompton, 2010; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989), one motivational antecedent that has received scant attention is power. Power, or the capacity to control valued resources (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), increases the likelihood that individuals will take action to achieve their goals (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Keltner et al., 2003). However, the meanings that individuals ascribe to power, and hence the types of goals triggered by feelings of power, appear to develop as a function of their feelings towards, and engagement with, a particular culture (i.e., their cultural

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 3 9903 1582.

E-mail addresses: [Jimmy.Wong@monash.edu](mailto:Jimmy.Wong@monash.edu) (J. Wong), [Joshua.Newton@monash.edu](mailto:Joshua.Newton@monash.edu) (J.D. Newton), [Fiona.Newton@monash.edu](mailto:Fiona.Newton@monash.edu) (F.J. Newton).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +61 3 9903 4682.

<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +61 3 9904 4501.

orientation; Torelli & Shavitt, 2010; Zhong, Magee, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2006). Some cultural orientations, for instance, view power as a means for furthering one's own interests, while other cultural orientations emphasize using power to further the interests of others (McClelland, 1987). These culturally-derived beliefs about power may, in turn, influence consumer preferences for tourism experiences that cater to prosocial or self-indulgent outcomes. This study consequently investigates whether individual-level cultural orientation and power interact to influence consumers' decisions to purchase a volunteer tourism package.

## 2. Literature review and hypothesis development

### 2.1. Self-indulgent and volunteer tourism

Tourism has often been conceptualized as a self-indulgent pursuit, with many individuals traveling for sensual enjoyment (Tinsley & Eldredge, 1995), relaxation (Dann, 1981), reward maximization (Fodness, 1994), and to be pampered (Eachus, 2004). In recent years, however, there has been a discernible shift in the number of individuals seeking alternative tourism experiences (e.g., *Tourism Research and Marketing*, 2008). Mowforth and Munt (1998), for example, highlighted the growth in so-called responsible tourism at the expense of mass, self-indulgent tourism experiences. Similarly, Butcher (2003) contrasted those who prefer mass tourism and its emphasis on sun, sand, and sex with those who favor what he termed 'new moral tourism', a form of tourism that focuses on preserving threatened cultures or environments. One example of new moral tourism is volunteer tourism (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

Volunteer tourism refers to the act of volunteering during one's holidays on projects aimed at achieving beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities, institutions, or the environment (Wearing, 2001). Examples of volunteer tourism projects include teaching a foreign language, participating in community welfare programs, supporting scientific research studies, and working to conserve natural environments (Tomazos & Butler, 2009). While volunteer tourism is often conceptualized as a prosocial behavior (Singh, 2002), the reasons for engaging in volunteer tourism are not always purely prosocial (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009; Mustonen, 2007). That is, many individuals engage in volunteer tourism to experience personal growth (Benson & Seibert, 2009), escape the rigors of day-to-day life (Lo & Lee, 2011), or immerse themselves in another culture (Lo & Lee, 2011; Ooi & Laing, 2010). Nevertheless, the fact remains that individuals who participate in volunteer tourism do so at the expense of engaging in holiday pursuits that are more directly focused on self-gratification. Indeed, as Scheyvens (2002) noted, some individuals engage in volunteer tourism as a means for achieving "something more meaningful than a pleasure-filled, self-indulgent holiday" (p. 102). The converse also holds true in that some individuals may well perceive a self-indulgent holiday spent at a luxury resort to be more appealing than a volunteer holiday where one's time is spent contributing to a social or environmental cause (Goodwin & Francis, 2003; Koch, 2011). Wickens (2002), for example, found that many tourists deliberately choose tourism experiences that maximize their chances of experiencing self-indulgent pleasures. What remains unclear are the factors that give rise to these preferences for volunteer and self-indulgent tourism experiences.

### 2.2. Power and action tendency

Tourism is sometimes viewed as "the hedonistic face of neo-colonialism" (Crick, 1989, p. 322), and this perspective, with its implicit emphasis on differential power relations, has given rise to

an extensive body of research examining how power asymmetries influence interactions between tourists, tourism operators, and local community members (e.g., Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Cheong & Miller, 2000; Fallon, 2001; Ford, Wang, & Vestal, 2012; Kayat, 2002; Lim, 2007; Ryan, 2002; Wearing, Wearing, & McDonald, 2010). Power has also been examined within the domain of volunteer tourism. Sin (2010), for example, highlighted how volunteer tourism has the potential to perpetuate existing power disparities by encouraging host communities to become dependent upon the assistance stemming from volunteer tourism. In a similar vein, McGehee (2012) noted how the discourse surrounding volunteer tourism can reinforce prevailing hegemonic power structures, particularly by presenting Western ideologies as being superior to those of host communities. To the best of our knowledge, however, psychological feelings of power have not been examined within a tourism context. That is, tourism research has typically treated power as a structural variable that exists between actors rather than as a psychological variable that can vary within an actor. Given the omnipresent nature of power in shaping human interactions (Russell, 1938), this is an important oversight. Indeed, social psychology research suggests that individuals primed to recall incidents where they exerted control over others experience a psychological state of power that influences their subsequent behavior (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Keltner et al., 2003; Rucker, Dubois, & Galinsky, 2011; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). For example, individuals primed to feel powerful will spend more money on themselves (Rucker et al., 2011), place greater confidence in their existing attitudes (Briñol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007), and be less likely to take the perspectives of others (Galinsky et al., 2006) than those primed to experience a low state of power. An additional effect, and one which has particular relevance to the current research, is the propensity for power to increase action tendency (Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner et al., 2003).

According to the approach-inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003), power affects the equilibrium between two systems that regulate action: approach and inhibition. Feelings of power activate the approach system, for powerful individuals wield control over valued resources and are consequently less aware of the factors that may constrain the realization of their goals. In contrast, feelings of powerlessness activate the inhibition system. That is, powerless individuals have less control over valued resources and are therefore more cognizant of the factors that may impede the pursuit of their goals. As a result, powerful individuals have a greater tendency to take action to achieve their goals than their less empowered counterparts (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, 2007). Given that tourism choices are often made as a means of satisfying particular needs or goals (Burns & Holden, 1995; Kernan & Domzal, 2001), those who have been primed to feel powerful should display higher purchase intentions for tourist packages that satisfy their underlying goals than those primed to feel powerless. Thus:

**H1.** Consumers in a high state of power will display greater intentions to purchase a tourism package than consumers in a low state of power.

### 2.3. Individual-level cultural orientation and power

Cultural orientation refers to an individual's "feelings toward and levels of engagement in different cultures" (Tsai, Chentsova-Dutton, & Wong, 2002, p. 42). This conceptualization, which focuses on the relationship that individuals have with their cultural environment, is a logical extension of social identity theory in that it shifts attention to how individuals identify with and integrate broader cultural forces into their self-concept (Leung, Bhagat,

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